

President's Sustainability Council Executive Summary 2008-9



Submitted April 19, 2010



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report situates sustainability as a concept guiding York University. The President's Sustainability Council finds that York is already engaged in a rich array of very substantial sustainability initiatives. For example, the University is well known for groundbreaking interdisciplinary curriculum, for instance in the Faculty of Environmental Studies and the Schulich School of Business. The Institute for Research and Innovation on Sustainability has made critical connections between the scholarly and applied dimensions of sustainability, both within the Greater Toronto Area and internationally. York's commitment to social justice is exemplified through an impressive range of community engagement and human rights programs. Campus Services and Business Operations has integrated sustainability initiatives throughout its processes and functions, achieved important reductions in energy consumption, diverted a great deal of waste through recycling and reusing materials, and adopted a sustainable building strategy. And the University's shift toward sustainable transportation has been vigorous, with a dramatic change in the commuter modal split from approximately 70% single occupant motor vehicle in 1998 to 65% alternate modes of transport in 2008. The recently inaugurated Rapid Transit lanes from Downsview Station to the Keele campus and two forthcoming subway stations promise an even more sustainable transportation profile for the University.

York's sustainability achievements to date are a point of pride for the University. The recommendations proposed in this report advance York's sustainability profile even further, and to respond to sustainability challenges that have not yet been addressed. The 39 recommendations are organized around four central sustainability themes: organizational structure, curriculum, social justice and human rights, and campus operations and development. These recommendations also fall into two broad orientations, relating to sustainability policy and operational systems, summarized as follows:

Policy recommendations

- Develop a York University policy statement on sustainability.
- Establish a community of Campus Sustainability Ambassadors.
- Request that the Academic Policy, Planning and Research Committee (APPRC) and the Vice-President Academic and Provost make sustainability a major strategic feature in the White Paper and the new University Academic Plan.
- Include sustainability in more courses and academic programs throughout the University.
- Develop a York-specific green standard for the development and construction of all new buildings and building renovations.
- Establish policies and practices to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases and other pollutants from vehicles, for example through establishment and enforcement of a "no idling" policy for all vehicles on York's campuses.
- Develop a York University policy or framework aimed at governing campus food service operations in a more coordinated fashion that enables and supports the implementation of sustainable practices at a much greater degree than is presently possible.

Recommendations regarding University programs and practices

- Establish opportunities for broad-based discussion of this report, including opportunities for constructive feedback.

A. Sustainability and organizational structure

- Include the Senior Manager, Environmental Design & Sustainability in the Sustainability Council membership

- Dedicate resources to the Sustainability Council to enable fulfillment of its objects
- Establish a formal role for the Yorkwise program in relation to the Sustainability Council.
- Continue to develop and implement opportunities for student engagement in collaboration with the Student Sustainability Sub-Committee.
- Undertake and support a Sustainability Assessment Project.
- Engage a review of sustainability administration models across Canadian and international institutions of higher education, with a view to identifying the most suitable model for York.

B. Sustainability in the curriculum

- Develop a greater focus on sustainability in the York curriculum.
- Work with the relevant faculty members/offices to design and implement a survey about sustainability within the existing York curriculum.
- Encourage and support the development of non-degree offerings in sustainability.
- Provide students with more opportunities to do research and work on campus sustainability projects.

C. Social justice and human rights

- Enhance York's resource commitment to existing initiatives such as those identified in the Inventory of Community Engagement (Office of University Events and Community Relations)
- Improve access to York facilities such as the library system, buildings, and sports complexes and laboratories. In particular, a number of days each year should be designated as "community use days" for specified facilities (with streamlined approval process and waived or significantly reduced fees for facility use).
- Assess and develop outreach initiatives to attract qualified applicants for part-time and full-time employment from communities-in-need surrounding York.
- Through the York Foundation encourage donor programs that enhance bursaries and awards for local residents.
- Encourage deliberate outreach efforts with local secondary schools by each Faculty and department.
- Coordinate bridging and transitional programs and explore opportunities for ongoing budget support to these programs.
- Support and implement the policies of the updated York University Secondary Plan, specifically as they relate to housing, community services and facilities.
- Support the ongoing work of the President's Advisory Committee on Human Rights and help bridge this work with York's sustainability initiatives.

D. Campus operations and development

- Establish an institution-wide program that enhances "e-waste" recycling practices in all academic departments and administrative units, and locate drop boxes throughout the Keele and Glendon campuses to facilitate broader community participation.
- Identify and implement policies, plans and incentives to substantially reduce the consumption of paper at York by adopting practices of double-sided printing on all multiple-paged documents and encouraging students to print and submit double sided papers and assignments.
- Implement a clear, comprehensive and coordinated program that is aimed at increasing the level of recycling and composting.

- Provide a larger selection of products made from 100% recycled materials in the University Bookstore.
- Establish a program to reuse office furniture, when/where feasible, and if not, items should be offered by sale/donation to the York community, community charities, and organizations
- Support (and if possible increase support for) organizations focused on traffic demand management, the promotion of transit use and other alternate modes of transportation, and like sustainable transportation initiatives.
- Develop a University food services policy that protects the investments made in campus food operations by restricting on-campus catering and food service provision to caterers and food service providers that are contracted, permitted or otherwise authorized by the University's Food Services office.
- Improve the University's marketing of the range of available food services on both campuses, for example through website improvements, and better signage.
- Expand and enhance the availability of sitting/common space for use by students (both indoors and outdoors) and improve access to microwaves, water-bottle refilling stations and sinks for those that bring food from home or want to refill water bottles.
- Compile and analyze studies of the natural features of the University's two campuses, establish a York inventory of natural features and develop a comprehensive plan for protecting and enhancing York's endowment of natural features.
- Continue to develop ecologically progressive plans and procedures to guide campus landscaping and grounds management practices.
- Integrate relevant research and studies into grounds management and other areas of campus operations by establishing formal opportunities with straightforward processes for the engagement of students (for example, through course-related research projects, internships, paid work, or volunteer opportunities).
- Continue to position the University to manage its carbon footprint more effectively through the implementation of the energy management program and other initiatives; and expand efforts to engage the community in prudent energy conservation practices in order to sustain, and possibly improve, the targeted reduction in energy consumption and emissions.