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Introduction
The plurality of student experiences at York University emerged early in our discussions
with students, staff and faculty. We must recognize that there are a multitude of student
experiences; our challenge is to identify and prioritize opportunities and mechanisms to
enhance the experiences of our students. The first meeting of the Green Paper Working
Group began with an overview of York student demographics, with data provided from
OIRA: 80% of our students are drawn from the GTA; 45% of our students identify as
visible minority (with the three largest groups within the 45% being South Asian 31%,
Chinese 24%, Black 11%); 64% of our first-year students live at home with their parents;
almost half our students commute more than 40 minutes each way; and 60% of our first-
year students work off campus at an average of 16 hours per week. Many of our students
work long hours because they have an aversion to debt. Perhaps this explains why our
undergraduate times to completion are longer than the provincial average. The hours
spent by our students commuting and working also have an impact on their potential to
participate in a full university experience: 40% of first-year students report that they
spend 5 hours or less on campus each week outside scheduled class time. During the

hours that they are on campus, students have been affected by the growth in the period from 1999 to the present, with growth and student satisfaction generally forming an inverse relationship.

The following factors most directly impact student experiences:
- Academic
- Administrative
- Environmental (physical and cultural)
- Services and Support
- Social (on and off campus, including student organizations, sports and recreation, and institutional reputation)

Student experiences span all aspects of the interactions that transpire between individuals and the university, from recruitment through to graduation, in the curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular realms. Additionally, how students define a positive experience can vary: some students seek efficiency (i.e., quick and accurate access to information) while others pursue outside class activities that can be academically or socially oriented. When examining the range of student experiences, it is vital to maintain a holistic perspective that embraces all the above factors, exploring what, where and how we wish to improve while acknowledging what we do well.

Literature review
Central to the notion of the student experience are the concepts of student involvement (Astin, 1984) and student engagement (Kuh, 2001, 2003). Astin describes student involvement as the amount of physical and psychological energy a student devotes to the academic experience as a direct function of both time and effort. He further postulates that: "the amount of student learning and personal development associated with any educational program is directly proportional to student involvement in that program" and "the effectiveness of any educational policy or practice is directly related to the capacity of that policy or practice to increase student involvement" (519). Residence, extra-curricular involvement, part time job on campus, students ability to identify with the institution, and most importantly, frequent and meaningful interaction with faculty, are all strongly related to the nature and level of student involvement.

The often challenging transition into university for high school entrants and the importance of providing supports to first-year students are themes that emerge in the literature. Tinto and other researchers have suggested that the first year is the most critical period when considering student involvement. Students' expectations prior to arrival often do not match well with the reality. In particular, first-year students seek regular feedback from their instructors (Brinkwoth et al, 2009). Chickering and Gamson (1987) list contacts between students and faculty as a key element of good practice in undergraduate education. Tinto (2006) further suggests that there is much scope for us to know just how to apply available research on the student experience to make student involvement matter. In his research, Astin (1977, 1993) determined that the persistence or retention rate of students is greatly affected by the level and quality of their interactions with peers as well as faculty and staff. Reynolds (2006) examined the impact of facilities

on recruitment and retention. During the selection period, students' choices are influenced by the quality of facilities for the major, the library, sophisticated technology, and classrooms.

Within the "current environment of mass education," there are ways in which the university can foster retention and nurture achievement: pre-entry information; induction [orientation]; personal tutor support; attendance; teaching and learning activities; and assessment of students beginning early in the term (Trotter and Roberts, 2006). Tinto (2006/07) states that while "student retention is everyone's business, it is now evident that it is the business of the faculty in particular (5). And yet, according to Tinto, in most cases faculty involvement is limited.

It is imperative that the university community as a whole be more effectively engaged and for this purpose our concerns need to broaden from student access and retention to student involvement, education and learning. We need to build models of collaborative efforts between faculty and student affairs professionals so that students experience a holistic learning context of both academic and social support; an integration of both academic learning and student development; and opportunities to develop skills in leadership and teamwork through extra-curricular activities. NASPA's report (2004) titled, "Learning Reconsidered: A Campus Wide Focus on the Student Experience" urges a move away from traditional dichotomies of student/academic affairs, inside/outside the classroom learning, and curriculum/co-curriculum to enhance the overall student learning experience. This focus on student learning is also reiterated in the report on the workshop of Ontario universities on assessing the NSSE experience. The report further encourages universities to open discussions on teaching and learning as part of the student experience (Jones, 2007). Further, given York's mandate to internationalize higher education, it is situated in a unique position to consider what intercultural learning and teaching means within the context of our multicultural student population (Ippolito, 2007).

Questions posed
Why do students choose York? What do students expect prior to attending York?

What experiences do students have after they arrive and which ones do they like? What are their expectations?

