LA&PS Academic Plan 2021-2026

Rising Together: Building a Better Future Through Excellence and Inclusion
Land Acknowledgement

[Anishinaabemowin and Mohawk translations to be included]

La Faculté d’arts libéraux et d’études professionnelles, en tant que partie intégrante de l’Université York, reconnaît sa présence sur le territoire traditionnel de nombreuses nations autochtones.

La région connue comme Tkaronto a été préservée par la nation Anishinabek, la Confédération Haudenosaunee et les Hurons-Wendats. Elle est désormais le foyer d’un grand nombre de communautés autochtones, inuites et métisses.

Nous reconnaissons les titulaires actuels du traité, la première Nation des Mississaugas de Credit. Ce territoire est soumis au traité de la ceinture wampum (« Dish with One Spoon »), entente définissant le partage et la préservation pacifiques de la région des Grands Lacs.

The Faculty of Liberal Arts & Professional Studies, as an integral part of York University, recognizes that many Indigenous Nations have longstanding relationships with the territories upon which York University campuses are located that precede the establishment of York University. York University acknowledges its presence on the traditional territory of many Indigenous Nations. The area known as Tkaronto has been care taken by the Anishinabek Nation, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, and the Huron-Wendat. It is now home to many First Nation, Inuit and Métis communities. We acknowledge the current treaty holders, the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. This territory is subject of the Dish with One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement to peaceably share and care for the Great Lakes region.

[Accessible formats: we would like to offer the Academic Plan in other accessible formats: large print, an audio version, etc.]
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Values

Home to a rich diversity of people and programs in the social sciences, humanities and professional fields, LA&PS has a strong commitment to accessibility, effective teaching, quality academic programming and research, hands-on learning, community engagement, internationalization, and collegial, accountable governance. These values are not just legacies of our past, but the foundation for our future.

Mission

The mission of the Faculty of Liberal Arts & Professional Studies is:

- to blend internationally recognized research and effective teaching with a commitment to diversity, equity, and social justice
- to recognize and support the broad range, global perspectives, and rigour of our degree programs as well as the diversity and engagement of our students and instructors
- to recognize and support our strong research culture and commitment to outreach, ensuring researchers bring their scholarship into the classroom and out into the local community
- to remain sensitive to the aspirations of and challenges faced by LA&PS students, staff, and faculty
- to sustain and renew the ideals and practices of the modern university by drawing from our own tradition of self-examination and reflection
- to provide access to all qualified applicants, including non-traditional and international students
Overview

The Faculty of Liberal Arts & Professional Studies (LA&PS) at York University is the largest and most diverse Faculty of its kind in Canada. Currently, more than 22,000 students pursue studies here in one or more of our 90+ undergraduate degree and certificate options, and our 22 Master’s and 16 PhD programs. More than 650 faculty members bring their outstanding research into the classroom, teaching across our three areas of scholarly focus: humanities, social sciences, and professional studies.

History

The Faculty of Liberal Arts & Professional Studies was created on July 1, 2009 with the unification of the Faculty of Arts and the Atkinson Faculty of Liberal and Professional Studies. This merger produced a vibrant teaching and research space with 21 academic units and 4 colleges offering disciplinary and interdisciplinary programs across the humanities, social sciences, and professional studies. With more than 27,000 students enrolled in the new Faculty at the time of its inception in 2009, LA&PS quickly established itself as an integral part of York University.

The consultation process

The task of developing and monitoring the Faculty’s Academic Plan is one of the primary responsibilities of the Academic Policy & Planning Committee (APPC), a standing committee of LA&PS Faculty Council. Under the committee’s mandate, APPC is to work “in tandem with the Dean and in close consultation with Departments/Schools & Colleges [to] oversee the development of the Faculty Academic Plan, oversee coordination/implementation of the plan, and report to Council on its initiatives”.

