

Faculty of Liberal Arts & Professional Studies
LA&PS Colleges Re-Visioning

REVISED FINAL

Preliminary Report

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Executive Summary

The LA&PS Colleges Re-Visioning was announced on November 29, 2018, by the Faculty's Interim Dean, JJ McMurtry and commenced with a public consultation that was held at the Senate Chambers on December 6, 2018. Following the announcement and the initial public consultation, a broad-based, open, consultative, and deliberative process was developed that included creating an interactive web platform, a designated email address, a series of town halls, focus groups, stakeholders' meetings, student surveys, online questionnaires, and so on. The LA&PS Colleges Re-Visioning was given a short mandate of six months to complete its work and prepare a draft Preliminary Report that would outline a "new vision" for the four LA&PS Colleges: Founders; Vanier; McLaughlin; and, New.

The LA&PS Colleges Re-Visioning has turned out to be one of the most extensive public consultations undertaken by our Faculty, and likely at York University, that sought out to address a fundamental question:

"How can we provide our students with the best higher educational experience possible at York University's colleges?"

The results of this process are detailed in this Preliminary Report. The Faculty of Liberal Arts & Professional Studies community, as a whole, has expressed its views on a wide range of relevant issues and concerns related to a "new vision" for our four Colleges. All the views expressed have been carefully considered, assessed, and, analyzed and the following seven key points have emerged. These can briefly and succinctly be summarized as follows:

The essence of the Preliminary Report is based on four "practical initiatives" and three "principles of practice." The "practical initiatives" include:

- 1. The adoption of a First-Year Seminar;**
- 2. A "Common Read" for all incoming first-year students;**
- 3. Utilizing our four College communities, and especially their alumni and Fellows, to obtain Experiential Education opportunities for our students;**
- 4. The Colleges should serve as catalysts for research innovation.**

And, the "principles of practice" include:

- 1. All students admitted to the Faculty would be allocated appropriate "study space."**
- 2. All students would be offered the "student services" that they require in order to successfully complete their degree programs.**
- 3. All faculty members attached to a College will be required to mentor students affiliated with their College.**

Taken together, these four initiatives and three principles will help to generate a spark to ignite a "new vision" for the four LA&PS Colleges. At the same time, they will be able to provide our students with the best higher educational experience possible at the Colleges at York University.

We believe that the four initiatives and three principles are all straightforward, far from radical or controversial and certainly doable within a reasonable timeframe. Moreover, they reflect the outcome of the overall process of the LA&PS Colleges Re-Visioning conducted over the last six months.

It is envisioned that this Preliminary Report will be made available to everyone in the LA&PS community, following which a public consultation should take place in the Senate Chambers. The Preliminary Report should also be taken up within all the governing bodies within our Faculty and York University. From these deliberations, and with the directions of these bodies, including the Dean's Office, a final report will be prepared and distributed broadly *via* email listserv as well as being posted on the LA&PS Colleges Re-Visioning website. The final report will incorporate a strategic plan for the implementation of the initiatives and guiding principles and a communication strategy for all concerned, especially, for all our students.

“College involvement enriches on a plethora of levels. It not only increases networking spanning across from other colleges and communities, but also benefits one’s overall well-being, as those networks offer the students a safe space to be able to study, relax, and meet incredible students.” (LA&PS Colleges Re-Visioning Feedback Form).

Introduction

There are many collegiate systems at universities in Canada and elsewhere of varying forms and styles, yet there are only three Canadian universities—all in Ontario—that have well-established collegiate systems in which most undergraduate students are affiliated with a college: Trent University in Peterborough has five colleges; the University of Toronto has seven constituent colleges in the Faculty of Arts and Science; and York University, also in Toronto, has nine faculty-based colleges across its eleven faculties (LA&PS Colleges Re-Visioning, College Systems Elsewhere, <https://colleges-revisioning.laps.yorku.ca/college-systems-elsewhere/>).¹

Like some other faculties at York University, the Faculty of Liberal Arts & Professional Studies (LA&PS) decided to undertake a community consultation to develop a new vision for its four colleges: Founders, Vanier, McLaughlin, and New. The LA&PS Colleges Re-Visioning has been developed within a six-month timeframe to consult with its respective communities and report back to the Interim Dean, JJ McMurtry. The Re-Visioning is premised on a broad-based open, consultative, and deliberative process, with the following guiding question: “How can we provide our students with the best higher educational experience possible at York University’s colleges?”

The result has been one of the most extensive community consultation exercises undertaken either within the Faculty of LA&PS or at York University more broadly, with six town halls, an interactive website, four focus groups, numerous stakeholder meetings with students and faculty members, a designated email address for receiving statements, comments, submissions, etc., a

¹ The University of Toronto also has Regis College, a Jesuit Faculty of Theology, that is one of North America’s Roman Catholic ecclesiastical faculties. Regis College offers post-baccalaureate civil and ecclesial degrees within the Roman Catholic tradition. It is part of the Toronto School of Theology that includes Emmanuel College; Knox College; Wycliff College; University of St. Michael’s College; University of Trinity College; and, of course, Regis College. St. Augustine’s Seminary is also part of the Toronto School of Theology. The University of Toronto has two other campuses: the University of Toronto Scarborough, formerly Scarborough College; and, the University of Toronto Mississauga, formerly Erindale College. Elsewhere in Ontario, the University of Western Ontario has three colleges (Brescia University College, Huron University College, and King’s University College), and the University of Waterloo has four (St. Jerome’s, St. Paul’s, Renison, and Conrad Grebel). In other parts of Canada, Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, has one college (University of King’s College). Menno Simon College is affiliated with the University of Winnipeg and is, as well, one of the three founding Colleges of the Canadian Mennonite University. The other two founding colleges are Concord College and the Canadian Mennonite Bible College. The University of Saskatchewan has six federated and affiliated colleges (Briercrest College, St. Thomas Moore College, Horizon College and Seminary, the Saskatoon Theological Union (an association of three theological education colleges), Gabriel Dumont Institute of Metis Studies and Applied Research, and St. Peter’s College. The University of Alberta has two affiliated religious colleges (St. Joseph’s College and St. Stephen’s College). And, the University of British Columbia has its Vantage College that provides a pathway for international students from high school to university studies. Colleges play varied and unique roles at universities across Canada, but they are by no means uncommon.

student survey, and several reports. These consultations provided substantial insight into how the colleges are perceived and valued by our students and how our communities would like to see the colleges change over the next five to ten years. Based on these results, four practical initiatives and three “principles of practice” have been suggested to create a “new vision” for the four LA&PS Colleges.

The four practical initiatives, outlined below, which are part of the new vision for the LA&PS Faculty’s four colleges are:

- The **first-year seminar** that would be delivered by each of the Colleges to their affiliated students.
- The “**Common Read**” for first-year students. All first-year students would be expected to read a designated book before they arrive at their college and would have an opportunity to discuss it prior to the start of classes.²
- The provision of “**Experiential Education**” opportunities for students at the colleges through the assistance of their college alumni and Fellows.
- The colleges as “**Research Innovators**” would place the emphasis on college affiliated faculty conducting cutting-edge research that would incorporate their undergraduate students.

The three “principles of practice” can be stated as follows:

- All students admitted in LA&PS programs will be allocated “**study space**” on campus.
- All students admitted into LA&PS programs will be provided with the **student support services** they need to help them to succeed and to graduate.
- Faculty members attached to a college are required to serve as **mentors** to the students affiliated with their college.

Together the four practical initiatives and three principles of practice provide a new vision for our colleges that will help to ensure our students receive the best higher educational experience possible in our Faculty and within York University.

This Preliminary Report on the LA&PS Colleges Re-Visioning will be for review by all members of our Faculty and discussed in a general town hall to consider its major findings and our various recommendations. Any modifications or amendments required will be incorporated into a final report, and once approved by the relevant governance bodies within our Faculty and at York University, a strategic plan will be formulated for the realization of a “new vision” for the LA&PS Colleges.