What supports do students anticipate? How can we incorporate additional academic and learning skills supports into the classroom experience?

What do students experience in class? What value do students place on research? What value do students place on teaching? How can we improve the quantity and quality of faculty/student interactions?

What do students experience outside class? What types of spaces and activities are preferred? How can we improve the environmental experience?

How can we nurture the development of connections and community(ies) at York?

At York, what do we expect of our students? What roles can students play in helping to enhance student experiences and how can we communicate these expectations?

What are we doing well? What can we do better?

If we could change one thing, what would that be?

What we heard
In conversations with York students it was clear that prior to arriving, they fully understood that they were coming to a very large, commuter environment that offered them tremendous diversity in academic and social programming and experiences. In this regard York has not disappointed them. Unfortunately, while they understood that they would have fewer supports than those provided in high school, they are not prepared for the extent of the difference. They feel that there are insufficient opportunities to connect with faculty in and outside the classroom and, because of the complexity of York's programs, they often do not feel that they have access to adequate academic/ career guidance. Graduate students seek more sustained and meaningful interactions with faculty. York is very much a commuter campus for our faculty as well as for our students, as noted by the frequent absence of faculty on campus outside of their teaching day commitments. Students are seeking ways to engage in the learning process through discussion in class with their peers as well as through interactions with faculty. This can be accomplished not only through personal contacts but also through the use of technology. Just as there needs to be an expectation of intellectual work in the classroom, our students are expecting greater use of technology through which to engage with faculty and fellow students.

Students expressed concerns and frustration around advising experiences: difficulty obtaining accurate (and consistent) information; the experience of receiving multiple referrals but no answer; confusion around where to go; and seeking but not feeling a personal connection. Worst case scenarios include students who reported having to enrol in additional courses and invest in another year of study in order to fulfill degree requirements. Examples of "if you can find someone who can help you don't let them go!" were cited on a number of occasions. The challenges and frustrations associated with navigating the York bureaucracy from admission to graduation were expressed, including documents getting lost, waiting in lines, phones not being answered, etc.

Between classes, students are looking for comfortable spaces, quiet spaces, clean washrooms, and places where they can heat food and eat. In a survey conducted by Scott Library in 2008, students expressed their desire for a combination of work areas and relaxation areas; they want access to quiet spaces as well as collaborative spaces; students are "desperate for more space." Inadequate spaces (quantity and quality) also were raised as areas of concern by students at both Glendon and Keele campuses as well as by graduate students.

The following key concepts emerged:
1. The first-year experience
2. Student experiences inside academic settings
3. Student experiences outside academic settings
4. Student experiences with support services

Options
Within each of the categories above, there are various avenues through which student experiences can be enhanced. We already have some excellent programs in place; the challenge moving forward is to identify and implement additional strategies.

1. The first-year experience
Should York consider developing a learning community program for first year students? Learning communities require that faculty, and in some cases, faculty and student affairs professionals, collaborate in a variety of ways. Faculty members in linked courses typically plan their assignments so that the activities of one complement that of the other. Ideas to consider:

- Introduce learning communities based on co- registration or block scheduling, so that the same students are registered in two or more courses (and perhaps assigned to the same peer mentoring group)
- Introduce mandatory advising for all first year students
- Re-institute mid-term grades for all 6 and 9 credit courses in the first year
- Introduce guidelines for ensuring interactions between students in years 1 and 2 and full-time faculty members (inside or outside class)
- Promote the model of taking supports to the students in all General Education courses (integration of critical skills development, research, writing, learning and development skills, etc)
- Define and expand the role of the colleges in the first-year experience
- Explore the development of a summer pre-university transition program

2. Student experiences inside academic settings
Those who are in the classroom have the greatest impact upon the academic experience. We also know that graduate students as tutorial leaders have a significant impact on first year students. Currently there is a mandatory one day orientation session to prepare new graduate students. There are also a number of workshops offered by the Centre for Teaching and Learning, but attendance is voluntary.
Has the emphasis on research undermined the status of teaching? How might we revision the relative weighting of teaching, research and service for full-time faculty? How can we encourage full-time faculty members to spend more time on campus, interacting with students?
Ideas to consider:

- Introduce mandatory advising for all second year students
- Offer modules in pedagogy for all graduate students who are TAs, as well as for new part-time and full-time faculty members

- Introduce guidelines for ensuring interactions between students in years 1 and 2 and full-time faculty members (inside or outside class)
- Develop better integration of critical and academic skills (research, writing, learning skills) throughout the curriculum
- Encourage all full-time faculty members to attend course and assignment design modules, including universal design, offered through the Centre for Teaching and Learning
- Develop greater co-curricular integration between departments/faculties and their affiliated colleges
- incorporate experiential learning into a significant portion of the curriculum
- offer more hybrid courses

3. Student experiences outside class settings

Peer interactions occur in a variety of venues, including peer mentoring programs, almost 300 student organizations, dedicated programs for our close to 2700 residence students, intramural sports, which attract 5,000 students, and in recreational facilities. Overall, significant points of contact outside the classroom with faculty, staff and students, foster a positive student experience.