Following Senate approval of Building a Better Future: York University Academic Plan, 2020-2025 in June 2020, APPC began developing the first Academic Plan for LA&PS. To this end, APPC hosted a number of virtual consultation sessions during the 2020/21 academic year, including 3 Town Halls and 21 unit-level visits to LA&PS Schools, Departments, and Colleges. The committee also conducted 2 online surveys, maintained a dedicated email address for inquiries and suggestions about the Academic Plan, and hosted an eClass site, the “LA&PS Academic Plan Consultation Repository,” where participants could engage in discussion forums and access documents relevant to the planning process. These opportunities, as well as the Town Halls, were made available to all students, staff, and faculty in LA&PS. The unit-level visits were attended by YUFA and CUPE instructors, student representatives, and staff.

The consultation sessions focused on three main themes:
1. Recognizing historical strengths within the Faculty, as well as areas for further growth.
3. Establishing guiding principles to direct our academic mission over the next five years.

APPC analyzed the data received, ascertaining common themes that resonated across a number of units. Some of the recurring topics of our collegial consultations included the following:

- enhancing student supports
- building on our capacity for interdisciplinarity
- supporting internationalization
- addressing the needs of non-traditional students
- maintaining our commitment to social justice
- improving the digital infrastructure
- supporting access initiatives
- improving our physical spaces
- promoting experiential education

Drawing on these common themes, APPC drafted a preliminary set of principles, and shared these for feedback with members of Faculty Council in April 2021. The committee also undertook a cover art contest, encouraging LA&PS students to use the common themes gleaned from the unit-level consultations as inspiration for artwork to include on the cover of the Academic Plan. That contest ran concurrently with the drafting work done by APPC.

Because the Academic Plan was developed in consultation with all of the constituent units of LA&PS, the principles contained in these pages represent our collective aspirations for enhancing the strengths of our Faculty and identifying areas for further growth.
Academic planning in context

This academic plan was developed in the context of three significant areas of social challenge and opportunity:

1. The global Covid-19 pandemic, which necessitated a period of intensified remote learning and working beginning in March 2020 and extending into the 2021/22 academic year.
2. Worldwide solidarity against anti-black racism, initiated mainly in response to repeated incidences of entrenched and persistent police brutality, but also as a reaction to institutional violence more generally.
3. The ongoing commitment to centre reconciliation efforts to promote the resurgence of First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and all Indigenous peoples.

Accordingly, this Academic Plan focuses on healing and recovery in myriad ways. We have heard from colleagues that building connections will be important for our academic work in the years to come, both in order to come back stronger from our long hibernation of social distancing, and also to confront the twin legacies of settler colonialism and the forced migration of peoples of African descent through enslavement and colonization. These particular histories inform the institutional choices that we make in terms of curriculum; hiring and representation; and funding and resource allocation. In our consultation visits, colleagues expressed a desire for LA&PS to address anti-black racism, support Indigenous scholars, and enhance inclusion as foundational principles within our academic mission. We take up that challenge here.

Related planning documents

The LA&PS Academic Plan 2021-2026 is one of two key documents that shape the academic mission of the Faculty. While the Academic Plan is a statement of principles outlining the values we collectively determine, the Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) is the administrative planning and implementation document that guides resource allocation on the basis of the principles set down in the Academic Plan.

The LA&PS Academic Plan 2021-2026 also exists in relationship to a number of other important institutional frameworks. It is guided by Building a Better Future: York University Academic Plan, 2020-2025, and aligns with the goals set out in that foundational document. These include the Six Priority Areas for Action and the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals. The Six Priority Areas for Action are: living well together; 21st century learning; knowledge for the future; from access to success; advancing global engagement; and working in partnership.
The 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals are as follows:

- No Poverty
- Zero Hunger
- Good Health and Well-Being
- Quality Education
- Gender Equality
- Clean Water and Sanitation
- Affordable and Clean Energy
- Decent Work and Economic Growth
- Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure
- Reduced Inequalities
- Sustainable Cities and Communities
- Responsible Consumption and Production
- Climate Action
- Life Below Water
- Life on Land
- Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions
- Partnerships for the Goals
Just as the UAP influences the Academic Plans of the 11 York Faculties, the LA&PS Academic Plan inspires planning documents at the unit-level for the 20 schools and departments in the Faculty, as well as the colleges and Organized Research Units. Thus, the LA&PS Academic Plan bridges the macro and micro levels by establishing guiding principles to inform institutional planning for our constituent LA&PS units.

