

Trying the Way:
Ethnographic Glimpses of York University

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With

the Kroy Collective

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Trying the Way

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Preface

Why write an ethnography of York University, or of any university, for that matter? The initial impetus for this project was to write an ethnography to complement the history produced to celebrate the 50th anniversary of York in 2009 (Horn 2009). Underlying this intention was a concern that neither national surveys, nor Maclean's ranking of Canadian universities, nor public relations branding campaigns could capture the essence of York culture or counter anti-York writing in the media. York was not well served by these approaches, and we thought that an ethnography might do better. In the public media, universities are often targets of anti-intellectual rants; but criticism of universities often comes from people who are not familiar with the complexity of university cultures. We thought that as anthropologists, we should be able to capture and communicate that complexity.

This ethnography emerged initially from a fourth year seminar course in anthropology called Practicing Ethnography, where class members learned ethnographic practice by observing their campus. Some of those class members remained involved after the course ended and became members of the Kroy Collective. The project expanded organically with observations and feedback from a number of student and faculty members in the York community. It took shape in the year before York's 50th anniversary when some interesting soul-searching took place, particularly among older retired faculty members. The project was delayed for a number of reasons. Promised funding for research assistance and printing the ethnography project from the 50th anniversary budget did not materialize. The strike of 2008-9 delayed fieldwork and dampened enthusiasm, as informants were uninterested in talking positively about the university. Finally, the first author faced some health problems that delayed completion of the project, and the second author produced a dissertation and a daughter that competed for her time.

An ethnography is a written description and analysis of a community in a particular time and place, as observed by one or more ethnographers, with a goal of communicating about that community

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to others. Ideally an ethnography is based on long term engagement with the community in question. The first hand experiences and observations of ethnographers, often in the form of fieldnotes, are augmented by additional contextual materials. Contextual material included campus newspapers, particularly Excalibur, York's student newspaper since 1966.

Unlike most ethnographies, there was not much comparative material available. While there are many ethnographies of institutions such as hospitals, clinics, retirement homes, and even public schools (cf. Yon 2003), there have been few ethnographies of universities. Exceptions include Becker's et al. 1968 study of University of Kansas, Moffatt's 1989 study of Rutgers University, and Nathan's *My Freshman Year* (2006).

To our knowledge, this is the first ethnography of a Canadian university. It is not *the* definitive ethnography of York; it is simply the first of a possible set of ethnographies of York University. More ethnographies need to be written from other entry points—hockey or chemistry, Glendon or international business. Ethnographies are always partial, always selective, and they carry the biases of their observers with them.

Since this ethnography is written in English and printed at York, it will no doubt be read by York faculty and students. That is a terrifying thought, not for ethical reasons but because there will be disagreements with interpretation and coverage. Knowing that ethnographies are always partial does not help when people express disappointment that Schulich School of Business or Osgoode Law School or the football team is not adequately covered. Ethnographic research presents other dangers; there is risk to exposing the foibles of campus culture; in particular, stories about campus high-jinks may feed into images of the excesses and frivolity of university life. But campus culture provides one additional lens into the workings of the university, a glimpse into an enterprise that is about more than knowledge production as a means to an end, to a job.

Trying the Way might be considered an institutional ethnography—the

ethnography of a specific institution, rather than Institutional Ethnography as a specific sociological method developed by Dorothy Smith (2005) which includes how documents and people's activities, including relations of ruling are co-ordinated in everyday life. Generally ethnographies are not based on survey data, although a recent study of Rutgers University library based on surveys calls itself an ethnographic project (White 2009). This ethnography is more qualitative than quantitative, more exploratory than systematic. Future ethnographies may choose to change this and work more directly with survey data and statistics. The questions we posed changed over time, just as York constantly changes. For example, the changes in the structure of both Vari Hall, with the addition of the information kiosk, and Scott Library, with the rearrangement of study space, occurred mid-writing.

Ethnographers usually travel to another place, leaving home to encounter and make sense of different ways of life. We used the term *kroy* to reinforce the difference between being at York and making ethnographic observations of kroy. As Miner found for the Nacirema (1965), spelling American backwards helped to make the familiar strange enough to begin to observe from a fresh perspective. Students, staff, faculty and members of the York community had to turn home into other in order to see some of the situations that we do not usually attend to at York and to recognize patterns that provide clues to meaning. This shift in perspective is a necessary part of doing ethnographic research at home.

