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Report of the Working Group on Evening/Weekend Education at York University

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Highlights

We are concerned primarily with those students—undergraduates and graduates—who are limiting themselves to evening and weekend studies. The ambiguity inherent in the terms "part-time" and "mature" together with the changing nature of our student body led us to focus on those students who were restricted to "off-hours" in terms of when they could pursue their university studies. Historically, Atkinson has had the responsibility for ensuring that its degrees could be completed in non-traditional timeslots and/or via distance, in a reasonable amount of time, and that required administrative and academic supports would be convenient for students working during the day. With restructuring, evening/weekend studies have become the responsibility of all Faculties, and so this study sought to ascertain the concerns and elicit recommendations regarding how York University might best continue degree studies in non-traditional time-slots going forward.

Notably, many of the recommendations in this report would improve and enhance the student experience for *all* of our students, not just those restricted to pursuing their education in the evening and on weekends. While some recommendations would take time and money to implement, it is not the case with all; some recommendations are easy and require only attention paid to ensuring such accessibility.

Information on the following practices was sought:
- Academic offerings: The provision of courses and degree programs (including: course offerings, course work, exams, advising services);
- Student Support Services: The provision of services including advising (central and program), program/department workshops, University administrative support services, online information and services; and
- Campus environment: Transportation/parking services, security/lighting, facilities.

Recommendations

Program-Related Recommendations
1. Clearly identify to visitors and prospective students which degrees/programs are available to be completed through evening/weekend/on-line courses exclusively. Make explicit the expected/possible time to completion.
2. Broaden Lecture Schedule search options to include the possibility of searching by time/day of Course Offering.
3. Create a unique identifier for students who are restricted to evening/weekend/online studies.
4. Ensure scheduled exams match day and time of day of evening and weekend courses.
5. Protect the rights of students restricted to evening/weekend-only attendance with an accommodations policy.
6. Encourage instructor flexibility regarding assigned work outside of scheduled class hours.
7. Expand the possibilities of gaining advanced standing through Prior Learning Skills Assessment (PLA) options.

Academic Service-Related Recommendations
8. Ensure that a full array of academic and student support services are available evenings and weekends.

Environment-Related Recommendations
9. Improve safety of the evening Keele and Glendon campuses with (a) increased lighting, (b) increased visibility and decreased response times of GoSafe and (c), transit departures that coordinate with class end times (for the Keele campus).
10. Improve the cleanliness of the evening/weekend campus environment.
11. Integrate the mature and part-time students amongst us into our very culture.
12. Permit all students the option of directing the student levy.

I.   Introduction

In 2007-2008, York University had over 34,000 registrations in courses that began after 4pm More than 22,000 of those were enrolments in courses that began after 6 pm or on weekends. How well are students served who cannot attend York during the day? What is York student experience in these "off hours"?

Historically, part-time studies and mature students have been the special focus of the Atkinson Faculty—while mature students have never been the exclusive domain of the Atkinson Faculty, no other Faculty has had as its *raison d'etre* this constituency. Over recent years, the distinctions between full-time and part-time students have become blurred; boundaries between Faculties have become increasingly porous through changes in degree regulations, and part-time and mature students increasingly registering across all Faculties. These changes have meant that "the responsibility to serve these students can no longer be seen as that of a single Faculty; it is a University responsibility and one we embrace" (Memo from Sheila Embleton, Vice President Academic to APPC, September 8, 2006).

On July 1, 2009, the Faculties of Atkinson and Arts will join together to form the new Faculty of Liberal Arts and Professional Studies. The mandate for evening, weekend and summer education will become a University-wide mandate, with all Faculties responsible for York University's non-traditional students.

With the aim to better understand the educational and campus services available to students who must or prefer to study in the evening and on weekends, members of the Atkinson Faculty of Liberal and Professional Studies have produced this report, funded by the Vice President Academic and Provost, and the Dean of Atkinson, exploring the experiences of these students.

A variety of issues surrounding course planning, support services, campus facilities, and the like are addressed in the report. The survey and focus groups provided information on the ease with which evening/weekend students progress through their education as well as other concerns they have relating to the campus facilities available during their time on campus.

The report is intended to help all Faculties in their assumption of this broader mandate. The report summarizes and recommends suggestions based on the survey of evening/weekend students' access to campus services/completion of post-secondary requirements; it also identifies the types of support offered by administrative offices that will permit these offices to better serve this student cohort. The report includes a section identifying current practices that students found helpful or noteworthy. The report concludes with a list of recommendations for practices that are serving or will serve these constituencies well.