² McLaughlin College has instituted a “Common Read” for the new academic year, 2019-2020. The book selected is Thomas R. Klassen and John A. Dwyer, *How to Succeed at University (and to get a great job!)* UBC Press, 2015. The College will feature Professor Klassen in a series of workshops, two each term, for first-year students throughout the academic year. Professor Klassen will also be undertaking a pilot seminar at Founders College this Fall Term.

Mandate, Plan, and Process

The LA&PS Colleges Re-Visioning commenced on November 29, 2018, when Interim Dean JJ McMurtry issued an email announcing that a Colleges Re-Visioning exercise would be undertaken to seek answers to a number of questions that had arisen, in part, from the 2016 Colleges Review.

The questions included but were not limited to:

- 1 How can we further enhance what our colleges do for our students to serve them better and to enrich their learning and development experiences here at York?
- 2 How might we also serve the college's wider respective communities, including faculty, staff, alumni, and Fellows?
- 3 How can we strengthen and improve the relationships between the departments and programs affiliated with the colleges?
- 4 How can the colleges' physical space be better utilized to serve the needs of their students, staff, faculty, Fellows, associated programs, and alumni?

The Colleges Re-Visioning exercise was given a limited, six-month timeframe. These and other questions were to be engaged through “participatory conversations with all stakeholders, including ‘town hall’ meetings, with a commitment to open dialogue and timely feedback among the various constituencies about the direction of re-visioning and the role of the Colleges in LA&PS” (Interim Dean JJ McMurtry’s email, November 29, 2018).

The re-visioning process was launched at an open town hall meeting in the Senate Chambers at York University on December 6, 2018. Anyone unable to attend was invited to send written submissions.

The December 6th open town hall meeting laid the groundwork for the dialogue among various LA&PS constituencies and for the participatory conversations with all the stakeholders that followed. It was evident from this initial town hall meeting that the wider LA&PS community was seeking a broad-based consultation with the following key elements:

- a series of town hall meetings;
- an interactive website that would allow community members to provide their views and opinions on a “new vision” for the LA&PS Colleges;
- focus groups;
- stakeholder meetings;
- surveys;
- a means for providing direct input to the two leads of the LA&PS Colleges Re-Visioning: Professors Pablo Idahosa, Founders College Head, and James C. Simeon, McLaughlin College Head.

In short, the LA&PS community made it clear that the process should involve every possible means of providing individual and collective input for a new vision for the four LA&PS Colleges, including the most modern forms of communication technology and social media. The deliberations would converge on a key question:

“How can we provide our students with the best higher educational experience possible at York University’s colleges?”

A further consideration and concern at this first general town hall was that the outcome of this exercise not be limited to merely another report on York University’s colleges that would ultimately get shelved and gather dust without any implementation or impact on the college communities in LA&PS.

One of the first measures undertaken by the LA&PS Colleges Re-Visioning organizers was to establish an interactive website on the LA&PS Faculty website. (Please see "<https://colleges-revisioning.laps.yorku.ca/>."") A designated email address, lapscolleges@yorku.ca, was also established to allow for direct feedback on a “new vision” for the LA&PS Colleges. The following schedule of thematically based College Town Halls was announced to all members of the York University community with an invitation to participate in this “open and deliberative community consultation” on the LA&PS Colleges Re-Visioning.

- Wednesday, January 16, 2019, from 1 to 3 p.m. in the Senior Commons Room, 305 Founders College;
- Wednesday, February 13, 2019, from 1 to 3 p.m. in the Junior Common Room, 014 McLaughlin College;
- Wednesday, March 6, 2019, from 1 to 3 p.m. in the Renaissance Room, 001 Vanier College;
- Wednesday, April 3, 2019, from 1:30 to 3:30 p.m. in the Harry Crowe Room, 109 New College.

Several focus groups and stakeholder meetings were held with College Councils, College staff, and several Departmental and School Councils, the College Council Presidents, as well as with the Chair of the Council of College Heads, Professor John Amanatides, Head of Bethune College.

Direct consultation with our LA&PS College alumni and Fellows was also considered to be essential, thus, a consultative dinner was arranged for this special constituency group in the Founders Assembly Hall for Wednesday, May 8, 2019.

The first four to five months of the LA&PS Colleges Re-Visioning process, which began in January 2019, were set aside for the consultation phase of the project. An additional month was planned to analyze the results, prepare a preliminary report, and present it to the LA&PS and York University communities for consideration and further feedback. An additional month was set aside for the preparation of the final report, to be submitted now by the end of October 2019. What follows from there will be entirely dependent on the recommendations that flow from the final report and any further plans for their implementation.

A more detailed outline of the “broad-based, open, consultative deliberative process” that underscores the LA&PS Colleges Re-Visioning exercise can be found on the Colleges Re-Visioning website (see <https://colleges-revisioning.laps.yorku.ca/an-open-and-deliberative-consultative-process/>).

Consultations

Interactive Website

The main platform for the LA&PS Colleges Re-Visioning was the new interactive website launched on the main LA&PS Faculty website in early December 2018. Key features of the website include a feedback form with the option to respond anonymously and separate pages with information about the thematic College Town Halls at each of our four LA&PS Colleges.

All York University students, faculty, staff, alumni, and college Fellows can complete the simple online feedback form. Those using the form do not have to identify themselves and can remain entirely anonymous. There is a “Comments” box for additional comments, or a file can be attached to the online form and then submitted. If respondents are not concerned about their anonymity, they can also submit feedback through the designated email address, lapscolleges@yorku.ca.

The LA&PS Colleges Re-Visioning website also has extensive materials on York University’s college system and those found elsewhere, as well as the previous Task Forces, Provostial White Papers, College Audits, and other relevant reference documents on the colleges.

The College Town Halls are also listed and contain extensive material on each of the town halls such as a Post-Town Hall Questionnaire for those who were unable to attend the town hall, a video of the Town Hall, and a form for submitting a question on the subject matter covered at the town hall.

It also includes a contact page that lists the two co-leads and two Project Assistants and how they can be contacted in order to obtain further information or to provide suggestions on how to improve the consultations process.

College Town Halls

Each of the College Town Halls featured a different theme. The Founders College Town Hall dealt with the effective, efficient, and economical use of interior and exterior space. The McLaughlin College Town Hall focused on modern communications and, specifically, the use of social media. The Vanier College Town Hall addressed how best to strengthen the relationship between the colleges and their affiliated departments and schools and their respective degree, certificate, and diploma programs. Finally, the New College Town Hall was concerned with improving the provision of student services.

Before each College Town Hall, a *yFile* article was published providing a brief update on the Colleges Re-Visioning process and the theme that would be covered at the town hall.³ Following each College Town Hall, a summary of the key takeaways and a post-College Town Hall Questionnaire was posted on each College Town Hall page on the LA&PS Colleges Re-Visioning website. Those who were unable to attend the town halls were invited to complete and submit the online questionnaire instead, and for the McLaughlin, Vanier, and New College Town Halls, there was also the option of viewing and participating *via* Zoom, a video conferencing platform. It was determined that it would be important to try and use modern communications technology whenever possible, and Zoom is the video conference platform used by York University across all its Faculties.

It was decided that Mentimeter, an online electronic surveying program that could be easily accessed with any mobile phone, was also utilized for the McLaughlin, Vanier and New College Town Halls. Mentimeters were used to try to engage all the participants at each of the town halls whether they were physically present or participating remotely *via* Zoom. We found Mentimeter was a very effective way of engaging participants on the key issues raised at each of the town halls.

For the Alumni and Fellows Consultative Dinner both Mentimeter and “Word Cloud,” an online graphic surveying program, were used. There were some technical issues and other concerns that arose using Mentimeter and “Word Cloud.” Nonetheless, both proved to be useful in drawing in the participants at the consultative dinner.

