

February 2, 2015

Dear colleagues of the Academic Policy, Planning and Research Committee:

Thank you for the invitation for some preliminary thoughts on our current and future UAP at York University. Please find below my brief responses to your two questions as set out in your memo January 9, 2015.

a) What collegial processes and strategies have you utilized that are helping you to pursue the quality imperatives of the current University Academic Plan (UAP)?

It is with pleasure that the Faculty of Graduate Studies (FGS) shares our efforts in the pursuit of oversight and advocacy for graduate education by addressing three fundamental pan-university objectives related to quality and research intensification: 1) meet graduate targets; 2) transition of graduate programmes to cognate Faculties; and most importantly, 3) enhance the academic experience of our graduate students.

Since the inception of my term as Interim and Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Associate Vice-President, Graduate in 2012, FGS has been deeply committed to ensuring that graduate education is well integrated and served both by the academic and administrative apparatus of the university. In order to this, FGS has been building relationships with graduate students, programmes, academics and administrators across the campus (see Appendix A for AAPR consultations and Appendix B for working group activities).

Before I comment on the specific ways in which FGS has operationalized the matters pertaining to graduate education in the UAP, it is important to stress that we have similar understandings of the status of graduate education at York.

Since the inception of the Ontario government's *Reaching Higher* strategy 2007, York's applications and registrations (See Appendix C), Tri-Council scholarships, and researchers' contributions to graduate student funding have declined. There are many factors that partially explain these declines including the increased competition for graduate spaces provincially, the 2008-2009 CUPE strike, graduate funding models, governance structures, and the increase in student demand for graduate degree education with professional applications.

1) Meeting Graduate Targets

In this context, FGS has made significant efforts to provide analytics, digital tools, and evidence-based benchmarks to better understand graduate education at York, provincially, nationally, and internationally. These efforts have been important to address some myths and trends in graduate education at York. Many of our colleagues are committed to graduate education yet few were aware of our trends in declining enrolments, the



financial and reputational implications of not meeting provincial targets, and/or how provincial graduate funding is awarded. It has been the task of FGS to engage our colleagues on these matters and, as a result, we have begun to work more collaboratively to enhance the graduate student experience (See Appendix D). Moreover, as a result of empirical evidence, comparators, and student contributions, we have been able, for the first time in five years, to increase the number of registered students and decrease the number of ineligible.

While we have had some of the tools to perform graduate analytics, most of our programmes do not employ them. FGS, through working with Office of Institutional Planning and Analysis (OIPA) and Vice-President Students' office, has been able to forward data and projects to support graduate students from their application to post-graduation experience. Moreover, in partnership with a number of units, we are working on a system to support a comprehensive student record from application to post-graduation.

2) Transitioning Graduate Programmes to Faculties

FGS has been preparing graduate programmes for the resource accountability transition from the FGS to the Faculties. There have been numerous consultation meetings with students, staff and faculty discussing the transition. These meetings have focused on how to facilitate the financial and governance transfer of the programmes. As a result of this process, there have been some exciting initiatives of rethinking how we deliver graduate education. For example, Mathematics and Statistics, Communication and Culture, and Biology have engaged in name changes, streamlining fields, and reduced course redundancy.

3) Enhancing Graduate Student Experience

Fundamental to achieving the research intensification goals as set out by the UAP is ensuring the best possible academic experience for our graduate students. A critical point of departure for the FGS has been to rethink what we do, *when we put students at the centre of what we do*. This shift has changed how we engage with graduate students and what we offer them. Some of the changes include creating supervisory workshops offered through the Teaching Commons, launching the Graduate Professional Skills Programmes, personal invitations and the offer of writing support for students with the minimum GPA to apply for scholarships (we have had a 1200% increase in applications), inviting retired faculty to provide feedback on graduate student conference presentations, and developing better mechanisms to bring graduate students and funded researchers together.

b) What priorities should the next UAP articulate?

It is critical that the next UAP represent and engage graduate education on parity with undergraduate education. The equal emphasis on both graduate and undergraduate education will create a more defined space necessary for undergraduate and graduate education to closely interact with each other to achieve many of the UAP priorities, including research intensification of York. Creating a stronger understanding of the place of graduate education at York University requires that we:

- make more explicit in University documents the important contributions graduate students make to research and scholarly innovation;
- better facilitate research and scholarship opportunities for graduate students;
- celebrate graduate student contributions to research and scholarship;
- fundraise for graduate student conference travel and field research costs;
- integrate professional skills development in graduate curriculum; and
- increase the number of post-doctoral fellows.

As a passionate advocate for Graduate Studies, I look forward to discussing with the APPRC the challenges and opportunities for graduate education and the many initiatives that we have taken and how those can be reflected in the next University Academic Plan.