Mandate of the Committee

To support the transfer of responsibility for evening/weekend education to all Faculties with the closure of Atkinson Faculty of Liberal and Professional Studies, the Atkinson Council formed an ad hoc committee to provide an accounting of some "best practices" gleaned from its 40 years of providing evening education to adult students. At the request of the Vice President Academic and Provost, who shared the cost of the study with Atkinson, the project became a survey of the needs and experiences of students in all Faculties who are only able to attend classes during evening and weekend hours.

II.   Scope of study

The primary focus of this study is on the academic program and administration needs of students who attended classes evenings and/or weekends at the time of the survey and who are limited to those time frames. This scope of this study does not extend to include important pedagogical issues.

Information on the following practices was sought:
- Academic offerings: The provision of courses and degree programs (including: course offerings, course work, exams, advising services);

- Student Support Services: The provision of services including advising (central and program), program/department workshops, University administrative support services, online information and services; and

- Campus environment: Transportation/parking services, security/lighting, facilities.

III.   Definitions and Sample Characteristics

Historically, "mature" and "part-time" were the primary defining characteristics of the "non-traditional" university student—as distinct from the full-time day-time, direct entry student. More recently, however, diversity in terms of course load, age, as well as ethnicity, race, language and class increasingly characterizes our student body. As such, York students are non-traditional in ways that are not always contemplated by public policy and University programs, or the assumptions on which they are founded.
The term mature student is variously used to describe both a student who is older than the typical student entering university directly from high school, or to define precisely a certain type of applicant for undergraduate admission. Similarly "part-time" student is both a generic term referring to a student who has other, non-university related, full-time responsibilities and a more precise term defined by course load (less than 9 credits per term). Where it was once the case that part-time, mature and evening students were almost exclusively one and the same, it is increasingly the case that these characteristics do not adequately identify the non-traditional student.

The ambiguity inherent in the terms together with the changing nature of our student body led us to focus on those students who were restricted to "off-hours" in terms of when they could pursue their university studies. We are concerned, then, primarily with those students—undergraduates and graduates—who are, by necessity or by choice, limiting themselves to evening and weekend studies.

The characteristics of the students responding to the on-line survey are primarily undergraduate students (92 percent), enrolled in programs in Atkinson (56 percent), Arts (13 percent) and Health (11 percent), evenly split between those who are younger and those who are older (25 years of age and older), with a 2:1 ratio of women to men.

Table 1. Sample Characteristics

Characteristics of the sample of 645 students responding to the survey are as follows:
- undergraduates (91.59 percent),
- enrolled in programs in Atkinson (358 or 55.5 percent), Arts (83 or 12.8 percent), Health (67 or 10.3 percent), Science and Engineering (40 or 6.2 percent), Schulich (28 or 4.3 percent);
- with the remaining students (66 or 10.2 percent) enrolled in programs in faculties (Education, Environmental Studies, Fine Arts, Glendon, and Graduate Studies). (No one from Osgoode participated).
- females (67 percent), males (33 percent)
- ranging in age brackets from 17-24 (50.3 percent), 25-30 (17.9 percent), 31-40 (16.8 percent) and older (14.5 percent).

Precise details of the actual population were unavailable. To offer a bit of a perspective on the sample surveyed, albeit an imprecise one, we pair the distribution of the students by Home Faculty responding to the survey (Column 2) with the Total Evening/Weekend Enrolments (Heads) in Taught-By Faculty (Column 1). Column 1 estimates make no adjustment, however, for the multiple enrolment counts arising from all cross-listed courses.

	Percent of Total Evening/Weekend Enrolments in Taught-by Faculty* 2007/2008	Percent of Total Respondents by Home Faculty (Survey Sample)
Faculty	**COLUMN 1**	**COLUMN 2**
Atkinson	55.2%	55.5%
Arts	13.3%	12.8%
(Atkinson+ Arts)	*(68.5%)*	
Education	1.0%	
Fine Arts	3.0%	
Glendon	3.0%	
Health	5.1%	10.3%
Law	1.4%	0%
Science and Engineering	10.1%	6.2%
Graduate Studies	2.7%	
Schulich (Graduate Students)	5.1%	4.3%
TOTAL Fall 2007/Winter 2008	100.0%	89.1%

Note: Percentages are inflated by the double-counting of cross-listed courses.