How was the ethnography carried out? Here we provide details about authorship, ethics and methods.

Authorship: Penny Van Esterik conceived of the project, developed a course, Practicing Ethnography, to test out the idea, and did much of the initial writing. When the 50th anniversary committee agreed to fund a GA, Laurie Baker came on board and remained long after the funding ran out, writing, reviewing, editing and overseeing the technical side of document production. We use a plural voice throughout, except when we add our initials to footnotes to indicate our personal experiences.

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The Kroy Collective is a group of students who contributed substantially to the research and came to workshops/meetings to brainstorm about the ethnography. The collective members acted as a focus group, bringing observations and questions to workshop-like settings, and exchanging information. Some members provided written reflections about an event; others critiqued outlines and early drafts of written pieces. Collective members attended open meetings on campus life, planning exercises, and political protests. Some came only for a short time; some stayed to the bitter end. RAY (Research at York) funded Jeff Cook and Monica Silva to do more extensive research in the summers. Some collective members moved away from York and were able to provide an insider–outsider perspective. Other outsiders like Richard O’Connor from the University of the South, Tennessee, brought a comparative perspective to the collective because he was engaged in a similar project at his university; his visits to York were valuable because of the contrasts he noted between the small, more than a century old liberal arts college where he teaches in rural Tennessee and the huge, relatively young multicultural York.

Ethics: Ethics approval was obtained in several stages. First, the whole project was reviewed and approved, including an informed consent form. At several stages in the fieldwork, additional clarification or ethics approval was sought for a specific piece (e.g. for a short survey on graduation, or for use of photographs). Separate approval was obtained for research conducted as part of classes. Several classes participated to the ethnographic work, including Practicing Ethnography, Science as Practice and Culture, Nutritional Anthropology, Public Anthropology and the Anthropology of Space and Place. Students whose research work we wanted to quote were given an additional permissions form where they chose whether they wanted to be cited using their real names or a pseudonym. In some cases, group work by students made it difficult to attribute an idea to a single named student. In these cases, the citation refers to the collective work done in classes. Student research papers in the course, Practicing Ethnography informed the initial organization of the ethnography. When all else failed, we each carried a letter from the former Dean of Arts, Robert Drummond, attesting to the legitimacy

of our activities if questioned by community members. (For example, when a faculty member or a fourth year student turned up at a freshman orientation event.)

Training in anthropology does not always prepare us for the messiness of the field. This often concerned ethical dilemmas common to ethnographic fieldwork. The informed consent form indicated that all informants would be anonymous and given a pseudonym. This was a problem when staff and students wanted their real names used and wanted their opinions to be “on the record”. Others specified what we could and could not use or quote. We decided not to use anything that we felt could harm an individual or group. We are aware that this intention to do no harm is impossible to guarantee.

Methods: Ethnographic methods began with an open-ended immersion in the daily life of the institution, involving continuous reflexive participant observation of what was going on around us. Geertz (1998) and others call this method of immersing oneself in on going activities at an informal level, deep hanging out. It was a source of insight into the university and a way to generate new questions. We also carried out key informant interviewing of student leaders, and staff, many of whom used to be York students.

We conducted archival research in York’s library collection and Carole Carpenter’s collection, Yorklore, in addition to secondary literature review. Because of the 50th anniversary, there were many written collections and oral recollections from York members and departments, including the music department, geography department and York retirees. Excalibur acted as a regular archival source¹ reflecting student concerns on campus and reactions to campus events. Margaret Crichlow Rodman donated her fieldnotes from her research on Vari Hall conducted with her students in the Anthropology of Space and Place.

Some extensive thesis research projects were referenced in the

¹ Due to difficulties accessing online archives, dates rather than authors are provided for news reported in Excalibur.

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ethnography; for example, the ethnography of the library by Amanda Wakaruk (2009) could stand alone, as well as the thesis research on Vari Hall by Clare O'Connor (2009). Some life stories were pressed upon us, and we used their insights where we could. Collective members did on the spot interviewing during scheduled and unscheduled events. The direct quotes used in the text are from interviews or written submissions from students and Kroy Collective members. Event analysis during graduation, multicultural week, strikes and protests included participant observation, focus groups, textual analysis of reports following the events, and photography. Where appropriate, we carried out small surveys; for example, during graduation ceremonies or to understand the academic paper-writing process.