All the town halls and the consultative dinner for alumni and Fellows were video recorded in their entirety and posted on the LA&PS Colleges Re-Visioning website. Records of these events are also quite detailed and readily accessible on the website.

Focus Groups and Stakeholders Meetings

Focus groups, stakeholder meetings, and a student survey were also important components of the consultative process. The focus groups were conducted with college staff and York International staff, as well as one with international students, to obtain their views about the role of the colleges and the needs of our international students.

Professors Idahosa and Simeon held stakeholder meetings with their respective College Councils and with the New College School of Administrative Studies Council to solicit their views on a “new vision” for the LA&PS Colleges. A separate meeting was held with Professor John Amanatides, Chair of the Council of Heads at York University, and with the Committee of the College Council Presidents and the directors, chairs, and undergraduate and graduate program directors of all 21 LA&PS schools and departments.

³ All *yFile* articles on the LA&PS Colleges Re-Visioning are posted on the website under “News,” found at the bottom of the website Home page.

Student Survey and Report on New Undergraduate Students at LA&PS

The student survey, distributed to all LA&PS students, was conducted over a two-week period beginning February 27, 2019. In total, 2772 students completed the survey for a response rate of over 10 percent of LA&PS students—a respectable response rate for online surveys for students at York University. The survey consisted of fourteen questions in total. The responses offer key insights for developing a “new vision” for our colleges.

York University’s Office of Institutional Planning and Analysis (OIPA), which conducted the student survey, also undertook an analysis and prepared a report on “New Undergraduate Students Entering LA&PS Colleges”. The report uses enrollment and student assessment data to provide a statistical analysis of the new undergraduate students in each of the Faculty’s four colleges.

Both the results of the student survey and the statistical report on undergraduate LA&PS students provide an informative view of who our students are and how they perceive and relate to their four colleges. These will be further considered in the next section of this report. What we present in the next section of this report is our analysis and interpretation of the results of the student survey. While we believe that the results of the student survey stand by themselves, we also see them as part of the broader discussion, as well as the wider context of the other sources of information that we draw upon in formulating our findings and drawing our conclusions.

Nearly 80 percent of the students who completed the student survey identified themselves as “commuters”. Similarly, the OIPA study of new LA&PS undergraduate students found that the majority of students in all the colleges are listed as either a Greater Toronto Area (GTA)/Commuter or a Non-GTA/Commuter, with the GTA/Commuters predominating by an overwhelming amount across all the colleges. The implication of this for how the York University community and its colleges operate on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis is quite self-evident. All LA&PS Colleges must look to be serving the largest segments of their respective student bodies that are comprised of commuters who are only on the campus for a limited period of time.

As essentially a commuter campus, York University’s students typically devote a certain time on campus, given their class, test, and examination schedules. Their hours on campus are dedicated to their class time and meeting with instructors, study groups, and their classmates to complete their assignments. Students also hold part-time jobs and have other commitments off campus. Attracting students to any co-curricular and extra-curricular events and activities is, therefore, extremely challenging. Easy access to the York University campus was, prior to the arrival of the TTC subway, a major challenge, especially, for those who have to use public transit. However, this major impediment has now been met with the addition of the subway extension to the main Keele Campus and beyond. And, this is best exemplified physically by York University’s two subway stops on its main Keele Street Campus, the “York University” and “Pioneer Village” stations.

As a consequence, York University has become a major transportation hub in the GTA, and its connections to all parts of the City of Toronto and surrounding regional municipalities have improved significantly. Now that York University is connected to Toronto’s main subway lines, travel times from the main Keele Street Campus to downtown Toronto are about 20-30 minutes.

The Lester B. Pearson International Airport and the Toronto Island Airport are easily accessible from the Union subway station, and GO buses and trains connect York University to surrounding cities beyond the GTA. These connections make it easier, less time-consuming, and less expensive for our GTA and non-GTA commuter students to travel to and from York's main Keele Campus. These improvements in accessibility may enable our commuter students to spend more time on campus, and York University may, therefore, also become a more viable option for more students who may be interested in pursuing undergraduate or graduate degrees. Connecting York University to the TTC's subway system has expanded York University's student "catchment area" by a very wide margin.

Considering the changes to the transit networks, and York becoming a major transit hub, there may also be an opportunity for the colleges at York University to attract more public transit commuter students to their various student services, events, and other activities. Taking full advantage of the new commuting possibilities and, importantly, the reduced travel times for our public transit commuter students, will require careful consideration and creative thought.

The Salient Discourse: Message(s) Received

OIPA Statistics on New Undergraduates Entering LA&PS Colleges

A good place to begin to learn about the new students who are arriving at our four LA&PS Colleges is OIPA's 2019 report on "New Undergraduate Students Entering LA&PS Colleges." Our new students are overwhelmingly domestic (Canadian citizens or permanent residents), female, English-speaking, GTA/commuters who enter directly from high school and are 18 years of age or under. While this is the typical profile of first-year students entering the Faculty and its colleges in LA&PS, there are some interesting distinctions between the four colleges in terms of the characteristics of their student bodies.

Vanier College and New College have by far the highest number of first-year international students, while McLaughlin College and Founders College have the lowest number of first-year international students. In fact, New College has roughly the same number of first-year international students as it does first-year domestic students. It is also the only college entirely comprised of professional programs: the School of Administrative Studies; the School of Human Resource Management; the School of Information Technology; and the Disaster and Emergency Management program that is part of the School of Administrative Studies.

Female students outnumber male students in Founders and McLaughlin Colleges, but the reverse is the case for both New and Vanier Colleges.

In terms of age, while an overwhelming majority of first-year students are 24 years of age or under about 10 percent fall within the 25 and 34 years category, and, about 5 percent of the first-year student body at all four colleges falls in the 35-to-44-year-old or 45 years and older categories. Interestingly, about 15 percent of all first-year students at our colleges are 25 years of age or older. According to York University's definition and admission requirements, 15 percent of first-year

students fall in the “mature student” or “senior citizen” categories.⁴ The number of “mature students” attending university is likely to increase over time and will be an important consideration in how student programs ought to be delivered at the colleges and within the Faculty, reflecting the different life experience, needs, and educational goals that mature students often bring to their engagement with campus life.

A good number of the students at the colleges anticipate experiencing difficulties paying for their university education. This indicates that many students attending York University are likely in financial need.

Finally, the survey and the report both clearly show that for most students, York University is a commuter campus, with the attendant issues of fostering engagement and sustaining a presence on campus.

The Student Survey

In the student survey conducted as part of the LA&PS Colleges Re-Visioning, more than 7 percent of respondents said they were not part of a college in LA&PS. This was rather surprising, given that all incoming students are assigned a college affiliation. It seems reasonable to assume that the 7 percent of students who completed the online questionnaire did not know which college they were affiliated with. This is an interesting finding, in its own right, suggesting that many of our students are simply not aware of how the collegiate system functions at York University.

Question two was, “How many times have you attended an event or used a service in your College this academic year (September 2018–February 2019)?” Responses indicate that nearly 49 percent of respondents had done so from one to more than five times, and 8 percent answered that they were not sure if they had participated in a college event or service during the academic year. It is therefore probably fair to say that more than half the students who responded to the survey had been actively involved with their college’s activities, whether they were aware of it or not. While it is reassuring that half the students are participating in their college’s events and activities, it also suggests that many of our students are not utilizing the student services available to them within their respective colleges. It is worth noting that not all students necessarily require all the student services that are available to them and that are provided by their Colleges or the Faculty.

