

A wide-angle photograph of the York University campus. In the background, a large, multi-story building with many windows stretches across the frame. In the foreground, a body of water reflects the sky and the building. Several swans are swimming in the water. A tall flagpole with a red and white flag stands in the middle ground. The sky is blue with scattered white clouds, and the sun is shining brightly from the upper right, creating a lens flare effect.

York University Sustainability Strategy

November 2017

YORK
UNIVERSITÉ
UNIVERSITY

The logo for York University, featuring a stylized red 'U' with a white 'Y' inside it.

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Traditional Land Acknowledgement

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, the Wendat, and the Métis. It is now home to many Indigenous Peoples. We acknowledge the current treaty holders and the Mississaugas of the New 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.

We also understand that indigenous peoples around the world have important knowledge about how to live sustainably:

Sophisticated knowledge of the natural world is not confined to science. Human societies all across the globe have developed rich sets of experiences and explanations relating to the environments they live in. These ‘other knowledge systems’ are today often referred to as traditional ecological knowledge or indigenous or local knowledge. They encompass the sophisticated arrays of information, understandings and interpretations that guide human societies around the globe in their innumerable interactions with the natural milieu: in agriculture and animal husbandry; hunting, fishing and gathering; struggles against disease and injury; naming and explanation of natural phenomena; and strategies to cope with fluctuating environments.¹

It is the intention of York University, in putting forth this Sustainability Strategy, to honour, respect and learn from traditional knowledge systems so as to better inform our efforts to live sustainably with the earth and with each other.



Message from the President



York University was founded in 1959 on principles of social justice. Since that time, we have grown to become Canada’s third largest research and teaching institution, a progressive and community-engaged university committed to providing a broad demographic of students access to a high-quality, research-intensive environment. With this growth comes a shared responsibility to be a leading advocate for sustainability as we prepare for and respond to the challenges we face locally and globally, within our University community, and beyond.

Today, York has 25 interdisciplinary and collaborative research centres, with strengths in vision and space sciences, history and refugee studies, health, the environment, climate change, sustainability, digital media and corporate social responsibility. We have eleven faculties offering more than 5,000 courses, including more than 500 course offerings that focus on environment and sustainability. Our intellectual, cultural and social life is one of the richest on any Canadian campus, with approximately 300 student clubs and organizations, many of which are dedicated to various aspects of sustainability.

Our University Academic Plan identifies five key values that guide our work as an institution of higher learning: Excellence; Progressiveness; Inclusivity and diversity; Social justice and equity; and Sustainability. As you will see, each of these values is central to the Sustainability Strategy.

As we move toward the implementation of this strategy, I encourage each of you to find ways to integrate sustainability into your roles, whether that is through teaching, research, engagement, volunteerism, or in any way you feel you can best contribute. As we begin this long journey with these first important steps, I thank you for your commitment to furthering our shared goals in this vital collaborative endeavour.

Rhonda L. Lenton, PhD
President & Vice-Chancellor

¹ Nakashima, D., Prott, L. and Bridgewater, P. (2000) Tapping into the world’s wisdom, UNESCO Sources, 125, July-August, p. 12.

Sustainability at York University

The York University Academic Plan 2015-2020 declares that “York values environmental, social, and fiscal sustainability through its programs, physical environment, and fiduciary practices” and identifies “further enhancement of our campuses that build on our commitment to sustainability, campus beautification and improved utilization as a top priority.”²

These values are reflected in York’s Sustainability Policy, which was approved by the Board of Governors in 2008 after the University signed the Talloires Declaration.³ The Sustainability Policy guides York to become a sustainable university, “one that enhances the ecological functioning of its campuses; models knowledgeable, active and responsible global citizens; and does so within an integrated, long-term framework of full-cost economic and environmental accounting. Features of a sustainable university include a long-term perspective, a holistic outlook, acceptance of limits, focus on place and active involvement in problem-solving.”⁴ Recognizing that human and natural systems are coupled, and that of our well-being is dependent upon the ecosystems in which we are embedded, York adopts a holistic understanding of sustainability that includes ecological, social and economic dimensions and strives to achieve “co-benefits” that improve both human well-being and ecological health.