A 24 hour observation and photographic scan of Vari Hall was accomplished in segments, with two collective members observing and photographing the space throughout the night. From the beginning of the project, images and photographs were considered an integral part of the ethnographic description. Beginning with the framing cover images, we selected photographs to illustrate ethnographic descriptions, as an aide-memoire rather than an independent research tool such as photo-elicitation. Photographs were taken by collective members, with particular assistance from Kaila Simoneau whose interest and expertise in visual anthropology was invaluable.

We made use of York statistics where appropriate, but although we began the work of designing a survey instrument with the Office of Institutional Research and Analysis at York, we decided not to use survey methodology since there are other sources of official and unofficial statistical information available to the public, most notably, the publications of ISR (Institute for Social Research). Future ethnographies may want to make more use of this material. However, we do not consider that the numbers reveal any more about York culture than the stories. In short, we brought to this informal multi-sited ethnography the curiosity of anthropologists, informed by theoretical work in the discipline.

Certain conceptual tools guided the theoretical underpinnings of the

ethnography. The idea of positionality in this ethnography is both personal and collective, as we formed collective opinions on what York was about and shared our experiences. Below we explain individually where we position ourselves in relation to the university.

Penny Van Esterik: I have had a long association with York University. My father, a retired high school chemistry teacher, helped set up the natural science experiments at Glendon and later at York in the early 60s. I used to do my highschool homework at the back of the science labs at Glendon. John and I were married at Trinity College, University of Toronto and had our reception in York Hall at Glendon. In 1984 I joined the Anthropology department at York, and progressed through the ranks. I have studied or taught at many other universities, including the University of Toronto, University of Illinois, University of Notre Dame, and Cornell University. Illinois and Cornell were both part of the land grant college systems in the United States. As a CUSO volunteer, I taught at Thammasat and Silpakorn Universities in Bangkok, Thailand. My later research and academic linkages have taken me to the National University of Laos, LPDR, as well as sabbatical visits to Berkeley, Arizona State, University of the South, University of Hawaii at Hilo and Kyoto University. I cannot help but compare York to the other institutions I have been associated with, although I have rarely made the comparisons explicit (except, for example, Van Esterik 2004, 2006).

Laurie Baker: I started visiting York long before I was ever a student. My first visit to York, after attending my mother's convocation in-utero, was as a child. A close and lucid memory is the cavernous hall leading to Scott Library. The musty smell of the books and the sheer expansive space of the library still resonates with me each time I enter Scott. Jump ahead more than fifteen years and I began an undergraduate honours degree in anthropology at York. Finished in three years, I left to work and travel before going to the University of Western Ontario to complete a Masters in anthropology. After completing that degree and taking some time off, I came back to York to pursue a PhD in anthropology. Life has intervened throughout my PhD, as one would expect it to. Now married, with a two-year-old

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daughter and another on the way, this book has been a fixture throughout my degree. My daughter has made many trips to York with me, attending Lee Wiggins Childcare Centre for nearly a year. My involvement with York has been a long-standing family affair. I have also been a teaching assistant during my tenure as a PhD student and have now seen students I taught in their first year enter the Master's Program. It is from this perspective, having been a student, graduate student and teaching assistant that I have contributed to this ethnography.

The starting point for this ethnography is the second floor of Vari Hall, the home of the department of anthropology. The Arts bias is justified by the fact that the Faculty of Liberal Arts and Professional Studies (LAPS) is a faculty that is bigger than many universities in Canada. The ethnography is not authorized or approved by the University or the department of anthropology although it began in the anthropology department. Individual faculty members supported us, but many faculty and graduate students in anthropology would likely challenge our ethnographic authority; others would challenge the authority of ethnography itself in contemporary anthropology. Others questioned our sanity in attempting to write an ethnography of York, seeing it as a waste of time or downright dangerous. Nevertheless, many of the observations and questions began in the departmental halls and offices. From this base, we moved into many but not all possible niches at York, revealing some, concealing others for personal, ethical or academic reasons.