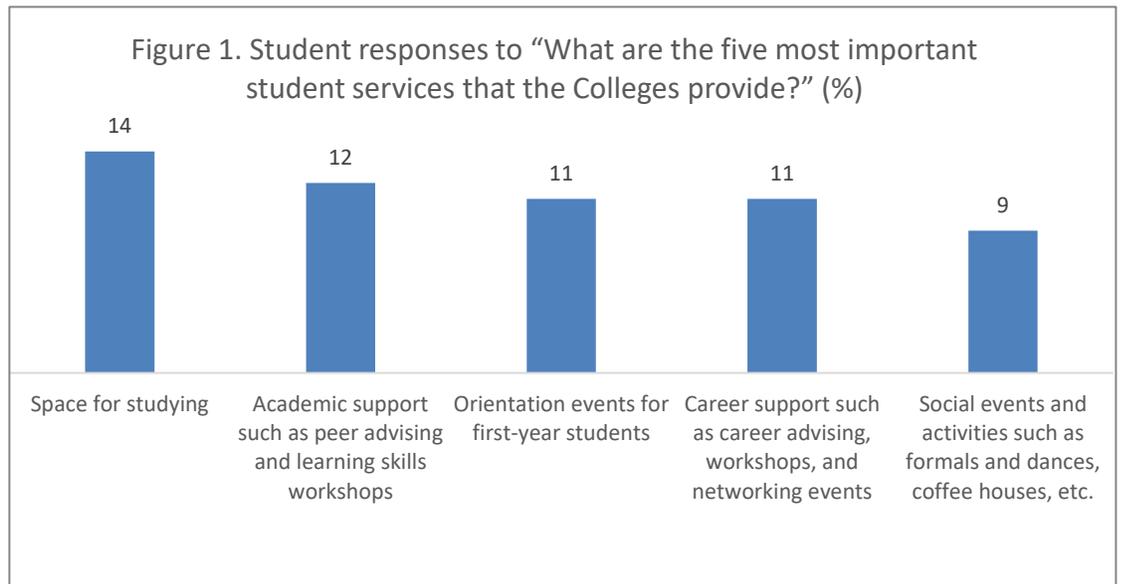
⁴ York University, Future Students, Admission and Application Procedures for Mature Students, <https://futurestudents.yorku.ca/requirements/mature>. (accessed August 29, 2019). To be considered a mature student you must:

- Be at least 20 years old by the end of the calendar year of admission to the University;
- Have been out of full-time high school studies for at least two years or have returned to upgrade after a two-year absence;
- Have attempted less than one full year of studies at an accredited university or college;
- Have a favourable academic record; and
- Have demonstrated potential for success through academic, professional or volunteer activities and other accomplishments.

It is also important to note that there is tuition fee waiver for senior citizens that is limited to one undergraduate and graduate degree.

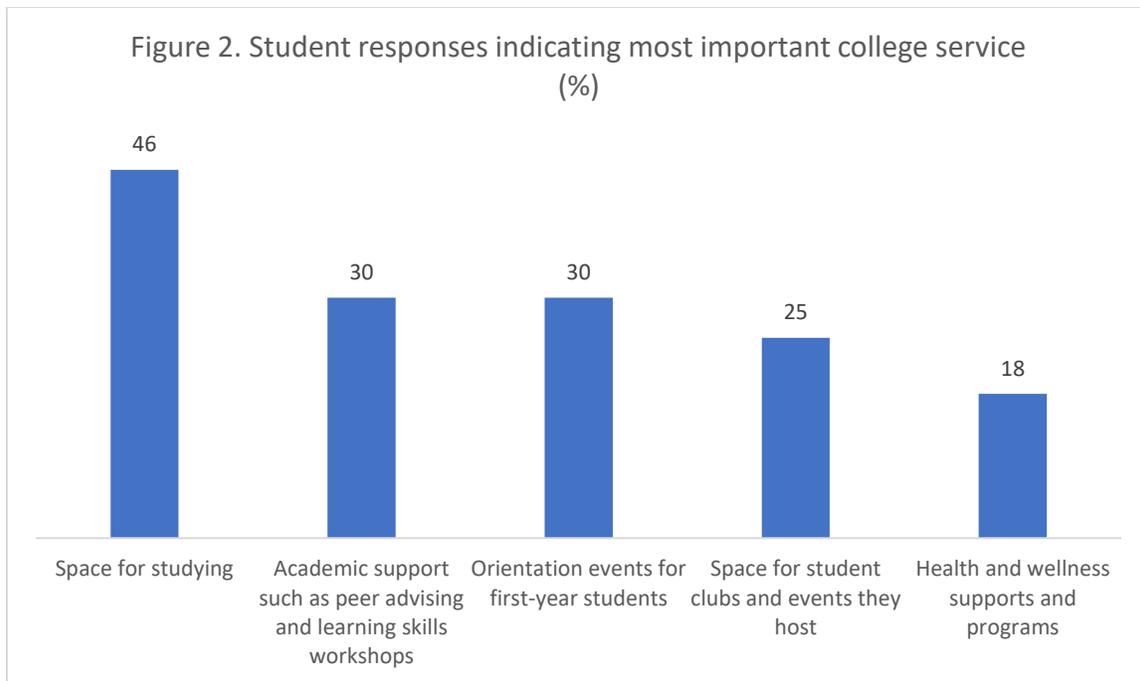
Question three asked students how strongly they identified with their college, and a full 60 percent said they had some identification with their college, with nearly 10 percent saying they identified strongly, very strongly, or extremely strongly. Question four asked students, “How relevant is the College to your overall experience at York University?” Again, 61 percent responded that it was at least slightly relevant, with 14 percent considering it to be relevant, very relevant, or extremely relevant. These are remarkable findings that show how important the college experience is for our students.

The most frequent responses to the question, “What are the five most important student services that the Colleges provide?” are summarized in Figure 1.



What is interesting among these top five choices is that academic and support activities were more highly regarded than social and athletic events and activities. That most students listed “study space” as a key service is perhaps most telling.

When asked to order the priority of the services the colleges provide, most students identified “study space” their number-one priority (see Figure 2).



These results point to the important role that students believe that colleges play in providing academic support for undergraduate students at York University.

Question seven asked students, “How strongly would you support more student services being delivered in the Colleges?” Compellingly, 70 percent of the students stated that they either slightly supported it, somewhat supported it, or strongly supported it, and the overwhelming majority of these — 37 percent, more than one-third — stated that they strongly supported more student services being delivered by the colleges.

Along similar lines, question ten asked students, “How strongly would you support more events related to your current academic program being delivered outside the Colleges?” 67 percent of the respondents answered that they were either slightly, somewhat, or strongly in support of this; we conclude from this finding that students want more academic support both within and outside their colleges.

To summarize, the key findings of the student survey, about half of the students who responded to the survey participate in college activities, more than 60 percent of the students stated that they identify with their college to varying degrees, and more than 60 percent of the students indicated that the colleges are relevant to their overall experience at York University. The most valued student services provided by the colleges are academic support services, including the highly valued “study space”, as well as first-year orientation and health and wellness. Furthermore, well over two-thirds of students favour the delivery of more student services at their colleges. Overall, the vast majority of the students in our Faculty view the colleges positively and appreciate the academic support services that they provide.

College Town Halls and Consultative Dinner

The four College Town Halls and our Alumni and Fellows Consultative Dinner were critical sources of LA&PS community input for the Colleges Re-Visioning. The College Town Halls were all thematically based. The town hall in Founders College focused on the use of space; the one in McLaughlin College addressed modern communications and the use of social media; the one in Vanier College examined the relationship between colleges and their affiliated programs; and the one in New College concentrated on student services. The Alumni and Fellows Consultative Dinner provided a briefing on the progress of the Colleges Re-Visioning process and some of its main findings to date, and the alumni and Fellows in attendance were asked what they considered to be the real benefits of the colleges and what the colleges ought to be doing in the future.