York University has an extensive history in demonstrating commitment to sustainability. In 1968, York established a Faculty of Environmental Studies, a first in Canada, which focused on an interdisciplinary approach to environmental studies and planning. Since that time, many other faculties within the university have included sustainability within their curriculum, resulting in approximately 500 course offerings on sustainability.

Outside of the classroom, a number of important sustainability initiatives have been implemented through York’s Campus Services and Business Operations (CSBO) department over the past several years. Our Energy Management Program, ZeroWaste program, and other initiatives in green building, food, grounds and transportation have achieved impressive results that this Strategy will build upon.



The President’s Sustainability Council

York University established the President’s Sustainability Council (PSC) in 2009. The Council is comprised of students, faculty and staff, and makes recommendations to the President and University administration on advancing York’s sustainability efforts. The PSC has been instrumental in introducing, furthering, and supporting a broad range of sustainable programs and practices across the University⁵.



² York University University Academic Plan 2015-2020 (UAP), available at secretariat.info.yorku.ca/files/UAP-2015-2016-Final.pdf

³ The Talloires Declaration (TD) is a ten-point action plan for incorporating sustainability and environmental literacy in teaching, research, operations and outreach at colleges and universities. It has been signed by over 500 university leaders in over 50 countries.

⁴ York University’s Sustainability Policy is available at sustainability.info.yorku.ca/psc/sustainability-policy

⁵ More information on the PSC is available at sustainability.info.yorku.ca/psc

Background

The development of a sustainability strategy for York University stems from a recommendation included in the 2015-16 report of the President’s Sustainability Council. The recommendation was accepted by the President and advanced by the Vice-President Academic and Provost and Vice-President Finance and Administration through their sponsorship of this process.

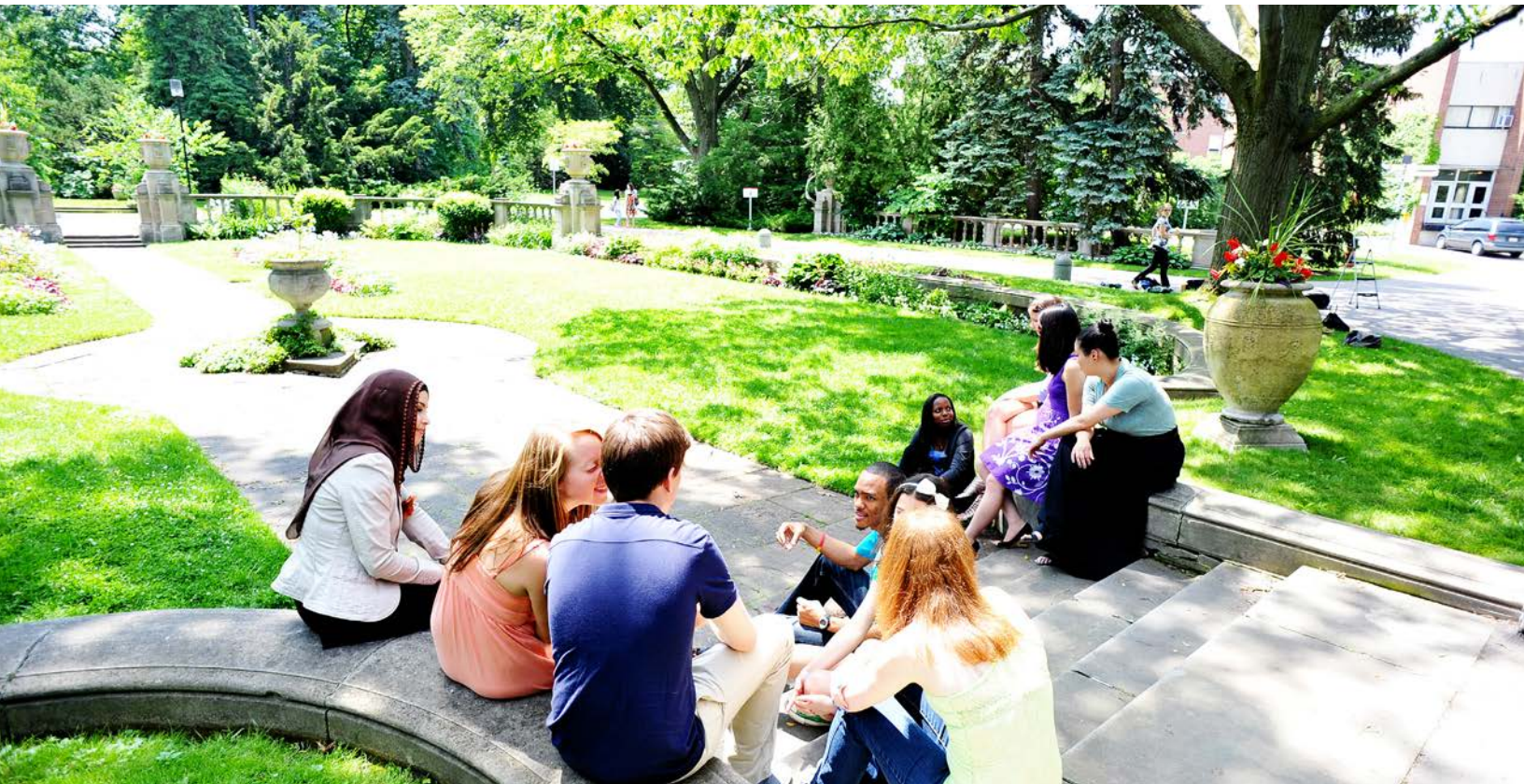
A core group of PSC members and other key stakeholders, including faculty, staff and students, formed a working group that undertook the development of the Strategy. The Working Group investigated strategic plans and programs from other North American Universities, developed a detailed process for the development of the Strategy, and engaged the York community through workshops, meetings, open forums, and an on-line survey. Over 1000 students, faculty, staff, alumni and neighbouring community members participated in developing the Sustainability Strategy.

