

UNIVERSITY NEWSBEAT

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PRESIDENT ADDRESSES STUDENTS

York makes strides despite cutbacks

The following remarks by York President H. Ian Macdonald were made at the September 18 meeting of the Council of York Students Federation.

I am most pleased to have this opportunity to speak to you at your meeting on the topic of the state of the University. It is indeed a most controversial and timely subject in view of the alleged public pessimism about universities and about education on the whole. Despite the disillusionment that might exist in certain quarters, I believe that education is more important than ever before, and particularly at the post-secondary level.

There is a concern on the part of many today that there may not be adequate or sufficient jobs for university graduates tomorrow. Certainly the university cannot guarantee its graduates high paying jobs upon completion of their degrees. I believe, however, that the opportunities for people with post-secondary education are still much greater and broader than for those without and, based on my own conversations, I am certain that will continue to be so.

There is, as a matter of fact, a considerable body of research based on past and present experience in support of the proposition that university graduates fare better in the market place, and that employers in a wide variety of activities still express a preference for a graduate with a good B.A. whom they can train to their own requirements. I really believe that figure of popular description—the taxi driver with the Ph.D.—is anomalous rather than typical.

Stepping Stone

Indeed, I was delighted to read the results of a poll reported in the *Toronto Star* a few weeks ago which indicated that a university education was definitely an advantage in securing employment and that those with university degrees tended to do better in the job market than those without. On the other hand, it is not up to the universities to provide and to create jobs for their graduates; that is a function of governments and government policy. However, the university does provide a stepping stone for greater personal advancement and, for that reason alone, a university education is invaluable.

It is the responsibility of all universities to ensure that our institutions remain places of high academic quality and standards. However, I also believe that every effort should be made to assist anyone who can profit from a university education to secure a place, regardless of financial or social background. Then, once anyone is admitted into university, he or she should meet the highest standards of academic excellence.

The basic problem originates with the chronic under-funding of the university system in Ontario in terms of the universities' and the public's legitimate needs. For the past eight or nine years, the universities have been obliged to live on income that is considerably less than the rate of inflation.

We in this province built a remarkable university system which is the envy of many parts of the world. We completed in the 1960's a system of fifteen provincially supported universities providing a diversity of education. However, in the period of 1970-79, Ontario has fallen from third to tenth place among the provinces in terms of university grants calculated on a per student basis, to the point where many of us share the belief that the fundamental quality and strength of the system is threatened.

Tuition Fees

The government has also put the universities in the difficult position of having to decide by how much they should increase tuition fees, if at all. At the same time, the government has recognized that its increases in grants do not meet the legitimate need of the universities for maintenance and development of quality programmes. This is so at York.

As you know, in order to avoid crippling cuts in academic programmes and support services, we were obliged to increase fees about 13 per cent this year while still facing a potential deficit in 1980-81 of up to \$1.25 million. It should be mentioned that fee increases in the past decade have been well below the level of inflation. In the ten-year period from 1970-71 to 1979-80, fees at York University increased, on the average, less than 6.66 per cent per year.

Meanwhile the Consumer Price Index (CPI) has climbed by more than an average of 10 per cent per year and the minimum wage has increased by an average of 13 per cent per year.

Although tuition fee increases have become an inescapable reality for most Ontario universities, we will continue to do our utmost to ensure that tuition fee increases will not prevent the attendance at York of those who would otherwise have attended or cause undue hardship on students already enrolled. For that reason, the first call on discretionary funds this year at York University is for enhanced student assistance, up to an additional \$75,000.

We will also strive to ensure that tuition fee increases are kept to the bare minimum, although I am in no position to make any exact promises about that. I can tell you that I am arranging formal student participation in our budgetary planning this year in order that the fees question becomes an early and integral part of our overall decision-making.

Union Contracts

You are interested, I know, in the status of the union contracts at York University. Mr. Farr, who is responsible for those matters, will follow with some remarks on that subject. However, let me make one thing clear. Neither Mr. Farr, nor I, nor the Board of Governors are negotiating with our own money nor in defense of our own personal interests.

Each union has the responsibility to interpret the best interests of its own members; we have the responsibility to represent and to

reconcile the overall interests of the University. In so doing, we are allocating public funds to the extent of 85 per cent of our budget and student fees to the extent of 15 per cent of our budget. We are also obliged to consider the long-term academic interests of the University and to ensure that we maintain high-level academic performance.

The York University Faculty Association (YUSA) last year signed a two-year contract with the University dissolving the need this year for contract negotiations. We are currently working on a new contract with the Graduate Assistants Association (GAA), now the Canadian Union of Educational Workers, and the York University Staff Association (YUSA). Our objective is to settle these negotiations amicably in the near future.

No one enjoys union strikes and we in the administration wish to avoid that eventuality as much as do the students of this University. However, as you know, labour relations is a complicated matter and the reality is that there are strong differences of principle.