IV.   Brief Statement of Method

The two methods primarily used to obtain the data were an electronic survey instrument and focus groups. The former was directed solely toward students; the latter included a variety of student service units, both Atkinson and central, academic and non-academic staff in Atkinson's program units, as well as current and former students.

Research for the report included an online survey addressed to all students in evening and weekend courses, student focus groups, and interviews with Atkinson faculty and staff, librarians, administrators of student services across the University, students and alumni. Details of the survey methods are provided in Appendix A.

The committee focused on students who attended classes in the evening and on weekends in Fall07/Winter08, recognizing that other aspects of the original Atkinson mandate (provision of programs for mature and part time students) described students found in all faculties. *Students registered in courses that begin after 6 pm or on weekends and who were unable to attend courses during the day* were invited, via Passport York, to complete a voluntary online survey between mid November of 2007 and mid January of 2008. A total of 645 students responded to the call. Respondents were also given the option to sign up and attend one of the focus groups to be held in the last week of January/early to mid February. Focus groups were on various days and times; e.g., 6:00 pm, on weekends, etc.

Our research probed the ease (or lack thereof) with which students could pursue their academic program and access administrative and academic support services, and other aspects of student experience related especially to time spent on campus. Many issues emerged from the focus group discussions, some of which related specifically to mature students.

The respondents to the survey were students who attended classes in the evenings and on weekends for all or part of the time. These students comprised all but two focus groups as well.

In addition to surveying students, we met with a number of colleagues at York involved with providing academic and non-academic support services to evening and weekend students, including administrative assistants within the Atkinson Faculty of Liberal Arts and Professional Studies; administrators of student services (including: Student Client Services, Office of Computing Technology and e-Learning Services, Student Community and Leadership Development, University Registrar, Financial Aid, Library and the Lee Wiggins Child Care Centre), Mature Students Association, Atkinson Student Association, and alumni.

Two focus groups consisted of administrators, one of unit administrative support staff from Atkinson, and the other of administrators of university-wide units. The former sought to elicit best practices; the latter primarily evolved into a discussion of how the needs that were emerging from focus groups and the survey might be met.

In addition to the on-line survey, focus groups and interviews, participants were invited to submit any further comments in writing via a dedicated E-Mail address.

V.   Survey of Evening/Weekend Students: Results

In our survey of students enrolled in evening and weekend courses, and restricted to those hours, we sought their feedback on program accessibility, student support and administrative services, and campus safety.

V.1   Program Accessibility: Course Selection and Availability

Program accessibility addressed issues related to course selection and availability of space in the course. Specifically, we asked about the adequacy of the course selection measured in terms of the student's ability to complete his or her degree in a timely manner. Once the student had selected her/his courses, we surveyed their ability to enrol in these preferred courses. In both cases, we differentiated between General Education courses, Courses required for the Major, and Elective Courses. Of the students responding, 7 percent accessed courses offered on the Glendon campus, 93 percent did not.

Main findings include:
- The majority of students find the selection good or only somewhat limited of General Education courses (56%), Majors courses (62%) and Elective courses (59%).
- The completion of a student's degree has been delayed (by a term or more) because of a lack of offerings of General Education courses (23%), Majors courses (31%), or Elective courses (17%).
- On one or more occasions, to fulfill the requirement in a given term, students have been unable to enrol in needed General Education courses (19%), Majors courses (27%), or Elective courses (18%)

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33 of the 198 student comments expressed concerns about
- *increasingly limited choices of courses,*
- *unscheduled outside-class requirements (e. g., group work),*
- *scheduling of exams on days/times other than scheduled course time/day.*

V.2   Student Support and Administrative Services

Student support and administrative services surveyed included:
1. Academic support services (Student and Academic Advising, Skills support, Computing, Library, Essay Tutoring)
2. Accommodation Supports (ESL, Counseling, Disability)
3. Administrative Services (Admissions, Registrar, Student Finance)
4. Ancillary Services (Parking, Transit, Bookstore, Food Services)

Main findings are:

Academic support services (Advising, Skills support, Computing, Library)

Usage—Percent of Respondents accessing the service:
    Student Advising (80%)
    Academic Advising (83%)
    Skills support (55%)
    Computing Labs (69%) and Terminal/Kiosks (55%)
    Computing Helpdesk (50%)
    Library (86%)

Accessibility—Available "always" or "sometimes" at convenient times/places or via adequate electronic alternatives to users:
    Student Advising (71%)
    Academic Advising (74%)
    Skills support (77%)
    Computing Labs (89%) and Computing Terminals/Kiosks (46%)
    Computing Helpdesk (90%)
    Library (94%)

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8 of the 198 comments suggested students would benefits from longer evening and weekend library hours.