In addition, the following important documents inform the goals and principles set out here, and express the vision of the university at the present juncture relative to teaching, learning, research, and community outreach.
Addressing Anti-Black Racism: A Framework on Black Inclusion

Opportunities for alignment

- eliminate barriers to access and academic advancement for Black scholars
- ensure that Black scholarship is represented in the curriculum
- include, acknowledge, and elevate Black perspectives within research, information resources, and collections across all disciplines
- promote a climate of respect and support for Black students, staff, and faculty
- enhance representation of Black tenured faculty, instructors, staff, and senior administration, and support the emotional labour that they often undertake

York University Sustainability Strategy

Opportunities for alignment:

- enhance options for studying sustainability within LA&PS academic programs, including experiential education opportunities that focus on sustainability
- include learning outcomes in undergraduate and graduate programs that address the sustainability challenges facing our world
- foster a culture of sustainability within our spaces of academic learning
- integrate sustainable practices into our roles as researchers and scholars
The Indigenous Framework for York University: A Guide to Action

Opportunities for alignment:

- work with the Indigenous Council to expand Indigenous programming and curricular offering
- seek guidance from the Indigenous Council in the hiring of Indigenous faculty and support the inclusion of more Indigenous instructors generally
- support the recruitment and academic success of Indigenous students
- enhance outreach to Indigenous communities to build reciprocal learning relationships and promote academic opportunities

Towards New Heights: York University Strategic Research Plan 2018-2023

Opportunities for alignment:

- maintain our commitment to research excellence and the development of new knowledge and creative activities
- support research initiatives that cross disciplinary boundaries
- continue to deliver research that positively affects the social, cultural, and economic development of the communities we serve
- maintain our commitment to social justice and responsibility in our research endeavours
Guiding principles

Principle 1: Prioritize student access, experience, and success

a) Engage in a sustained effort to enhance the academic experience of LA&PS students by providing a range of innovative curricular options through our Schools and Departments, supported by co-curricular and extra-curricular initiatives, including those led by the Colleges

b) Provide a sense of connection for students through such means as smaller class sizes, more interaction with peer mentors and professors, and an impactful affiliation with one of the LA&PS Colleges

c) Maintain safe spaces where students can study and learn surrounded by facilities and resources that are responsive to their academic needs and where their presence is acknowledged and respected

d) Promote best practices in pedagogy across all units and all levels of study, with particular attention to the first-year experience, and enhance opportunities for collaborative teaching endeavours, such as team teaching, among LA&PS instructors

e) Maintain a seamless model of student advising and services, along with high functioning technological infrastructure to support students’ successful engagement with both in-person and online learning
Principle 2: Enhance connections and collaborations in LA&PS and beyond

a) Build on our shared history to encourage integration ‘across the ampersand’ of LA&PS while also recognizing the specific strengths of the liberal arts and professional studies areas of the Faculty

b) Support innovative and cross-disciplinary research clusters across the various Schools, Departments, Colleges, and Organized Research Units in LA&PS to better reflect the interdisciplinary nature of the Faculty, while maintaining research excellence in specific disciplines

c) Engage with LA&PS Alumni, College Fellows, and research partners in industry, government and the community to promote experiential education opportunities for all LA&PS students

d) Promote economic and social development with Toronto, Peel Region, and York Region (including Markham) to make a positive local impact on the communities we serve

e) Build on our longstanding alliance with the Black Creek community via the York U – TD Community Engagement Centre to promote pathways for collaboration between local neighbourhoods and LA&PS Units and Colleges
Principle 3: Recognize, value, and support diversity within LA&PS and beyond

a) Draw on the diversity of the LA&PS student body and the valuable insights provided by domestic students, international students, self-identified Black and Indigenous students, and students from equity-seeking groups

b) Enhance our outreach to Indigenous communities to promote the Truth & Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s goal of inclusive education for Indigenous students

c) Building on our leadership role in promoting principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion, develop and support sector-leading policies and practices in both research and teaching that will enhance the lived experience and intellectual vitality of LA&PS students, staff, and faculty

d) Extend initiatives to diversify and decolonize the curriculum to benefit from a plurality of voices, perspectives, and worldviews, and to acknowledge in our practices, teaching and curriculum the legacy of settler colonialism