Purpose

This Sustainability Strategy will guide the University in advancing sustainability into the near and long-term future. The purpose of the strategy is to communicate and implement a shared vision, inspire positive change, build capacity, empower people, harness innovation and creativity, and foster a culture of sustainability within and beyond the university. The Sustainability Strategy expresses broad goals in the areas of “People,” “Knowledge,” and “Place” that envision York University several decades into the future. The Sustainability Strategy complements other institutional documents, including the University Academic Plan, York University Master Plan, Strategic Research Plan, and Integrated Resource Plan. It will guide the development of implementation plans that will set short and medium term targets and identify mechanisms to achieve them.

Vision

Sustainability is an embedded value at York, and a lens through which all operations are viewed. A world leader in sustainability in its teaching, research and operations, York is a living lab, an incubator for sustainability leaders, a disrupter of old ways of thinking and a catalyst for transformative approaches. York’s campuses are accessible by multiple modes of transportation, they are ecologically rich campuses with access to green space, they support a healthy community life where people live, work, and study, and have easy access to a wide and well-developed network of recreational and social pursuits. As anchor institutions in their neighbourhoods, York’s campuses support local economies and communities, and serve as hubs of open space, services and facilities.



Strategic Goals

The following strategic goals envision a desired future in 2030. However, it is anticipated that these goals will be realized as soon as practically possible through detailed implementation plans. The Sustainability Strategy is intended to be reviewed every five years, with the strategic goals and progress updated accordingly. The strategic goals are organized into three categories: people, knowledge and place.

People

York University is working to foster a culture of collaborative behaviour that harmonizes the efforts of the York community to pursue widely understood sustainability objectives. The York community includes its faculty, staff, students, labour and other organizations, alumni and neighbours. York’s holistic understanding of sustainability includes human well-being and social dimensions, and recognizes the social, economic and environmental roles of York University in and with our local neighbourhoods.