New!
The Scott Library has recently introduced 24-5 study space from Sunday at 10am to Friday at 11pm.

Accommodation Supports (ESL, Counseling, Disability)

Usage—Percent of Respondents accessing the service:
    ESL (9%)
    Counseling (38%)
    Disability (10%)

Accessibility—Available "always" or "sometimes" at convenient times or via adequate electronic alternatives to users *(*e-alternatives negligible)*:
    ESL* (70%)
    Counseling (64%)
    Disability* (79%)

Administrative Services (Admissions, Registrar, Student Financial Services)

Usage—Percent of Respondents accessing the service:
      Admissions (69%)
      Registrar (70%)
      Student Financial Services (67%)

Accessibility—Available "always" or "sometimes" at convenient times or via adequate electronic alternatives to users:
      Admissions (76%)
      Registrar (76%)
      Student Financial Services (77%)

Ancillary Services (Parking, Transit, Bookstore, Food Services)

Usage—Percent of Respondents accessing the service:
      Parking (43%)
      Transit (62% use TTC/GO/YRT)
      Bookstore (89%)
      Food Choices (82%)

Accessibility—Available "always" or "sometimes" at convenient times or with adequate choice:
      Parking (63%)
      Transit (85%)
      Bookstore (92%)
      Food Choices (46%)

> **29 of the 198 student comments addressed the inconvenience of transit schedules on evenings and weekends.**
>
> **13 of 198 student comments addressed limited food services/choices.**

V.3   Campus Safety

Students were asked to identify the strength of their agreement or disagreement with a series of statements pertaining to Campus Safety.

"I feel the lighting on campus is satisfactory"
-   39% agreed or strongly agreed
-   44% disagreed or strongly disagreed

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43 of the 198 student comments addressed security concerns related to inadequate lighting in the evening.

"I feel comfortable on campus at night"
-   35% agreed or strongly agreed
-   44% disagreed or strongly disagreed

"I find Go Safe Services satisfactory"
-   45% did not know enough about the service to comment
-   34% who did know of the service agreed or strongly agreed with the statement
-   30% disagreed or strongly disagreed

"Snow and Ice Removal [are] satisfactory"
-   54% agreed or strongly agreed
-   24% disagreed or strongly disagreed

VI.   Current Practices
For Services available after 4:30 on the Keele campus, see Appendix F.

Atkinson Program Offices and Dean's Office	Hours of Operation
School of Administrative Studies	Monday – Thursday 9:00am – 7:30pm Friday 9am-4:30pm
School of Arts and Letters	Monday – Thursday 8:30am - 7:00pm Friday 8:30am-4:30pm
Economics	Monday – Thursday 9:00am - 6:30pm Friday 9:30am-4:30pm
School of Information Technology	Monday – Thursday 8:30am - 6:30pm Friday 8:30am-4:30pm
School of Public Policy and Administration	Monday – Thursday 9:00am - 6:30pm Friday 8:30am-4:30pm
School of Social Sciences	Monday – Thursday 8:30am - 7:00pm Friday 8:30am-4:30pm
School of Social Work	Monday – Thursday 9:00am – 7:00pm Friday 9am-4:30pm
Atkinson Dean's Office	Monday – Thursday 8:30am - 6:00pm Friday 8:30am - 5:00pm

VII. Recommendations: Enhancing York's Commitment to Supporting Evening and Weekend Education

The following recommendations are offered as a means of improving services and supports for students who are restricted to attending classes on evenings and weekends.

Notably, many of the recommendations in this report would improve and enhance the student experience for *all* of our students, not just those restricted to pursuing their education in the evening and on weekends. While some recommendations would take time and money to implement, it is not the case with all; some recommendations are easy and require only attention paid to ensuring such accessibility.