The videos of the town halls and consultative dinner and the key takeaways from each are available on the LA&PS Colleges Re-Visioning website, <https://colleges-revisioning.laps.yorku.ca/>. The essence of these key takeaways can be summarized as follows:

-- ***Founders College Town Hall:*** The aesthetic and strategic use and maintenance of the college's interior and exterior space is essential to students' academic and university experiences. Creative solutions need to be advanced to ensure that the needs of students, faculty members, and staff are met for colleges to remain at the forefront of providing students with the opportunities needed to achieve success in their academic pursuits. Maintaining the colleges' physical capital ought to be a priority, especially because Complex 1, which houses three of the LA&PS Colleges, has been designated a "heritage site" by the City of Toronto.⁵

-- ***McLaughlin College Town Hall:*** Communication is central to what the colleges do to inform their students and their wider respective communities of the latest events, activities, and information relevant to college life. Accordingly, the colleges need to stay abreast of the latest means of communication, including social media, and they should be employing these tools to connect with students and keep them informed about what is happening at their colleges.

--***Vanier College Town Hall:*** The relationship between the colleges and their affiliated programs should be a close one, and they ought to be working in tandem. For instance, the colleges, with their networks of alumni and external Fellows, could assist with finding experiential education (EE) opportunities for their students. Students place high value on faculty-student relationships for guidance, advice, direction, and research opportunities, and such relationships should be facilitated and promoted by the colleges.

⁵ Toronto, Staff Report Action Required, "4700 Keele Street – Inclusion on the Heritage Inventory and Intention to Designate Under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act," October 1, 2009, <https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2009/pb/bgrd/backgroundfile-24265.pdf>. (accessed August 25, 2019); Heritage Register Search, Addresses on the Heritage Register, "The following 14 building and building complexes on York University's Keele Campus were adopted by City Council on Nov. 30 and Dec. 1, 2, 4, 7, 2009." <http://cot-planning.maps.arcgis.com/apps/PanelsLegend/index.html?appid=a90bf1e72b694db5a4892dc6b170688d>. (accessed August 25, 2019). Please note that the Faculty's four Colleges (Founders, Vanier, McLaughlin, and New College, formerly Atkinson College), are all designated under Part IV of the *Ontario Heritage Act*, along with Winters College, that is part of Complex 1.

-- *New College Town Hall*: The provision of a wide set of student services is what the colleges at York University are all about. These include orientation, peer mentoring programs, critical skills training, health and wellness programs, annual public speakers' series, career preparation sessions, and leadership opportunities through the many student clubs, College Councils, and as Residence Life Coordinators and Dons. Due consideration ought to be given to both a compulsory first-year seminar course for all incoming students and a "Common Read." Both have been identified as high-impact educational practices for first-year university students (see the American Association of Colleges & Universities, High-Impact Education Practices, <https://www.aacu.org/leap/hips>, May 8, 2019.)

-- *Alumni and Fellows Consultative Dinner*: Alumni and Fellows identified the sense of "community" and the provision of "academic and personal guidance" by faculty and staff as two of the most important functions that colleges have been mandated to perform on behalf of their students. When asked what else our colleges should be doing to support our students' "ongoing growth and development," many at the consultative dinner mentioned "mentorship," "guidance," and "participation" most frequently, but also considered "experiential education" and "co-op opportunities" to be important. When asked what word they would use to describe a new vision for the LA&PS Colleges, the three most frequently cited words were "welcoming," "mentorship," and "family." The direction that the alumni and Fellows, who attended this consultative dinner, would like the LA&PS Colleges to take is clear: the colleges must continue to provide our students with a sense of "community" and to offer them "mentorship," "guidance," and "participation" in their academic studies—essential components to students' overall success at university.

Stakeholders' Views

If our students take precedence, they are one element — albeit the most important — among the composite of elements that comprise the life of any college. The others are, of course, the faculty, staff, alumni, and Fellows. Interestingly, Fellows can encompass all the other elements as well as incorporate those outside the university proper and from the broader world community. In some Colleges Junior Fellows are typically graduate students who fill this role for a limited period of time. Faculty, staff, and alumni are usually classified as internal Fellows. Fellows who come from outside the York University community are external Fellows.⁶

"Fellow" is defined by the *Cambridge Dictionary* as "a teacher of high rank at a College" (Cambridge Dictionary, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/fellowship>. May 4, 2019). And, perhaps more to the point, a "fellowship" is "people with the same purpose, experience, or interest, or a formal organization of people" (Ibid.). The position of Fellow at our LA&PS Colleges is entirely honorific. Some Fellows, both internal and external, are extremely active and make substantial contributions to college life. External Fellows, especially those who live at a considerable distance from the college, may rarely be seen but are nonetheless available to support the college and its mandate when needed. Indeed, they are the friends of our colleges, and they are there when called upon.

⁶ Uncharacteristically, New College has yet to appoint anyone as a Fellow of their College. New College appears to have a different model of the relationship between its students, student clubs, faculty and their associated professional organizations, all of which point to the unique character of our individual LA&PS Colleges.

Fellows and other stakeholders have been very supportive of the LA&PS Colleges Re-Visioning process and see our colleges as academic and scholarly disciplinary communities within our Faculty. They see the colleges as providing students with the support and assistance they might require to succeed and excel at university and as offering opportunities to develop and to grow as a “whole person.”

At a meeting with the new College Council Presidents at York University, a number of points were made by the College Council Presidents:

- Colleges provide students with leadership and development opportunities.
- College Councils provide students with opportunities to get involved with their academic communities.
- Colleges enrich the undergraduate experience through increased connectedness and networking.

The College Council Presidents indicated that there is a noticeable gap in student engagement after Frosh/Frost weeks. They noted that it would be important to increase the level of student engagement throughout the academic year and not just for Orientation and Frosh/Frost weeks.

The College Council Presidents also emphasized the importance of providing students who are in need of financial assistance with financial support. They also emphasized the importance of the College Clubs and having the College Clubs participating in as many activities as possible.

In a meeting with the Chair of the College Head’s Council, Professor John Amanatides, the following key points were made:

“In a humongous university like York University, the colleges make the university feel small. First-year students are overwhelmed by the size of York University and the colleges help to make the university a smaller and more manageable and comfortable place for students.”

“Students need study space, academic support, and a place to hang out. The colleges provide them with all of these necessities.”

“What can the colleges offer that is harder for departments and programs to provide for our students? The colleges are trans-departmental and are mandated to provide social, sports, recreational, and other intellectual supplemental and support activities that their departments cannot provide.”

It was further noted that the colleges should have more of a coordination role with the other academic services provided to our students at York University.

“Given the size of the university campus, geography matters. The colleges should help the students make the connection between academic advising, peer mentoring, and peer tutoring.”

As Head of Bethune College, Professor John Amanatides said that he tried to make Bethune College “the one-stop spot” for our Faculty of Science and Lassonde School of Engineering

students. There is lots of study space, volunteer peer tutoring, supplemental instruction through the PASS program of peer mentors and facilitated study groups, monthly sessions delivered by the Career Centre, and so on.

In terms of a future vision for the colleges at York University, Professor Amanatides stated that, “The colleges should be delivering the required first-year seminar credit course. This is something that many colleges do in the United States, for instance, that we do not do at York University.”

And, he also made a further point that, “The colleges need to become proficient at creating student cohorts where the students can study, learn, and grow together.” Group learning has proven to accelerate learning while benefiting students in many other ways. For example, informal peer learning and tutoring can help create a support network for students as they progress through their studies.

Focus Groups

Several focus groups were held with the staff. The comments from these consultations are summarized below.

College staff clearly want to see our Faculty promote the colleges more actively, and they believe that faculty members located in the colleges should be willing and required to take on mentorship roles and responsibilities for their affiliated students. As one staff member noted, “Community cannot be created in absentia.”

The point was made that younger faculty need to be introduced and involved in the collegiate system at York University.

Participants also suggested a need for greater collaboration in the training of student volunteers, as this would: (1) minimize staff time and effort in the duplication of tasks; (2) improve the quality of the training provided; (3) allow training to be provided by professionals in the field; and, (4) reduce costs.

With respect to where the college staff would like to see the LA&PS Colleges over the next five to ten years, it was noted that the Office of the College Head should control space allocation and repatriate Academic Advisors to the colleges; the Dean and faculty members should be more involved in the colleges; there should be a swing space for faculty instead of holding specific offices based on a faculty member’s office hours; and, communication with faculty and academic units should be strengthened to enhance student involvement and faculty attendance at events.