Building on Success: The York University - TD Community Engagement Centre

The York U - TD Community Engagement Centre was founded in 2008 to build a more engaged university by facilitating mutually-beneficial collaborations between York University and the Black Creek community. The primary purposes of the centre are to foster academic innovation in teaching and learning through community experiential education opportunities, to support post-secondary educational attainment among community residents and the development of academic pathways, to enhance the capacity of York faculty and students and community partners to work collaboratively on community-based research, and to coordinate institutional structures to respond to community requests and opportunities for university-community collaborations.

Strategic Goals:

- PE1: The York University community demonstrates a culture of sustainability through individual behaviour and institutional practices, such as dedicating staff and academic positions to pursue sustainability, embedding sustainability in all job descriptions, and changing behaviour and practices through focused training and continuing education for new and incoming staff, faculty and students.
- PE2: York University’s holistic approach to sustainability includes social sustainability. York is an inclusive and welcoming community that draws strength from inclusivity and diversity and a commitment to equity and social justice.
- PE3: Each of York University’s campuses is an anchor institution⁶ with their surrounding communities. They proactively engage to promote sustainable economic, cultural, social, and environmental opportunities and innovation.

⁶ Anchor institutions are influential institutions such as hospitals and universities that are embedded within, and have reciprocal relationships with, their surrounding communities. They can play an important role in local community and economic development.

**Building on Success:
Sustainability in the
Curriculum**

York University currently has close to 500 course offerings and 300 researchers that focus on sustainability. From our pioneering Faculty of Environmental Studies to programs and courses in every Faculty at the University, there are many options to study sustainability at York. In 2016, York opened the Lillian Meighen Wright Centre in Costa Rica. This new eco-campus includes indoor classrooms and laboratories, an outdoor Indigenous classroom, an arboretum, and botanical gardens. It will operate as a local, national and international hub dedicated to education and research on neotropical conservation, eco-health, community wellbeing and sustainable livelihoods of those who live and work in the area.

Knowledge

York University’s mission is the pursuit, preservation, and dissemination of knowledge through excellence in research and teaching. York’s Strategic Research Plan⁷ identifies “Forging a Just and Sustainable World” as an area of comprehensive research excellence at York, and “public engagement for a just and sustainable world” as a compelling opportunity for the strategic development of research. The Task Force on Sustainability Research at York University defines sustainability research as research which “generates knowledge that integrates the social, cultural, economic and environmental dimensions of complex challenges at scales ranging from local to global. This interdisciplinary approach emphasizes creativity and collaboration in order to advance research, action and innovation in social, economic and environmental justice.”⁸ Our strengths in sustainability research inform our teaching. York aspires to develop pathways for all students to access sustainability curriculum, especially experiential education opportunities in sustainability.

Strategic Goals:

KN1: York University’s international reputation in sustainability education and research draws students from across Canada and around the world to study here.



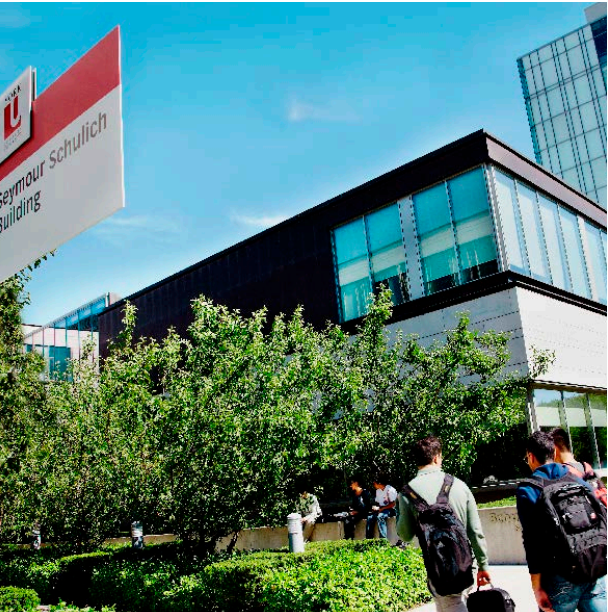
KN2: York University utilizes its campus operations, grounds and buildings as ‘living labs’ that provide experiential education opportunities to both undergraduate and graduate students.

