



# York University Senate

## Notice of Special Meeting

Thursday, May 21, 2020, 3:00pm

Via Zoom

### AGENDA

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1. **Chair's Remarks** (A. Macpherson)
2. **Senate Executive** .....1
  - a. **COVID-19 Pandemic: Impact and academic continuity planning** (For discussion)
    - Principles to Guide Fall 2020 course planning (L. Philipps).....4
    - Students and Parents' Opinions on COVID-19 and Fall 2020 (L. Philipps)

# Executive Committee – Report to Senate

To its Special Meeting of 21 May 2020

## FOR INFORMATION

### 1. Special Meeting of Senate

This special meeting of Senate has been called by the Chair, in consultation with the Executive Committee, to discuss academic continuity planning during the COVID-19 disruption, with a specific focus on plans for the Fall term. It was decided that it would be appropriate to convene Senate at its normal meeting time of Thursday at 3:00 to maximize attendance, and not in a time that interfered with Faculty Council meetings. The date of Thursday, 21 May, therefore, was selected.

In accordance with the Rules of Senate (Section 3.3 b), the only item of business that will be transacted at this meeting is a facilitated discussion of academic continuity planning. No other business will be entertained.

The regular monthly meeting of Senate will continue as scheduled on **Thursday, 28 May at 3:00pm** to deal with items of business being brought forward by the Senate Committees.

### 2. COVID-19 Pandemic: Impact and academic continuity planning

Since the *Senate Policy on Academic Implications of Disruptions or Cessations of University Business Due to Labour Disputes or Other Causes* (the *Disruptions Policy*) was invoked in March, the Senate Executive Committee has continued to monitor the impact of the circumstances on academic activities and oversee the process of directing and implementing the necessary remedial action. The suite of changes and course completion options authorized by Senate Executive for the FW 2019-2020 and Summer 2020 academic sessions have been regularly and promptly communicated to Senate and Faculties; they reside on the dedicated COVID-19 Senate webpage at - <https://secretariat.info.yorku.ca/covid-19-information-and-decisions-pertaining-to-academic-activities/>

Dedicated course directors, with support from staff and the academic leadership, ensured the successful completion of the winter 2020 term in trying circumstances. Tenure stream and contract-faculty have also worked incredibly hard to launch a robust summer 2020 session, which is now in progress.

Planning for the FW 2020-21 year, particularly the fall term, is actively underway. The ongoing pandemic continues to produce a planning landscape marked by uncertainty. One side of the coin is the external environment. The University, like all post-secondary institutions in Ontario, will have parameters approved by the Province and / or public health agencies to govern campus operations in the Fall. Program delivery will necessarily need to occur within the mandated regulations. The full spectrum of what those parameters and requirements will be are unknown at this time.

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The flip side of the coin is the internal setting at the University, which is presently beset with varying pressures felt by faculty members, students and staff. The critical issues in play include:

- Faculties, units, instructors needing clarity about Fall curriculum delivery options
- Course directors' access to support and resources to deliver high quality online / remote instruction
- Students seeking certainty about the status of programming at the start of the fall term, particularly incoming students as they make their university selection within a looming June 1 deadline, and international students with travel restrictions in place
- Ability of the University to implement and adapt mandated health safety measures for in-person activities
- Faculty, staff and students' anxiety about the safety of sanctioned in-person activities in the fall
- Students' receptivity to commencing or continuing their university studies through online / remote teaching
- Uneven student accessibility to technology and suitable arrangements to support online / remote learning

Within this context, planning for the next academic year must continue, and in a form that responds to the various pressures and extenuating circumstances in a balanced way.

The Executive Committee reminds Senators that in a disruption the primary obligations the Disruptions policy assigns to Senate are to ensure the academic integrity of all programs, and to maintain high quality instruction and supervisory support to students. Courses of action and adjustments to policies and regulations taken to preserve academic continuity in a disruption shall preserve the University's academic standards, while also balancing both the need for fairness to students in keeping with the circumstances created by the disruption and students' need for timely information about the status of academic activities. It is in keeping with this obligation that Senate Executive recently endorsed a set of principles to guide course planning for the Fall term to help Faculties, units and course directors move forward with preparations amid the uncertainty about conditions that will pertain in September. The principles are premised on preparing for online / remote delivery of both undergraduate and graduate courses while preserving flexibility to adjust to holding in-person components in small groups in select courses where student learning outcomes cannot otherwise be achieved, or where instructors wish to propose an optional in-person component for those students who can participate.

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The *Principles to Guide Fall 2020 Graduate and Undergraduate Course Planning* are attached here as Appendix A. The Provost will speak briefly to them at the outset of the Senate meeting.

Also to be previewed and discussed at the meeting are results from a recent *Universities Canada* survey of a sample of incoming university students and their parents on their opinions about attending university in the fall in the time of COVID-19. The perspectives shared are revealing, and identify critical issues for universities to factor into their fall term planning. The Provost will highlight at the beginning of the meeting the key takeaways for York from this survey.