There was a general consensus among the college staff that York University needs to promote its collegiate system and encourage greater faculty and staff attendance at its various college events and activities. York University should be making its college system as relevant as possible and be using its collegiate system to recruit and retain students. This cannot be done by a large central corporate division alone; such an approach simply lacks the sense of community, identity, and well-being that is provided by York University’s Colleges. To many focus group participants, this seemed so obvious and elementary that it need not even be articulated.

A “New Vision” for the Colleges in LA&PS?

The extensive and broad-based, open, consultations, and deliberations described above have led to several responses to the central question raised by this initiative: “*How can we provide our students with the best higher educational experience possible at York University’s colleges?*” At the same time, we must also address the four related questions raised at the very outset:

- How can we further enhance what our colleges do for our students to serve them better and enrich their experiences here at York?
- How might we also serve the college’s wider respective communities, including faculty, staff, and Fellows?
- How can we strengthen and improve the relationships between the departments and programs affiliated with the colleges?
- How can the colleges’ physical space be better utilized to serve the needs of their students, staff, faculty, Fellows, associated programs, and alumni?

Four practical initiatives are put forward to enhance the college experience for students:

1. First-Year Seminar

An idea brought up repeatedly throughout our consultations was the possibility of reintroducing college courses or seminars. At one point, the colleges offered students first-year courses with small class sizes, largely aimed at teaching students research, writing, and presentation skills, critical thinking, rhetoric, and so on. The Colleges Re-Visioning consultations have demonstrated that there is clearly an appetite for such college courses or seminars, principally, among the LA&PS faculty members and college staff.

The idea that seemed to prevail was the establishment of a compulsory first-year seminar credit course geared to teaching students the critical skills necessary to succeed in their university studies. Such first-year seminars are a common practice among colleges and universities throughout North America and have been identified as a high-impact educational practice that boosts student retention rates (High-Impact Educational Practices, Association of American Colleges & Universities (<https://www.aacu.org/leap/hips>)). It would be a natural logical step for the LA&PS Colleges to take on such an initiative, given their disciplinary specializations and their focus on promoting and supporting students’ success at university.

Currently, there are a number of initiatives underway at York University that are intended to address this apparent need for a First-Year Seminar. Two are Professors Rob Kenedy and Paul Grayson’s online course on “Skills for Success in Sociology”⁷, and Rosanna Furguele and David Ip-Yam’s “Pathways to Life-Long Learning” course offering at Glendon College, now the Glendon Campus, York University.⁸ There are also two further points of research worthy of emphasis here. First, Furguele’s and Ip-Yam’s and others’ research demonstrates,

⁷ Elaine Smith, “Sociology Professor tackle student skills gap,” March 19, 2019, Faculty of Liberal Arts & Professional Studies, York University, <http://laps.yorku.ca/2019/03/sociology-professors-tackle-student-skills-gap/>. (accessed August 25, 2019)

⁸ Elaine Smith, “Glendon students introduced to Pathways to Life-Long Learning,” *yFile*, March 21, 2019, <https://yfile.news.yorku.ca/2019/03/21/glendon-students-introduced-to-pathways-to-life-long-learning/>. (accessed

that a well-designed, structured and institutionally supported first-year seminar can be one of the most significant actions an institution can take to invest in student learning, development and retention.⁹

Second, Professors Kenedy and Grayson's student survey of four Ontario universities (York University, University of Western Ontario, University of Waterloo, and the University of Toronto) not only found serious academic skill deficiencies for university students, irrespective of their academic performance in high school, but that they needed more academic skills to succeed in their university studies. Perhaps most significant here, was that more than two-thirds of the students surveyed said that they welcomed a first-year course on effective studying, critical thinking, writing, and university standards.¹⁰

Notwithstanding that General Education (Gen Ed) courses are offered in our Faculty, the need for a First Year Seminar appears to have tremendous support from students and those who participated in the LA&PS Colleges Re-Visioning consultations.¹¹ The Gen Ed courses in our Faculty ought to be seen as complementary to the First Year Seminar and not as competition to it. The point of the First Year Seminar is that all first-year students ought to be taking this required credit course in the first year of their studies to help to ensure that they acquire the critical skills necessary to successfully complete their degree programs. Balancing the delivery of Gen Ed courses with Departments and Schools with a First Year Seminar at the Colleges ought to be part of the ongoing dialogue and discussion on how to ensure that our Faculty is providing our first-year students with an enriched deep learning experience in their all-important first year of higher education.

2. *The "Common Read"*

A common practice of most colleges and universities around the world is the "Common Read." This is the practice of assigning all incoming first-year students a book to read prior to their arrival at the campus and their college. The book is then discussed by the first-year class before their classes begin in earnest. Often the author of the book makes a presentation on their book and its content to the first-year class. The objective is to teach the students something about "critical

September 13, 2019); Glendon, "Glendon's Director of Student Affairs, David Ip Yam, presents research at First-Year Experience Conference," undated, <https://www.glendon.yorku.ca/student-affairs/2018/04/20/glendons-director-of-student-affairs-david-ip-yam-presents-research-at-first-year-experience-conference/>. (accessed August 25, 2019); "Inaugural Forum on Student Success puts focus on collaboration and learning," *yFile*, May 6, 2019, <https://yfile.news.yorku.ca/2019/05/06/inaugural-forum-on-student-success-puts-focus-on-collaboration-and-learning/>. (accessed September 13, 2019)

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ "Study finds more than half the university students feel they need better skills to succeed," *yFile*, April 28, 2019, <http://yfile.news.yorku.ca/2019/04/28/study-finds-more-than-half-of-ontario-university-students-feel-they-need-better-basic-skills-to-succeed/>. (accessed August 25, 2019)

¹¹ Faculty of Liberal Arts & Professional Studies, LA&PS General Education Courses, <http://laps.yorku.ca/programs-of-study/laps-general-education-courses/>. (accessed September 13, 2019) It perhaps goes without saying that Gen Ed courses can be taken at any time during a student's undergraduate degree program, whereas, the First Year Seminar must be taken by students in their first year of studies. Further, the purpose of Gen Ed courses is to expand the breadth and depth of student's knowledge and understanding across a number of fields that marks the ideals of a general liberal education, while the First Year Seminar is intended to help ensure that the student has the critical skill sets necessary in order to complete successful their degree studies.

thinking” on a pertinent topic that crosses a number of disciplinary fields and provides an opportunity for students to discuss their ideas about the book with their first-year student colleagues. Even more importantly, though, it is intended to be an “ice breaker,” encouraging students to become engaged in a relevant subject and share a common experience while also meeting and getting to know one another. These “Common Read” experiences may lead to the development of a learning community or informal study groups, and in some instances, they can produce lasting friendships at the college and the university. Feedback from the consultation process suggests that this high-impact educational practice, already used by most colleges and universities around the world, ought to be applied by the LA&PS Colleges at York University.

Ideally, both high-impact educational practices—a first-year seminar and a “Common Read”—could be adopted by LA&PS Colleges working closely in conjunction with their respective, peer mentor networks, College Councils, Departments and Schools and their related programs.