KN3: Undergraduate learning outcomes and graduate attributes of York University students include, wherever appropriate, the ability to identify and articulate sustainability challenges facing our world, and to assess, critique, explain and take action to address these problems.

KN4: York University is recognized as a world leader in applied sustainability research.

KN5: York University researchers and staff work together to develop, conduct and apply leading edge research and technology in sustainability initiatives.

KN6: York University will establish a Network of Centres of Excellence (NCE)⁹ in Sustainability that attracts world class researchers in sustainability and enables York to partner with other institutions and stakeholders around the world in sustainability research and knowledge mobilization.



Building on Success: The Centre of Excellence in Responsible Business

The Centre of Excellence in Responsible Business (COERB) at the Schulich School of Business is a global leader in creating and disseminating new knowledge about the social, ethical, environmental and political responsibilities of business. It is one of the reasons why Schulich is ranked number one in the world in teaching responsible business by such publications as Corporate Knights. Drawing on over 40 faculty experts from across the school, COERB is one of the world’s largest and most influential academic centres dedicated to triple bottom line thinking.



⁷ The Strategic Research Plan is available at yorku.ca/srplan/documents/SRPfinal-april25.pdf

⁸ The Report of the Task Force on Sustainability Research is available at taskforce.info.yorku.ca

⁹ The Networks of Centres of Excellence program is a Government of Canada initiative that supports large-scale academically led research networks that harness the creativity and inventiveness of Canadian health, natural, and social scientists and engineers (nce-rce.gc.ca/Index_eng.asp).

**Building on Success:
York University's Energy
Management Program**

Through a comprehensive suite of activities, York University's Energy Management Program has reduced energy use intensity at the University by approximately 30% from 2007 levels. This has been accomplished through a detailed energy audit, followed by an overhaul of the University's energy infrastructure that has included building retrofits and upgrades to the existing central energy facilities. A campus-wide automated metering system now tracks and monitors electrical energy use per building to better quantify each building's progress towards meeting the campus' energy objectives.

Place

York University's Keele and Glendon campuses are located in Toronto, and a new campus is being developed in Markham, Ontario.¹⁰ Much of our orientation to sustainability has to do with development, operations and maintenance on these campuses. With the opening of the subway extension in late 2017, York University is seizing the opportunity to reconfigure the Keele campus into a greener, better connected, pedestrian-oriented campus with a network of new and improved green spaces.¹¹ New development is guided by green building targets, and York is building on successes with waste diversion, sustainable procurement and operations, and nascent initiatives to electrify its fleet. Carbon reduction is increasingly a goal, particularly in light of the Province of Ontario's new Climate Change Strategy and carbon trading market.

Strategic Goals:

- PL1: York University integrates sustainability into both long-term institutional strategic planning and day-to-day decision-making.
- PL2: As an established institutional value,¹² York University makes sustainability visible and tangible on our campuses through intentional design that improves ecological and human well-being, supports experiential education, fosters innovation and demonstrates best practices.