Ethnographic work constantly blurred boundaries between doing fieldwork at York and leading our academic and much of our social lives at York. The distinction between self as professional researcher and personal self could only be maintained by applying artificial criteria; when we were carrying our kroy notebooks, we were conscious of being anthropologists in the field; without them, we were just working—teaching, studying, and doing related university duties. We were all involved in the everyday routines of teaching and studying at York, as well as embedded in ethnographic observations. Thus the boundaries between everyday life and fieldwork were blurred and

overlapping, as they often are in ethnographic encounters.

Fieldwork began officially when we received ethics clearance and started taking notes. But we could never erase what came before—strikes, student encounters, classes, faculty meetings. Fieldwork at home never really starts or ends; hall conversations, unexpected events, new articles in *Excalibur* provided opportunities for correcting mistakes and clarifying positions.

We found ourselves attracted to the staging of events at York. Complexity was easiest to observe when others framed the event for us, as in graduation ceremonies or Multicultural Week events. Planning meetings for the 50th anniversary provided an opportunity to pitch the idea of a York ethnography to administrators with little familiarity with the genre. Their questions and suggestions were very useful for framing the work.

Ethnographies are never value neutral and have the potential to do damage to reputations and representations. Ethnographers expose the intimacies of everyday life, but they also try to give a sympathetic reading to that life. Even a sympathetic reading of York exposes what was never meant to be seen in public, what should stay in the house. Michael Herzfeld refers to this as cultural intimacy (1997).

Structure: We could have looked at York from many different perspectives—by faculty or department, by season, through the academic career from orientation to graduation, or through residence life. The structure emerged slowly as observations accumulated, with the initial distinction between academic culture and campus culture among the first to emerge.

The book is divided into four parts; each part opens with photographs that illustrate the textual argument along with a description of an event like graduation or a situation such as a protest, described from multiple participatory perspectives whenever possible.

Part One provides an overview of the ecology of York, locating the institution in time and space and showing how community develops in

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the niches and watering holes around the landscape of York. Part Two places more emphasis on the intellectual work of the university, and the formal sanctioned structures that facilitate knowledge production in places like classrooms, laboratories, studios and libraries. It tries to uncover some of the meaning of intellectual work from a student perspective. Part Three places this intellectual work in the broader context of student lives, acknowledging the more bodily based experiences that permeate the hallowed halls of learning where stomachs growl and eyes connect across seminar tables. Here the themes of minds and bodies at play and at work intertwine. Part Four returns to the ecology frame, stressing how York relates to wider communities, near and far. The networks and interconnections drawing York outward make explicit how cosmopolitan values emerging from classrooms often take students into social action. The four parts are all interconnected; they are separated for purposes of analysis in order to look for patterns and meanings that reveal something of York culture.

As the ethnography took shape it became clear that the organization built on and blurred some interesting and relevant binaries—body and mind, inside and outside, for example. We often found ourselves locked into inappropriate body-mind dualism, when in fact minds and bodies are drawn into all practices. Consider the contrast between the intellectual work of the university stressed in part two, and the more bodily based student experiences on campus discussed in part three, more related to play than intellectual work. Work and play, minds and bodies are integrated within the everyday experiences of life at York. An additional contrast in parts one and four echoes the town and gown distinction that exists in many American college towns. At York, being engaged inside the university often means being engaged outside York as well.

The theoretical tension around binaries reflects a number of other unspoken tensions about York—tensions between the radical progressive potential inherent in much of the cutting edge research and action of faculty and students on social justice issues, and the administration's efforts to administer a campus that has grown too

large, too complex, too difficult to control. Our tensions between the desire to participate in the celebratory moment of York's fiftieth anniversary, and showcase what is unique about York, the successes that are missed by its many critics, and even its authorized histories, and the critical reflection that sees only what needs to be changed in order for York to reach its full potential. All this overlaid by the tensions created by financial constraints that speed up the corporatization of the university, pushing the university in dangerous directions, and the bodily suffering of those waiting in long lines for buses on cold days.

From the perspective of these varied tensions, this ethnographic snapshot of York may seem too superficial, too ready to take what is seen and heard at face value. While we did want to present a more sympathetic view of York, we struggled with the cynicism of the glass half empty vs. the idealism of the glass half full, and tilted towards the potential of the half full glass. Perhaps critical scholars at York are not good at celebrating what is good about the school. For example, the many accounts of the chilly climate for women at York downplay how comfortably ahead of other schools York has always been on gender issues. And anti-racist rhetoric at protest rallies sometimes neglects to recognize the efforts York has made over the last decades, and continues to make towards eliminating racism. We hope that this ethnographic glimpse into York will contribute to the ongoing work of understanding York culture and reclaiming the public image and personality of the university.