Ideas to consider:

- Develop greater co-curricular and extra-curricular integration between departments/faculties and their affiliated colleges
- Develop professional development sessions for graduate students, including topics applicable to those seeking careers outside academe
- Ensure that peer mentoring is offered in all faculties, and develop pan-university training modules for peer mentors
- Further develop Learning Commons partnerships (e.g., expand to include numeracy) and extend the Learning Commons concept to other York Libraries
- Create more student spaces for study as well as relaxation and improve recreational facilities

4. Student experiences with support services

"Academic Advising is the only structured activity on the campus in which all students have the opportunity for one-to-one interaction with a concerned representative of the institution" (Habley, 1994). Academic advisors provide students with the needed connection to the various campus services, e.g. financial and career services, and supply the essential academic connection between these services and students. Since student indecision as to major or career options can be a primary factor in student persistence, advising programs should have strong links to the career services on campus as a part of any retention plan. Academic advisors offer students the personal connections that the research indicates is vital to student retention and student success.
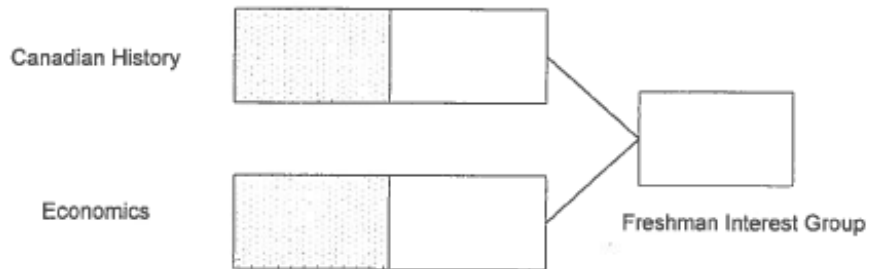
Ideas to consider:

- Develop professional development opportunities for faculty and staff who have responsibilities for academic advising
- Based on the very positive response to the degree audit pilot project in the Faculty of Health, accelerate the expansion of this project across all Faculties
- Develop professional development opportunities for administrative staff who have direct contact with students
- Review the processes for academic decisions, e.g. petitions, with the goal of streamlining the process and reducing the timelines
- Develop information modules to provide clearer understanding of available funding supports (for graduate students and undergraduate students)
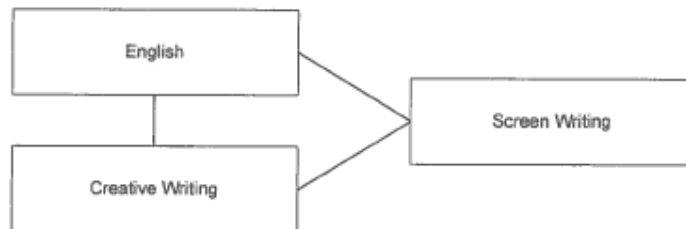
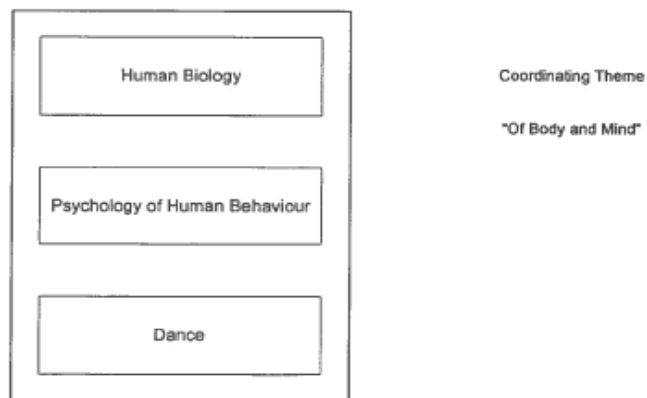## Appendix A – Learning Community Models

LINKED COURSES

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[ Mathematics ] ——————— [ Science ]
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FRESHMAN INTEREST GROUPS

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Canadian History   [░░░░|      ]
                               \
                                [          ]
                               /
Economics          [░░░░|      ]   Freshman Interest Group
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CLUSTER OR FEDERATED COURSES

```
[ English ]
    |       \
    |        [ Screen Writing ]
    |       /
[ Creative Writing ]
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COORDINATED STUDIES

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┌─────────────────────────┐
│  [ Human Biology ]      │      Coordinating Theme
│                         │
│  [ Psychology of Human  │      "Of Body and Mind"
│     Behaviour ]         │
│                         │
│  [ Dance ]              │
└─────────────────────────┘
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