

# UNIVERSITY NEWSBEAT

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President Macdonald meets with YUFA and the York community

## Public Policy and Public Attitudes: The Future of York and the University System

On February 23, President H. Ian Macdonald met with members of the York University Faculty Association and the York community to discuss "Public Policy and Public Attitudes: The Future of York and the University System."

President Macdonald focussed on the opportunity the Bovey Commission presents for an informed debate on the future of higher education in Ontario. He highlighted a number of issues including: government funding of universities; accessibility; and York's position within the university system.

The following is an excerpt from President Macdonald's remarks.

In the past, we have allowed prejudice and a disregard for factual information to dominate the discussion of the future of higher education in Ontario. Even the best efforts of the faculty associations, as well as the universities in Ontario, have fallen short of keeping the public informed and aware of the real issues confronting higher education. Therefore, at this time, we should do everything possible to broaden that discussion and to ensure that the real issues are addressed. I hope that the Bovey Commission will share my conviction about the importance of higher education to our economic and social amelioration, and will present the real facts about enrolment and accessibility as substitutes for such shibboleths as "duplication" when discussing the needs and offerings of our university system.

The commission should provide opportunities for public hearings at which we can present well-considered and constructive proposals. In that way, we can help the commission to focus upon the critical roles and responsibilities of universities in Canada at this particular time. If that is done, I am confident that the commission will not be making recommendations in the direction of dismembering our present system of higher education. Rather, by helping to point the way toward solutions to the great distress within our universities, the commission can, in turn, work toward relieving the distress of our economy and our society.

We cannot trumpet this theme too often or too loudly. We have a great responsibility in our universities to convince everyone of the critical importance of higher education to our future. The Bovey Commission could serve to draw ever more attention to our problems and our needs. Therefore, spotlighting opposition to the commission instead of spotlighting the real needs of our universities could work against the best interests of us all.

### Government Funding

After all, we have made some progress in getting the message across. Last January, a new release from the Minister of State for Science and Technology and for Economic and Regional Development, the Honourable Donald

Johnston, stated: "Nowhere is the need for investment of taxpayers' dollars so evident as in the university system." He was announcing measures for the encouragement of technology investment in the area of university-industry cooperation. Investment is the operative word! Mr. Johnston's remark is the kind of constructive spotlighting that we need most—pointing out areas of untapped potential in the universities, and the need for greater support if that potential is to be realized.

It is encouraging to see an increasing number of thoughtful Canadians speaking out on these issues. For example, Walter Light, the Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Northern Telecom, recently had the following to say to the Canadian Club in Toronto:

"Unless we are prepared to come to grips with our current crisis in education; unless we are prepared to invest in higher education at levels comparable to, or higher than, such investments being made by other countries, we run the almost certain risk of precluding any real long-term productivity improvement in Canada."

In commenting upon his address, Mr. Ronald Anderson in the *Globe and Mail* remarked in turn: "Mr. Light said in his speech that he is constantly amazed to hear senior businessmen and government officials talk about education, particularly universities, as if this is something separate from their business interests in the country's economic future. They are not," he said, "they may in fact be the key."

### Doubts persist

Yet doubts about our universities persist as, at once, the cause and the effect of public attitudes and public policy. On the one hand, government deficits are so overwhelming that it is difficult for policy-makers to concentrate on long-term goals such as our need for a more vital, competitive economy. On the other hand, government statements on goals and objectives for policies depend ultimately upon the very success of the universities. Yet we cannot achieve higher levels of success without improved funding, and we are denied more funding because we seem not to achieve higher levels of success. It is this latter misperception that we must correct: our governments, and the public they serve, have never had higher value for their money from the universities than they have at this time.

The problem is that we are expected to do too much with our available resources. In that case, quality is bound to suffer. And if quality suffers, our very credibility is endangered. Therefore, adequate funding and public confidence are two sides of the same coin. We cannot afford further debasement of the currency.

### Accessibility

A green paper recently published by the Council of Ontario Universities indicates that university enrolment in Ontario should peak in 1984-85 and remain high

until the 1980s. The anticipated effects of a drop in Canada's birth rate should be delayed because of the pressure from rising numbers of students who will complete their secondary schooling in four years instead of five, as a result of reforms being introduced at that level. We should, therefore, reaffirm our commitment in York University to accessibility because the demand for entry into our universities has never been greater.

In a recent article in the *Toronto Star*, our former President, Dr. Murray Ross, suggested that "What we need is fewer opinions and more facts." I agree, and the foremost fact is that more students than ever before are knocking at the doors of our universities. Moreover, I believe that demand will and should continue as our retraining and readaptation in response to technological change becomes more and more critical for effective competition in the world economy. Over and over again, we hear the suggestion that the Ontario university system was over-expanded in the 1960s. My idea of over-expansion hardly includes turning away qualified students because of an insufficient number of places for them. Nor does the insufficiency of places indicate "duplication" of facilities. Who would argue that because Eaton's and Simpsons sell similar merchandise, we have a duplication of facilities—as long as both are earning a profit and the public is clamoring for their merchandise?