3. Experiential Education Opportunities

Like the initiatives discussed above, experiential education—including community service learning and community-based learning—is what might be considered a high-impact educational practice. As the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) notes:

In [service learning and community-based learning] programs, field-based “experiential learning” with community partners is an instructional strategy – and often a required part of the course. The idea is to give students direct experience with issues they are studying in the curriculum and with ongoing efforts to analyze and solve problems in the community. A key element in these programs is the opportunity students have to both apply what they are learning in real-world settings and reflect in a classroom setting on their service experiences. These programs model the idea that giving something back to the community is an important college outcome, and that working with community partners is a good preparation for citizenship, work and life. (AAC&U, High-Impact Educational Practices, <https://www.aacu.org/leap/hips>)

The colleges at York University are especially well situated to help students secure EE opportunities through their alumni and Fellows. College Fellows are accomplished in their fields, and many are in positions where they may be able to assist in providing students with EE opportunities such as research projects, internships, and co-op placements with community partners. This potential has not yet been fully explored by the colleges, but it is something that is definitely worth pursuing and cultivating. The Heads of the Colleges should take a leadership role within their respective Colleges to advance such EE opportunities for their students.¹²

During the LA&PS Colleges Re-Visioning consultations and, particularly during the town halls, the idea that the LA&PS Colleges have an important role to play in the promotion of EE

¹² York University, Teaching Commons @ York, Experiential Education, <https://teachingcommons.yorku.ca/resources/experiential-education/>. (accessed August 29, 2019); York University, Faculty of Liberal Arts & Professional Studies, Experiential Education, <https://laps.yorku.ca/about/experiential-education/>. (accessed August 29, 2019)

opportunities for their affiliated students came up repeatedly. In conjunction with their respective programs of study, affiliated students can be provided meaningful EE opportunities through College alumni and Fellows, who are an untapped resource in this regard, and could be utilized much more effectively when coordinated with LA&PS Faculty. Working together with the Faculty's Experiential Education Office, the Colleges could help to secure EE opportunities for their students on a disciplinary basis.

4. Colleges as Research Innovators

Faculty members are enthusiastic researchers who are always looking for opportunities to conduct interesting and innovative research. Indeed, much in higher education is currently geared towards promoting the maximum amount of practically relevant research, as research is, of course, key to discovery and to knowledge generation and production. Colleges are the academic homes for many exceptional researchers undertaking innovative research and making an impact, however small, on their respective fields. The amount of research conducted at the Colleges often goes unnoticed, yet the colleges are important research incubators for cutting-edge research, especially, at the early stages of development. The Colleges cannot, obviously, nor should they, supplant York University's 25 research centres; rather, they can support the research efforts of the University as a whole. They are broadly focused and already closely aligned with their academic units and programs, allowing innovative lines of inquiry to be nourished and developed within a highly supportive and stimulating intellectual community of students and researchers. The College Heads have an important role to play in fostering such research innovation within their colleges, providing ongoing encouragement and support that can take many different forms.

The role of colleges as research incubators also serves students well by exposing them to cutting-edge ideas and innovative modes of thought that have oftentimes, yet, to come to the attention of their disciplinary fields. It can provide students with exceptional role models for their own development as researchers and critical thinkers and provides insights and in-depth learning on how to be an innovative researcher and creative thinker. In fact, "undergraduate research" is also considered a high-impact educational practice, and universities are encouraging their faculty members to reshape their courses to connect key concepts and questions to their undergraduate students' early and active involvement in systematic investigation and research. This can be an intense motivator for students, who appreciate an opportunity to work with a faculty member investigating important questions that could eventually lead to a major breakthrough on some of the most important and "cool" theoretical and practical problems.

Principles of Practice for the LA&PS Colleges

The following principles of practice have been developed based on the results of the extensive consultations undertaken for the LA&PS Colleges Re-Visioning.

1 All students admitted in LA&PS programs will be allocated appropriate "study space" on campus.

Students have identified “study space” as one of the most important services the colleges provide. Generally, students would like more “study space” than is currently available. The provision of sufficient “study space” for all students who require it should be a priority for our colleges and our Faculty. Accordingly, the Faculty should establish a principle that “all students accepted into a LA&PS program will be allocated appropriate ‘study space’ on campus.” If such a principle is accepted as one of our Faculty’s commitments to our students, it can become both a recruitment tool, to attract students to York University for their undergraduate studies, as well as a retention tool, as having an established “study space” facilitates the learning process. The colleges could play a central role in the provision of “study space” for their affiliated students.

2 All students admitted into LA&PS programs will be provided with the student support services they need to help them to succeed and to graduate.

As the student survey found, well over two-thirds of the students surveyed would like to see the colleges providing more student services. Colleges currently provide their students with numerous services in support of their well-being and academic success, including peer mentoring programs, critical skills workshops, sports and recreational opportunities, health and wellness programs, a Lunch Time Talks series, and so on. The Faculty also provides students with its own set of student services. Together, the Colleges and the Faculty provide students with a wide and comprehensive set of student services to help them succeed in their university degree studies.

Nonetheless, it would be a tremendous benefit to students to ensure that all LA&PS students can get the student support services they need to be able to succeed in their program of study. We have many outstanding students who do not require much in the way of services, and they often volunteer as peer mentors and support their peers in other ways. There are also students who need multiple types of student support services to succeed in their programs of study for various reasons, ranging from marginal grades at admission to financial constraints, difficulties adapting to a new culture and society, or marked deficiencies in literacy, numeracy, test-taking, or time management skills. The key, of course, is to provide all students with the supports they need to be able to complete their degrees successfully. Adopting a principle that would ensure that each student receives such supports would thus be of great benefit to students and would surely prove to be a powerful tool for both recruiting new students and retaining them.

3 Faculty members attached to a college are required to serve as mentors to the students affiliated with their college.

Students highly value the opportunity to connect with faculty and look to them for their advice, guidance, direction, and mentorship. Ideally, colleges provide a forum for students and faculty members housed at the Colleges to meet and for faculty to provide students with advice and guidance whenever called upon. Faculty members should be willing to serve as their students’ mentors. College alumni and Fellows believe in the value and practice of “mentorship” as one of the principal services their colleges should provide, and they believe it should be delivered in a more deliberate and pronounced manner than has thus far has been the case.

An enhanced faculty mentorship program will require planning and organizing at the college level, and faculty members will have to commit to serving as role models and mentors for the students

attached to their College. This could be accomplished in several ways. For example, office space could be allocated to faculty members in the Colleges only on the condition that they serve as mentors for a certain number of first-year students in their College, meeting with their assigned students at least once a semester, or more often if required. This valuable service should be recognized as part of the service contribution faculty members should be making to their College and to the university during considerations of tenure and promotion and for merit pay increases. Faculty members in the teaching stream might find this type of College service to be particularly appealing.

Wrap-Up and Concluding Reflections

Four practical initiatives and three “principles of practice” have emerged from the extensive consultations in our Colleges Re-Visioning process, creating a “new vision” for our four LA&PS Colleges. The First Year Seminar course and the “Common Read” are specifically, and intentionally, aimed at our first-year students, as these initiatives seek to increase our Faculty’s retention rate which, in turn, has an impact on both progression and graduation rates. The higher the retention rate, the higher the progression and graduation rates. Studies have demonstrated not only the need for a First Year Seminar because of the skills deficiency of students arriving at university, regardless of their grades in high school or elsewhere. Most importantly, they show the need to ensure that all our students have the critical skills necessary to succeed at university and complete their degree programs. The “Common Read” is also a widespread practice at universities in a number of countries and is a proven method that helps to bring our students together and assist them in forming social bonds and learning communities that are so essential for students’ ongoing learning throughout their studies. In adopting these two proven high-impact educational practices for our Faculty, the LA&PS Colleges could play a pivotal role in enhancing the quality of our students’ higher educational experience.

Promoting Experiential Education opportunities through the Colleges’ Fellows and alumni is a productive and meaningful way to provide all our students — but, particularly, those in the upper years of their studies — with the kind of deep, impactful learning that can come from the various experiences and practices fostered by experiential learning, whether in the social sciences, policy-orientated and professional fields, as well as in the humanities. Furthermore, the insights and understanding that can be gained from these types of community service and community-based learning experiences benefit both the broader community and our students.¹³ As EE continues to gain weight and momentum in higher education, the LA&PS Colleges have much to contribute, and our students stand to benefit a great deal, further enhancing the relevance and significance of the Colleges in our Faculty and within the university.