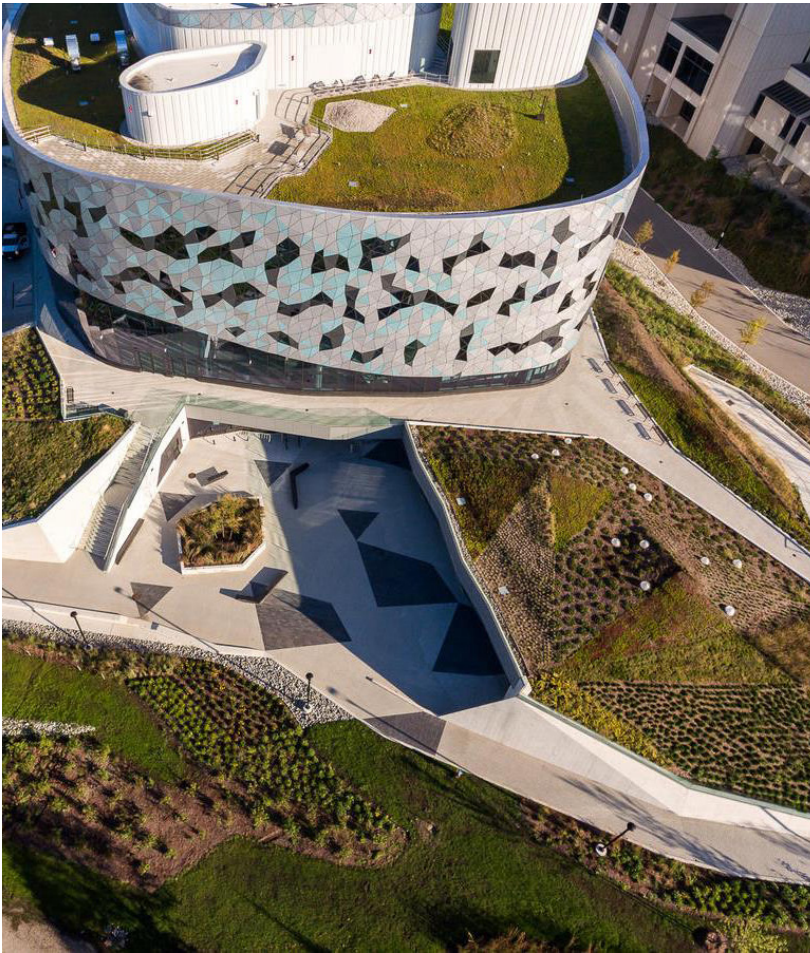
¹⁰ York also has a campus in Hyderabad, India, an eco-campus in southern Costa Rica, and two small satellite campuses in Toronto's financial district.

¹¹ The York University Master Plan is available at yudc.ca/masterplan-masterplan

¹² Sustainability is one of five institutional values identified in the 2015-2020 University Academic Plan. See secretariat.info.yorku.ca/files/UAP-2015-2016-Final.pdf

¹³ Specific targets for carbon emission reductions will be detailed in the energy strategy and action plan.

- PL3: York University integrates sustainability into its overall financial plan, integrated resource plans and procurement, and is a responsible investor with respect to sustainability.
- PL4: York University has an ongoing sustainability innovation fund to support sustainability projects on its campuses.
- PL5: York University has a long-term energy strategy and action plan with the goal of minimizing carbon emissions¹³ on our campuses. This will be achieved by pursuing integrated strategies in key areas such as energy, transportation, buildings, and operations.
- PL6: York University's campuses are ecologically healthy, and provide accessible and inviting spaces to learn, live, work and play. Valuing and prioritizing open and green spaces allows York University to manage our campuses to generate "co-benefits" that improve ecosystem health as well as human health and well-being.
- PL7: Buildings on York campuses and lands held by York University are models of sustainable design and operation in multiple dimensions. Not only do they achieve energy, water and human health sustainability benefits, but they also serve as living labs that support experiential education and research in sustainability.
- PL8: All new development, and where possible renovations, on York University campuses are constructed to the highest green building standards, and aspire to net positive contributions with respect to energy and utility consumption and other dimensions of sustainability.¹⁴



**Building on Success:
The Bergeron Centre for
Engineering Excellence**

Completed in August 2015, this 15,750 sq. m. building houses York's electrical, mechanical and civil engineering programs. The site is slightly elevated, offering occupants a view of the Black Creek watershed and adjacent lands. The building was constructed with the most sustainable engineering principles and practices, including a high performance building enclosure, low window-to-wall ratio for superior energy savings, a green roof to reduce water runoff, interior lighting controlled with occupancy sensors, and drought-tolerant, native landscaping that does not require permanent irrigation. The Bergeron Centre was **certified LEED Gold** in 2017.

¹⁴ We recognize that green building standards will evolve and continually raise the bar on sustainability. At the time this Sustainability Strategy was written LEED standards are generally used to benchmark green building objectives at York University. At this time we aspire to LEED Gold or better for all new development.

Sustainability Strategy Working Group

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Tentanda Via - The Way Must Be Tried.



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