### The "bottom line"

Let us get at the real issue here. The "bottom line" of the debate turns on whether we need all those people educated to the level of university. On that point we must face two important considerations

1) The great glory of Canada and the expectation of those who came here to make their lives and to build their homes and families was that there would be such opportunities for those who had the ability to undertake them. That is the reason accessibility has to be a cardinal value in Canadian society, quite apart from economic considerations.

2) However, the principles of economics teach us that we maximize our production when we use our resources to their fullest potential. And of course, in terms of the competitive nature of the world economy today, that means essentially our human resources. Therefore, we cannot afford *not* to develop our individual capacities to their fullest potential unless we are prepared to lag behind our competitors in the world. And that is a matter that can be documented, not only in comparison with other OECD countries, but also with other emerging productive nations.

Finally, we must face the issue as to whether increasing numbers and high academic quality are irreconcilable. Of course, there is a breaking point, and many of our colleagues in this University believe we have reached or passed that point. However, if we establish

that maximizing our educational capacity is a prerequisite to economic survival, and if we find that our funding policies are causing diminished quality, then, of course, the case becomes self-evident for the public and for governments to invest more in higher education. That is the kind of argument that I hope will come out of the discussion with the Bovey Commission and certainly the kind of argument that I will be promoting.

### York University

Meanwhile, what of York University? I believe we should not diminish in any way our strenuous campaign to demonstrate the enormity of the current funding formula and the extent to which it is prejudicial to York University. If the amount of money for universities is not to increase, and if the formula is going to continue to be revised in the direction planned for 1984-85, then all that happens is that money is transferred from this institution to other institutions with no net improvement to the system as a whole, but with terrible punishment to York University. That cannot be allowed to happen and we must oppose it with every argument at our command.

Although well-established as a multi-Faculty institution of high academic quality, York is also characterized by a very high degree of specialization within the Ontario system. Although we are a large university (second largest in the Province), our development has been highly focussed in the Social Sciences, Humanities, and certain professional programs. There is a clear direction, both undergraduate and graduate, in our academic offerings and research; one can describe this as highly "rational" with respect to the University of Toronto and Ontario as a whole.

A second strength is our location within the Province. Enrolment prospects for Metropolitan Toronto are good compared to some parts of Ontario, and currently the two Toronto universities fall short of providing enough spaces for local people seeking university education. Our recent experience with enrolments and applications shows that we are under enormous pressure to provide university places. Future prospects will be good for continued high enrolment should the University seek such enrolment. It is very unusual within North America for cities the size of Toronto to have only two large universities. The significant question for Toronto may be whether or not another university is required, or how either one of the existing universities can possibly increase its enrolment.

### Glendon College

Within York there is a special role that can be played by Glendon College in response to escalating demands by Ontario Francophones and graduates of French Immersion programs in Toronto high schools.

Particular strength in research and scholarship has been demonstrated in a number of fields. As indicated in the 1983 brief to OCUA, York has a number of areas in which we rank within the top three in Canada. Also, new research and teaching programs are still being developed, often with substantial assistance from non-formula sources; and this is evidence of a vital, ambitious University.

We have achieved a reputation for superior teaching, partly because our early founders sought to build a university that paid close attention to the needs of students. Similarly, we have been very responsive to societal needs through the constant development of new programs, many with significant "applied" components.

Finally, how much more need we say about: one of the leading law schools and the largest law libraries in the Commonwealth; the largest graduate business program in Canada; innovative Faculties of Fine Arts and Environmental Studies; a Faculty of Education specially tailored to pedagogical needs in our schools today; a full-time faculty in Atkinson College committed to part-time degree studies—to mention but a few of York's areas of excellence.

### Admissions Policy

Let me conclude with a reference to York's enrolment and admission policy for next year, and our budgetary priorities for 1984-85.

Our admissions policy is based upon the fact that we are near the bursting point in terms of numbers of students. For the sake of academic excellence we must ease that tension, without, if possible, unduly compromising our policy of accessibility. We can do that by holding our entering students in each Faculty to whatever number is the lower for the entering groups in 1982-83 or 1983-84. Our numbers will be somewhat eased, therefore, and first year will be the same size or smaller than last year. However, such a policy would still generate close to five percent growth from flow-through of continuing students.

Our latest news on student applications to enter university is that they are up substantially this year over last, and that York's applications are up almost double the provincial average. These new pressures have obvious implications for our admission standards, which the Senate Committee on Admissions, Recruitment, and Student Assistance will have to address.

### Funding

I have referred to the extent to which the funding formula is prejudicial to York University. If we were funded on the same basis as the University of Toronto in terms of the formula, we would have an additional 15 million dollars this year. In fact, in 1983-84, we are funded only for approximately eighty percent of our students.

The results show up in every

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