Program-Related Recommendations

1. ***Clearly identify to visitors and prospective students which degrees/programs are available to be completed through evening/weekend/on-line courses exclusively. Make explicit the expected/possible time to completion.*** The commitment should obligate units to maintain (1) an adequate set of offerings in each year, (2) an adequate rotation of courses over a pre-announced cycle, (3) a robust selection of upper-level courses and (4) program supports (counter hours, advising hours, etc) necessary to service students outside of traditional daytime hours. The portals for this Faculty-based information might best be the Atkinson Centre for Mature and Part-time Studies and the Student Home Page.

2. ***Broaden Lecture Schedule search options to include the possibility of searching by time/day of Course Offering.*** Many students, not just those with full-time, day-time responsibilities, are restricted in terms of when they can attend classes. By permitting a day/time search of the Lecture Schedule, all students will be better able to plan their semester curriculum.

3. ***Create a unique identifier for students who are restricted to evening/weekend/online studies.*** Evening students would benefit from having a unique identifier which would enable them to obtain priority enrolment in evening/weekend courses, priority to evening administrative and other appointments, receive discounted parking rates, and the like. The identifier could be similar to that utilized by part-time/full-time graduate students.

4. ***Ensure scheduled exams match day and time of day of evening and weekend courses.*** In the past, Atkinson courses included an extra class in each semester wherein the final exam for the course was held. This ensured that students would be able to attend the exam with little interruption of their non-academic schedule. By returning this practice, again matching day and time of day of the examination during the examination period to the course (e.g., Wednesday evening courses would sit a Wednesday evening examination), students would recover this important convenience.

5. ***Protect the rights of students restricted to evening/weekend-only attendance with an accommodations policy.*** Students restricted to evening/weekend only attendance should not be required to take time off work to fulfill course demands; for example, to submit assignments in person, to meet with the instructor, and so on. To ensure the greatest consistency and adherence to this fairness principle, it is recommended Senate/CCAS consider an accommodations policy that explicates this right (Appendix G suggests wording).

6. ***Encourage instructor flexibility regarding assigned work outside of scheduled class hours.*** Recognizing the difficulty for full-time working students to participate in meetings outside of scheduled class hours for group work, or other required activities, instructors should be encouraged to provide alternatives where needed.

7. ***Expand the possibilities of gaining advanced standing through Prior Learning Skills Assessment (PLA) options.*** For some mature students entering or re-entering university, extra-university experience and education may contribute to a knowledge base that may serve as a substitute for learning outcomes attained in some courses. Exploring the expansion of the PLA option would increase the ease with which mature students transition into their university program.

Service-Related Recommendation

8. ***Ensure that a full array of academic and student support services are available evenings and weekends.*** While not all services need be supplied in person, and so on-line alternatives may be adequate, there are a number of student support services that benefit students when delivered in person. Many of these services have historically been provided by Atkinson. It is essential that York continue to offer the full roster of services for all evening and weekend students. This includes the following services:

    a. Academic Advising in all Faculties with Evening/Weekend-Accessible Programs
    b. Computing Services
    c. Counselling and Supervision
    d. Education Resources
    e. Essay Tutoring
    f. Parking and Transit* Administrative Services
    g. Bookstore
    h. Library Services (Circulation, Quiet Study Space, Reference, etc)
    i. Student Client Services
    j. Student financial Services
    k. Registrarial Services
    l. Food Services
    m. Child Care

Note: While a full set of transit administrative services are available on-line and at other locations around the GTA, this is not widely known.

Environment-Related Recommendations

9. ***Improve safety of the evening Keele and Glendon campuses with (a) increased lighting, (b) increased visibility and response times of GoSafe and (c), transit departures that coordinate with class end times (for the Keele campus).*** A notable concern is the need for increased lighting on both campuses.

10. ***Improve the cleanliness of the evening/weekend campus environment.*** The campus in the evening and on weekends is much less welcoming than it is during the weekday, daytime hours. Improving the environment in these off-hours requires more lighting around walkways on both campuses and ensuring that classrooms, computer labs, washrooms, and eating areas are clean.

11. ***Integrate the mature and part-time students amongst us into our very culture.*** York magazines/newsletters, in print and online, should have a permanent mature/part-time feature. Students might be encouraged to share their experiences/stories here. Explore ways to ensure the mature student representatives are consulted and opportunities available for mature students to provide input.

12. ***Permit all students the option of directing the student levy***. Students would benefit from having the choice of where they would like their levy to go; i.e., Mature/Part-time Student Association or York Federation of Students.