Respectfully,



Barbara Crow, PhD
Dean and Associate Vice-President, Graduate

Appendix A: FGS AAPR Consultations

(GPD – graduate programme director, GPA – graduate programme administrator, GSA – Graduate Student Association)

Given the tasks that were set out in my term as Interim and Dean and Associate Vice-President, Graduate Studies, we have been working on a number of initiatives running parallel with the AAPR process in order to facilitate an informed transition of graduate responsibilities and resources to Faculties.

- 1) FGS has had three working committees on enhancing the graduate student experience: Task Force on Graduate Students with Disabilities, Working Group on International Students, and Working Group to Enhance Graduate Students' Academic Experience. These groups will be tabling final reports to the Faculty of Graduate Studies Council at the end of February (see Appendix B).
- 2) Two AAPR sessions were held with invitations sent to graduate programme directors and administrators. Dates May 29, June 5, 2014 & January 6 & 8, 2015: Attendees: ~80.
- 3) GPA meeting: GPAs asked to meet with Dean of FGS to understand the transition process and the implications of the AAPR process. Date: October 29, 2014, Attendees: 49, Outcome: Ten action items were moved with a significant focus on facilitating communication and customer service.
- 4) FGS Faculty Council AAPR discussion. For this meeting the AAPR Task Force Reports were circulated as well as a number of other provincial and national studies on trends in graduate education. Date: January 8, 2015, Attendees: 25.
- 5) GSA Council meeting discussion with FGS about AAPR. Date: January 29, 2015, Attendees: 40-50.
- 6) GPDs requested a meeting to be held in late March to share how programmes are responding to AAPR with the intent to share some better practices and ways to address elements of the Task Force reports such as time to completion.
- 7) Provost and VP-FA hold graduate student Open Forum. Date: January 26, 2015, Attendees: 15.

Appendix B: Task Force on Graduate Students with Disabilities, International Working Group, and Enhancing the Graduate Student Academic Experience

Task Force on Graduate Students with Disabilities

(Task Force commenced under the leadership of Dean Hutchinson)

Action item: Handbook for Graduate Students with Disabilities, February 2015

Membership:

Karen Krasny, Associate Dean, FGS
Heather Moore, Student Affairs Officer, FGS
Sheila Wilmot, Equity Officer CUPE 3903,
Adrie Naylor, Graduate Students Association, (GSA)
Marc Wilchesky, Executive Director, Counselling and Disability Services,
Marcus Reisenleitner, Graduate Programme Director, Humanities
Danielle Tucker, Vice-Chair Students of Access York,
Nancy La Monica, PhD Researcher
Kaley Rosen, former Vice- Chair Students of Access York
Obaid Daud, Graduate Student Representativ
Rehaana Manek, GSA Representative
Sabrina Charles, FGS

International Working Group

The primary task of the international working group is to enhance international graduate students experience at York. Our hope is that the group will help us develop a thorough understanding of the specific challenges international students face in successfully pursuing their graduate programmes. The group is expected to put forward concrete recommendations designed to improve further enhance the existing support mechanisms available for international graduate students.

Membership:

John Greyson; GPD
William Jenkins, GPD
Dina Ning, York International
Philip Shea, York International
Jolin Joseph, Doctoral Candidate in GFWS (nominated by the GPD)
Marta Silva, Doctoral Student in Sociology (nominated by GSA)
Pavla Kristkova, Doctoral Student in Law and (GA for FGS)
Heather Moore, Staff, FGS
Fahim Quadir, Associate Dean, (Chair)

Meetings: October 8 & 22, November 19 & December 10, 2014

Three Focus Groups were organized with international graduate students (the call was sent out through the grad students, GPDs and GPAs listservs. It was also posted on our web page and a registration form was created for the participation of the students in the FGDS. Focus Groups were conducted on November 4, 10 & 19, 2014.

Working Group on Enhancing the Graduate Student Academic Experience

The primary focus of the Working Group on Enhancing the Graduate Student Academic Experience is to identify critical issues related to graduate studies at the PhD and Masters Level and make recommendations aimed at the successful and timely completion of students' program of study. To this end, the group has identified three areas of focus: 1) Supervision, 2) Opportunities for Research and Professional Skills Development, and 3) Facilities/Space.

Membership:

Karen A. Krasny, Associate Dean, Academic FGS, Chair
Julie Falck, PhD (FT) student, Osgood Law (nominated by GPD)
Maris Grundy, MA student, (FT) Environmental Studies (nominated by GPD)
Sonya Sachar, PhD student, (FT) Education (nominated by GPD)
Nasra Smith, MA student, (FT) English (nominated by GPD)
Sujanathan Sriskandarajah, PhD student, (FT) Mathematics
Lisa Sloniowski, Reference Librarian and PhD student (PT)
Adrienne Perry, Graduate Program Director, Psychology

**Appendix C: Graduate Applications, Targets and Registrations, 2007-2014
(See attached AppendixC_2007-2014.xls)**

**Appendix D: Graduate Student Experience (See attached
AppendixD_FGS.ppt)**