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Major changes to campus security operations

Demands accepted after students occupy offices

by Christine F. de Leon and Doug Saunders

Three hundred student protestors claimed victory Monday after a four-hour meeting with York's top administrators ended in the acceptance of all eight of the students' demands.

The meeting was the end result of a three-hour occupation of the university's presidential offices by 300 students last Thursday.

The events were the culmination of weeks of protest against racism in York's full-time security force. Two weeks ago, officers asked three Black students to produce their student cards, saying they looked "too young."

"There is constant harassment on this campus," said Ahmed Hashi, a first-year arts student at last week's protest. "Black students feel under constant attack."

Other incidents cited by students included the alleged assault of a Black female student by a bouncer at the Underground, a parking lot attendant who reportedly told a Black student that "this is not the jungle," and the harassment of a Black student studying quietly at the library.

The ID card incident prompted students to wear cards around their necks reading "Jane Doe" and "John Doe" in a campaign to raise awareness. When students discovered the 30-member security force would be limiting itself to a self-investigation, they organized the occupation.

During the Thursday occupation, four of York's vice presidents were led single file into the crowd of students. They stood silently as *Excalibur* editor Jeannine Amber stood on a desk and read the demands to them through a megaphone.

The demands outline the creation of external review committees to oversee the operations of York Security

and security at the Underground. They allow for the firing of officers found guilty of discrimination, and they call for a second full-time staff member for York's office of Race and Ethnic Relations.

(The full text of the demands, as modified after the occupation and accepted on Monday, is printed on page 8).

Students jammed the Senate chamber at noon Monday to negotiate the demands. Surrounded by over 300 students were all five of York's vice presidents along with Pam MacDonald, executive director of York Security; Rob Castle, manager of the Student Centre and the Underground; and Gary McNeely, chair of the Student Centre Corporation.

Missing from the meeting was York President Harry Arthurs. During the Thursday occupation, the vice presidents told students Arthurs was off campus that day and would be out of the country until the end of the month.

But *Excalibur* has confirmed from administration sources that Arthurs was at Atkinson college during the occupation.

The negotiations were led by Heather Dryden, newly-elected vpequality for the York Federation of Students; Omar Smith, an undergraduate student; and Amber. Brandishing a megaphone, the three led the audience in cheers and chants as they traded retorts with the administrators.

The negotiations were frequently punctuated by students rising to make speeches and present a litany of personal accounts of harassment at the hands of security officers.

The vice presidents agreed to all the demands with little resistance —



Students rally in the Student Centre last Thursday, March 12. Less than half an hour later, they had stormed and occupied the executive offices on the ninth floor of the Ross Building. Although Metro Police waited at the foot of the building, there were no arrests. Pam MacDonald, executive director of York Security, said the cops were just "on standby." Photo by David Sutherland

with the exception of the seventh, which orders the York administration to immediately fire any officers found guilty of discriminatory acts by the review committee.

Three of the vice presidents initially refused the demand.

Ian Lithgow, vice president of external relations, said he didn't approve of the mandate because "I don't believe there is one punishment for one crime." Stephen Fienberg, vice president of academic affairs, also said he would not accept the demand.

Farr initially asked that the words "discriminatory behaviour" be changed to "racist behaviour."

The students reacted angrily to this. "This makes it easier to exclude sexism and homophobia from the process," said Omar Smith.

After being challenged and taunted by the crowd, Farr finally agreed to honour the demand.

"I was worried about a distorted process," Farr explained afterwards. "The review committee will find itself hamstrung."

"It's faced with the task of finding someone completely innocent or making a decision that will result in their termination," added Farr. "This will pose problems for the review committee."

After the negotiations, Pam MacDonald, executive director of York Security, said she was not sure how the new committees would work with York Security's operations.

"We're going to have to spend some time working that out," she said.

MacDonald had initially refused to sign a student petition condemning discrimination in York Security, arguing "I'm not convinced there is racism involved."

But she later acknowledged that "their [the officers'] behaviour was totally unacceptable and, understandably, people are upset."

A CHRONOLOGY OF CONFRONTATION

Monday March 2: three Black students in the crowded Student Centre are singled out by York Security officers who ask them to show ID, claiming they look "too young." When the students refuse ("on principle"), a squad of officers is called in.

Wednesday March 4: York Security director Don Magee says he doesn't feel the officer responsible should be disciplined, claiming "he's a good officer." Students begin wearing tags reading "Jane Doe" and "John Doe" around their necks and handing out fliers describing the incident.

Monday March 9: Pam MacDonald, executive director of York Security, tells *Excalibur* she launched an investigation as soon as she heard of the event. Magee says he was "out of step." The investigation will be conducted by Al Mossman, the service standards coordinator for York Security.

Tuesday March 10: Students meet to plan a protest rally and occupation of the president's office. They intend to confront President Harry Arthurs with a set of demands.

Thursday March 12: 12:00: about 300 students, chanting, singing and waving placards, begin a demonstration on the ground floor of the Student Centre.

12:30: the students start heading up the Ross Building elevators to the ninth floor, home of the vice-presidential and presidential offices. When they reach the top, they are told President Harry Arthurs is off campus (this is later proven untrue).

The students — calling themselves only "Jane Doe" and "John Doe" — say they will wait until four vice presidents arrive. Chanting and dancing on desktops, they settle in for a long wait.

2:30: four vice presidents — William Farr, Stephen Fienberg, Sheldon Levy and Ian Lithgow — arrive, along with Pam MacDonald. Surrounded by students, they hear the demands read to them over a megaphone.

3:00: After meeting for 15 minutes, the vice presidents hand the students a written agreement promising to meet with the students on Monday.

Saturday March 14: The students meet again to fine-tune their demands.

Monday March 16
2:30 Another demonstration begins in the student centre and proceeds up the Ross Building elevators, this time ending up in the York Senate chambers on the ninth floor, where all of York's vice presidents, as well as MacDonald and the Student Centre executive are waiting.
3:00 Students speak about their experiences at the hands of York Security
4:00 Negotiations begin over the eight demands
6:30 The vice presidents sign the final demand, promising they will sign a legally binding contract. The students plan to meet again the following Monday to discuss future plans.

Students interested in joining the meeting on Monday should call the York Federation of Students at 736-5324 for details.



York Vice Presidents Stephen Fienberg, Ian Lithgow and William Farr listen as Jeannine Amber, standing on a desk above them, reads out the demands. Photo by Anthony Cohen