The notion of the colleges as research innovators and incubators is hardly a new role or undertaking, but it is an important one that ought to be re-emphasized and recognized with the ongoing support of the College Heads and their respective faculty members, as the Colleges have a distinct history of nurturing and developing innovative research ideas, concepts, theories, and

¹³ Council of Ontario Universities, 2014, Experiential Learning Report, *Bringing Life to Learning at Ontario Universities*, <https://cou.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/COU-Experiential-Learning-Report-2014.pdf>. (accessed August 29, 2019)

practices. The direct benefits of strengthening such a “research incubator” approach will extend to the university as a high-intensive research institution as well as to students through their Colleges, as they will have the opportunity to learn from and working with faculty members who are blazing new trails within their fields and disciplines.

The three “principles of practice” for the LA&PS Colleges outlined here are far from revolutionary; rather, once elaborated, they seem straightforward and entirely self-evident. Ensuring that all our students have adequate “study space” and access to the student services they need to succeed in their university studies is a direct response to what we have learned from our students in our consultations and, more specifically, from our student survey. A commitment to provide all our students with the services they require to complete successfully their course of study is something that we strive for now. Elevating this to a guiding principle for our Faculty and its Colleges reinforces our dedication and commitment to our students’ success in their university studies. Both of these principles – the provision of dedicated “study space” for all of our students and providing them the support services they require to complete their degrees – should be great inducements to attract and retain students, and working with them to ensure that they complete their studies successfully.

These consultations have also revealed that our students crave closer relationships and ties with their instructors, and our colleges are well suited to facilitate this in the form of mentorships, requiring faculty members who occupy office space at a College to provide first-year students with advice, guidance, and direction as required. In short, the explicit role of all college-based faculty should perhaps be to serve as mentors for their students. Any faculty mentorship program would, of course, be in addition to the excellent peer mentoring programs already offered by the Colleges. The combination of the four “practical initiatives” and the three “principles of practice” forms a synergy, as together, not only will these measures produce marked improvements in retention, progression, and graduation, but they will also improve the overall higher educational experience for the students in our colleges.

The cost of implementing these practical initiatives and principles of practice will likely be negligible for all but the First Year Seminar. Without knowing the full cost of the implementation of a First Year Seminar it will be difficult to assess completely its utility and value to the Faculty. It is reasonable to expect, however, that it will not be inexpensive to offer a First Year Seminar to all incoming first-year students at a class size of, optimally, no more than 50 students. Nonetheless, regardless of cost it should prove to be a highly cost-effective investment over the three or four years required for our students to earn their undergraduate degrees. Significant improvements in retention, progression, and graduation rates will, undoubtedly, make this a cost-effective investment for all concerned: student instructors, our Faculty, and, York University, as a whole. In addition, it should prove to be a substantial enhancement to the quality of our undergraduate student’s higher educational experience.

The Way Forward and Next Steps

What, then, are the practicalities for realizing this “new vision” for our LA&PS Colleges? We begin with the presentation of this Preliminary Report on the Colleges Re-Visioning to our LA&PS

community, recommending that it be disseminated as widely as possible through our usual communication channels. A public consultation should follow with as broad a representation of the LA&PS community as possible. The results of this public consultation will ultimately shape the final report on the LA&PS Colleges Re-Visioning.

At the same time, we anticipate that this Preliminary Report will be discussed internally through the governance bodies of our Faculty, and the final report on the LA&PS Colleges Re-Visioning will naturally be shaped by these deliberations and processes as well. The final report will aim to take into account and balance the views of all concerned with a “new vision” for our LA&PS Colleges, including all members of the LA&PS community, the governance bodies of the Faculty, and the university as a whole.

Upon acceptance of the final report on the LA&PS Colleges Re-Visioning, a strategic plan should be developed to implement the recommendations that are accepted by the Interim Dean and by the appropriate governance bodies within our Faculty, including, of course, our Faculty Council.

York University’s Colleges are meant to be centers of student engagement and retention. They should be hubs of extracurricular learning, Experiential Education, and places of community *and* acceptance, mentorship and well-being. They have been and can also be sites of research; and at their best, they are also the *entryways to York University* for the greater community through these practices and values, as much as through outreach recruitment.

If this “new vision” is accepted what would our Colleges look like in five to ten years? What this report has identified are practices that are retained from the past that can also be foundations for envisaging and reinforcing a future with faculty members doing highly innovative research and devoted to their student mentees who may be involved with their research. Students having adequate study space throughout their degree studies, with a First Year Seminar offered to them as part of their first year of studies and a “Common Read” prior to the arrival on the campus to help prepare them for their all-important first year of studies. Student services that are targeted to the individual student’s ‘real needs’ and their academic short-comings. Alumni and Fellows engaged in providing our students EE opportunities as an integral part of their studies. As mentioned, every incoming first-year student admitted to a LA&PS program will have to do a summer/fall (January intake) “Common Read” assignment before they arrive on the campus with critical skills sessions as a follow-up that will serve as an “ice breaker” with their first-year student colleagues as well as an opportunity to engage fully in critical modes of thinking, prior to the start of their classes.

This new vision for our LA&PS Colleges provides a glimpse of the what our Colleges are capable of doing to advance our Faculty’s strategic plan but that of our university as well.¹⁴ If these four

¹⁴ York University, Faculty of Liberal Arts & Professional Studies (LA&PS), Strategy & Mission, <http://laps.yorku.ca/about/strategy-mission/>. (accessed August 29, 2019); *A Strategic Plan for the Faculty of Liberal Arts & Professional Studies, 2010-2020: Making Choices for the Future*. Prepared by the Dean’s Working Group on Strategic Planning, June 2010, http://www.yorku.ca/laps/pdf/LAPS_Strategic_Plan_2010_06_25_Final.pdf. (accessed August 29, 2019). Especially, germane here are:

Principle 5: A principal responsibility of Colleges is to enhance the co-curricular and extra-curricular experience of students, and in particular 1st year students.

And, under this principle, recommendations:

practical initiatives and three principles of practice are actioned, then, inevitably our students will be the beneficiaries and our Colleges will have achieved a “new vision” that will sustain them for the foreseeable future.

5.1 We encourage our LA&PS colleges to work with their affiliated departments and schools and with the Centre for Student Success to develop and deliver orientation programs and first year activities (including program-specific activities) which enhance new students’ academic success and engagement in university life.

5.3 We also encourage the colleges to work closely with their affiliated departments and schools to develop enriched co-curricular activities for upper-year students and information about such activities should be widely disseminated.

5.4 We ask colleges to redefine the duties of college fellows to include mentoring of first-year students and active involvement in college activities.

Principle 11: Department Chairs, School Directors and College Masters are expected to play a leadership role in fostering a sense of academic community within their units.

Principle 18: The Faculty recognizes that, in all academic and professional fields, there exist educational opportunities outside the conventional classroom.

And, under this principle, recommendations:

18.2 We explore the expansion of experiential education opportunities for our undergraduate students, including paid internships and cooperative education placements.

18.3 We plan to provide appropriate infrastructure for experiential education initiatives, partially offsetting costs through an Associated Course Fee.

York University, University Academic Plan, 2015-2020, February 25, 2016, yorku.ca, <http://secretariat.info.yorku.ca/files/UAP-2015-2016-Final.pdf>. (accessed August 29, 2019). Several of the university’s priorities are directly on point:

Priority 3: Enhancing the Quality of Teaching and Student Learning, and, within the next five years:

1.1. Increase the number of EE opportunities both internally and on campus including for example student participation in Organized Research Units.

1.2. Develop the means by which to organize and track experiential education opportunities, problem-based inquiry and related strategies as is the case with online and blended courses.

See, in addition, York University, York University Strategic Research Plan: 2018-2023, Towards New Heights, <http://research.info.yorku.ca/files/2018/07/Final-SRP-2018-2023.pdf>. (accessed August 29, 2019) The section of this Strategic Research Plan that would be most beneficial for our purposes here might be “An Operational Plan to Support Research Development,” pp. 26-28.