Basically, I believe the students and administration at York seek the same goals—easy accessibility to post-secondary institutions, non-disruption of services, high standards of academic excellence, as few cutbacks as absolutely possible, and the lowest possible tuition fee increases. Those are the goals, but they require a high degree of co-operation to achieve. It is possible that we can work together to realize all of our goals and I hope to see many joint efforts during the 1980-81 academic year.

Financial Campaign

Meanwhile, there are encouraging signs on the horizon. The gloomy forecasts of enrolment decline have not yet materialized. We are about to launch a public financial campaign in aid of university programs. The recognition of York University in Canada and abroad grows every year. We are celebrating our 20th Anniversary with a varied and interesting programme. Again, we welcome your support and your ideas.

In these various formal meetings with students, I hear much about parking, food services, transportation and other support activities which ease or complicate our lives. However, we are in the business of teaching and research—that is my primary interest and responsibility. Therefore, I want to know from students: are we doing a good job and if not, where not and why not? Therefore, I have organized a series of informal "Meet the President" sessions over the next two weeks and I hope you will encourage students to come and talk to me about these matters.

Finally, each person must seek to assess what is important in any job and what he, or she, should best do at any point in time. And so, let me tell you briefly what I shall be doing over the next year or longer. In the past few years, notwithstanding the added responsibilities of living with chronic under-funding, facing uncertain enrolment, and accommodating to the extensive

unionization, the University has made remarkable strides:

Strides

- We reduced an accumulated operating deficit of approximately \$1.6 million to zero by April 30, 1979, and maintained that position to April 30, 1980; and, in the same six-year period, we also reduced a capital loan of \$4.5 million to approximately \$1.8 million.

- We have added facilities such as the Religious Centre, the Metropolitan Track and Field Centre, and the Tennis Centre.

- We have seen the introduction of new initiatives such as the Centre for Research on Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Research Programme on Violence and Conflict Resolution.

- We have taken the campus to various off-campus teaching sites with conspicuous success.

- We have undertaken a number of major international initiatives and established a variety of exchange programmes.

- We have adapted our curriculum to be more "relevant" while retaining the essential academic content.

- Our faculty are maturing rapidly in the volume and quality of their scholarship, and in their national and international reputations.

I invite you to peruse the *York Gazette* over the past few years to absorb the flavour of our accomplishments.

Our task now is both simple and monumental in these times: to continue to enhance our academic quality and to make certain that everyone knows about it. As far as possible this year and for some time to come, I intend to disentangle myself as much as possible from the endless grind of committees dealing with various technical matters. We have highly competent Vice-Presidents and Deans, so I am saying to the Board and to our community: do not always expect me.

In particular, I want to put more distance between myself and the endless business of building the annual budget. I believe that the new guidelines which I am giving to the Vice-President (Academic Affairs) and the Budget Committee should make that possible, while the work of the Senate Academic Policy and Planning Committee, supported by Professor Found, will provide the essential academic guidance to the budgetary process.

Rather I will do the following:

- spend a good deal of time in the financial campaign. I believe that the direct participation of the President is expected, as far as possible, in assisting the Board to formulate its objectives and to attain them;

- spend even more time informally with the York community in terms of building morale and in dealing with the reality of extreme decentralization.

In both cases, one can help to build the important bridge which makes the initiatives of the university more relevant to the community, and the community's needs better known in the university.

Priority

In particular, I want to deal as a matter of priority with the following:

- What academic initiatives are we pursuing and how effectively?

- What are we doing by way of attracting students, and retaining them?

- What are we doing to increase research support, private support, and government support?

- What are our personnel plans for the longer term, for example, in our part-time faculty, and our professional and managerial group?

- What future role do we envisage for the Colleges and the College tutorial programme?

- How can we enlarge our international presence?

- What can we do to enhance our community relations?

- What is our long-term physical plan as related to academic needs, and our plans for improved campus ambience?

I am not implying that we have been inactive in these areas, nor that we will accomplish all our goals overnight. However, these are the primary areas of activity which must precede the refinement of our long-term financial plans, although we are well advanced in that process as well. Budgeting and allocation of resources is the means of meeting our objectives. In that process, the task is to reconcile three variables: academic quality, financial support and access for students.

I trust this outline will provide you with an indication of the subjects on which I would appreciate your advice and your support.

Meet the President

President H. Ian Macdonald is holding a series of open sessions with students, staff and faculty—those interested in voicing their views and concerns about the University. The sessions are scheduled by areas, but are open to members of the Keele and Glendon communities. A number of student councils are participating in these talks.

The meetings are scheduled as follows:

- Thursday, September 25 from 2:00 to 3:30 p.m. in the Junior

Common Room of Glendon College—for members of the Glendon community.

- Wednesday, October 1 from 4:00 to 5:30 p.m. in the student lounge of the Administrative Studies Building—for Administrative Studies and Osgoode Hall Law School students.

- Thursday, October 2 from 12:00 to 2:00 p.m. in the Faculty Lounge on the 8th floor of the Ross Building (South End)—for Graduate Students and Environmental Studies students.