e) Recognize the contributions that graduate students make to the diverse research and teaching pursuits of the Faculty, and build on the foundation of academic excellence demonstrated by our existing graduate programs
Principle 4: Connect students and faculty scholars to the global

a) Enhance internationalization opportunities for LA&PS students, including study abroad options, exchanges, and other immersive experiences

b) Support LA&PS research excellence at a global level by recognizing diverse forms of fieldwork and the importance of working within the protocols set down by participating communities

c) Promote the integration of global fluencies into LA&PS undergraduate education by supporting language learning and ethnocultural studies

d) Recognize local opportunities to internationalize a LA&PS degree through outreach with community organizations that represent regions around the globe

e) Continue to establish and strengthen partnerships with other universities, faculties, and postsecondary institutions around the globe to enhance opportunities for LA&PS students, staff, and faculty
Principle 5:  Promote teaching, research, and practice centred on community engagement and social justice

a) Build on our history of social justice to provide opportunities for non-traditional students, mature students, first generation students, part-time students, and students from across the ability spectrum to pursue post-secondary studies without financial, attitudinal, or physical barriers

b) Enhance access initiatives and academic bridging opportunities for local community members, including students with precarious immigration status

c) Provide opportunities for curriculum collaboration, where colleagues from different units can work together on degree, certificate, micro-credit, and experiential education opportunities to enhance student engagement

d) Promote our regional partnerships with the City of Toronto, Peel Region, and York Region/Markham to provide high-impact learning opportunities for LA&PS students

e) Support the creation of non-profit, for-profit, and social enterprise opportunities by LA&PS Schools, Departments, and Colleges to promote social engagement, equity, inclusion, and fairness
Principle 6: Strengthen collegiality, accountability, and respect in our academic work

a) Enhance collegiality and a willingness to listen and learn from others, recognizing that the university is a space where a diversity of perspectives can be shared

b) Prioritize transparency and accountability in all our academic processes, from curriculum development to complement renewal

c) Promote a culture of respect for students, staff, and faculty in our online and in-person teaching and learning spaces, and in all the work that we do to advance the academic mission of the Faculty

d) Build on the tradition of the LA&PS Colleges as places where faculty, staff, and students can come together over shared academic and extracurricular interests to build a sense of belonging and identity
Implementation

The principles in the LA&PS Academic Plan, along with those in the University Academic Plan, provide a set of priorities for allocating resources. Based on the principles established here, the Faculty’s Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) is created. The Academic Policy & Planning Committee (APPC) of LA&PS Faculty Council is mandated to regularly review the implementation strategies outlined in the IRP and advises the Dean on the interplay of academic and budget issues within the Faculty.

At regular intervals, but at least once annually, the Dean and APPC will report to Faculty Council on the scope of activities being undertaken to align the work of the Faculty with the principles of the Faculty Academic Plan. At the unit-level, colleagues can review their own governance documents to find areas of alignment and inspiration, reinvigorate curricular offerings to ensure that key principles outlined here are reflected in the content of courses, and promote pedagogical and research initiatives that reflect these principles. Units can also continue to contribute towards a sense of belonging and connectedness for their students through initiatives such as mentoring, providing safe spaces and opportunities for student gatherings, and prioritizing access.

The LA&PS Academic Plan 2021-2026, Rising Together: Building a Better Future Through Excellence and Inclusion, presents an opportunity for individual students, staff, and faculty to contribute towards our shared academic mission. A common theme we heard across our consultations was the need for the York experience to be both positive and transformative. Each one of us can contribute to this goal by working together to co-create a culture of excellence and inclusion, and to prioritize community engagement and social justice. Our research, classroom practices, and frontline actions can foster the positive and transformative environment we seek, as can our reactions and interactions every day and at every level.

In fulfilling our academic mission, we have the opportunity to lead with receptive listening, open engagement, and transparent practices that value and enhance the contributions of all members of both the academic and the broader York communities. The principles outlined here provide a framework for change that will inform our teaching practices, administrative policies, research proposals, and funding applications, and will be the basis for setting priorities within LA&PS and for aligning those priorities with those of the University. This is our journey to 2025.