These two brief introductions by Senator Philipps will set the stage for an open and constructive dialogue among Senators about fall term course delivery and planning for the resumption of academic activities as circumstances allow. Issues continue to be addressed, and solutions to problems still need to be carved out. Input and advice, as well as the identification of difficulties and challenges being encountered by faculty and students, will aid decision-making and preparations to ensure to that the needs of our diverse constituencies are being met. Additionally, decisions will need to be made about the gradual re-introduction of in-person academic activities and access to research facilities at the University. Hearing Senators' thoughts on what among them should be prioritized in the sequencing will inform decision-making on this important matter. Activities to consider in the in-person re-opening continuum include for example: research labs; graduate student learning environments; experiential education components (placements / laboratories / studios); small undergraduate or graduate courses building to larger courses etc.

The bulk of the meeting is dedicated to facilitating a wide-ranging discussion that provides Senate the opportunity to contribute to the planning for the delivery of programming and academic activities in the Fall term. The Senate Rules will be relaxed to facilitate inclusive and free-flowing discussions.

*Alison Macpherson Chair*  
*Mario Roy, Vice-Chair*

## Principles to Guide Fall 2020 Graduate and Undergraduate Course Planning

The guiding principles for Fall undergraduate and graduate course planning are:

**Prioritizing Health and Safety:** All instructors should be ready to deliver undergraduate and graduate courses remotely / online to the fullest extent possible as long as needed to protect the health and safety of all students enrolled in the course, as well as those with whom they may interact on or off campus, including instructors themselves. In order to maintain the likely social distancing restrictions, and given the limited availability of large classrooms, course planning will need to assume that it will not be possible anytime this Fall to bring groups larger than 50 together in a single room (and our ability to accommodate groups of up to 50 would depend on a space assessment to ensure we could do so safely within any continued social distancing requirements).

**Focusing on Student Learning Outcomes:** The expectations for courses rest with student learning outcomes (SLOs) and academic standards for achieving those SLOs as established by instructors. In the case of a disruption, it is often the case that the SLOs previously involving a hands-on learning component can be met with innovative online or other remote activities. However if there is no obvious means by which to achieve SLOs without at least some in-person learning activities, and/or if an instructor has a proposal for an optional in-person component, they should complete the “In-person Component Template” and submit it to their Department Chair/Director or Dean's Office as appropriate. Proposals will be reviewed to determine whether they can be implemented in a manner consistent with evolving emergency restrictions and whether they can be accommodated safely within space and other constraints of our campuses. Proposals should include clear contingency plans to complete the entire course remotely/online if necessary for health and safety reasons, or to defer to a specified future time any elements which the instructor has determined can only be completed in person. Deans / Principal Offices will communicate timelines and any other guidelines for submitting proposals.

*NOTE: The recommended group size for hands-on learning components is no more than 25 at a time in order to maximize utilization of different-size classrooms for different purposes; Faculties may consider on an exceptional basis if it is possible to accommodate proposals involving groups between 25 and 50.*

**Prioritizing Access to Campus Spaces:** It will likely be necessary with social distancing requirements to ration space bookings for on-campus learning activities this Fall. First priority will be given to experiential activities that require access to labs, studios or other physical facilities, and that cannot be replaced or delivered via alternate means while still meeting SLOs and protecting students' ability to progress in their programs. Assuming these requirements are met, Faculties will have flexibility to determine other priorities for allocating any remaining space based on safety considerations and the needs of different programs and cohorts of students, with the goal of maximizing the overall quality of student learning experiences.

**Equity in Accommodating Student Circumstances:** Course delivery should be planned with sufficient flexibility to provide equitable access for all enrolled undergraduate and graduate students to achieve SLOs. Instructors should take into account the needs of students in different geographic locations and time zones (e.g., by providing asynchronous access to course materials and activities with technological support from Faculties where it is appropriate and reasonable to do so), as well as accommodation needs related to health, family status or disabilities as per existing University policies. It should be clear to students at the start of a course if it includes a required in-person or synchronous learning component to meet the SLOs and what flexibility they will have for completing that component during Fall20 or F/W 20-21 for 6 credit courses. In the case of courses that start online/remotely with an optional in-person component, students should be provided with reasonable alternative access to the learning activities offered in that in-person component.

**Scheduling Courses to Enable Progression:** Programs, especially those with significant international student enrolments, will need to plan Fall offerings with a view towards ensuring that students whose arrival to campus is delayed, or who have limited ability to participate in remote/online learning, will have viable pathways to start the program in January and to progress in a timely and pedagogically responsible way. Where courses scheduled for Fall or Fall/Winter cannot be completed remotely, efforts will be made to push the course or selected course elements to the Winter or Winter/Summer. This may involve scheduling changes for instructors.