Acknowledgements

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The Kroy Collective members include Jeff Cook, Robert Ferguson,

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Monica Silva, Kaila Simoneau, Ines Taccone, Amanda Wakaruk, Sebastian Campos, Stephanie Morano, Flavia Geno, Ariela Fuerstenberg, Michela Lockhart, Elizabeth de Campenhaut and Jillian Ollivierre. Their work, along with the insights of unnamed students who offered on the spot observations on York culture shaped this ethnography. The graduate students in anthropology were supportive and helpful in many ways, with particular thanks to Lynette Fischer, Cathie Sutton, and Ravindra Nandlall. Daniel Feranda, Faarah Ibrahim and Nancy Fraser acted as graduate research assistants at various times during the project.

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Penny writes: Thanks to John, husband and fellow anthropologist, for his special support through some difficult years, and for helping me get back on the horse to finish this project. His years of observations at York are reflected throughout the manuscript and also informed his editing and proofing assistance.

Laurie writes: Innumerable thanks go to my husband Kevin who has been steadfast and resolute in his support for this manuscript (and all my projects on-the-go). His encouragement and friendship makes all things possible. Thanks must also go to all the close family members who donated childcare and offered gracious support and encouragement throughout. And finally, though never lastly, my girls: little lights full of energy (even in utero), that remind me that even finishing books and PhDs cannot equate to the value of play.

Part One: The Ecology of York





...kernels to think on...
York's 50th Birthday, Vari Hall



...eye of the storm...
Meditation sit-in, Vari Hall



...bearing it all...
Underwear run for SickKids, Vari Hall



...trashing York...
The Garbage Project, Vari Hall



...frosh week...

York University, Keele Campus

Event 1: A Day in the Life of Vari Hall

The sun comes up over the gas storage tanks on Keele Street. Its rays reflect off the glass and wood walls of Vari Hall. Sounds echo off the walls, as students with backpacks begin to criss-cross the open space, most moving from the outside of the building to the space joining Vari Hall and the Ross Building.

7:00 a.m.

Around this time, students and staff begin delivering clear bags of mixed garbage from different locations on campus and dumping them out in a barricaded space. The organizer of the event, a graduate student from the Faculty of Environmental Studies explains that the worst part about garbage at York is that it is all hidden—out of sight, out of mind. The purpose of his installation piece and performance art was to bring the garbage more fully into our view. He explains, “Our garbage is part of us; we created it and we hide it away.” Students walk past the installation, “grossed out” by the sight of what they discard every day. Some students ask him what it is and why he is doing this. Other students do not want to see their trash. Many do not get the point or the importance of the point being made. A mature student walks past and mumbles, “The young just don’t get it.”

Many of the student observations concern food.

Most of my garbage is food; most of my food is garbage.

We need to eat less packaged and processed foods so that we can compost everything.

There needs to be better composting facilities on campus; the composters are too hidden; they should be bright green with big signs; who takes care of them?

Observers were disgusted by the food waste in the garbage pile. One

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of the volunteers who cleans up the garbage at the end of the day is shocked by how much food was thrown out, including uneaten oranges and full bottles of water. Passing students grumble that they already know the effects of their waste and the environmentally sound options for reducing waste, but they struggle between convenient choices and environmentally conscious decisions. Others complain that they were being targeted and judged for their poor practices. After several hours of conversation with passing students and faculty, the volunteers re-bag and sort the garbage to the appropriate containers.

Next to the inner wall of Vari Hall, another student demonstrates worm composting in a box on a table. Students comment as they looked at the worms:

Why would I use a worm composter rather than the city's green garbage collection?

Great use of space—draws on the activist roots, the nature of York University.

There's always something going on in Vari. Can't I just go to class?

A nearby security guard says, "It is good to see Vari Hall used for a non-confrontational purpose. Vari Hall is a negative space, used for negative purposes. This is a nice change."

11:00 a.m.

A group of Pakistani students sets up a booth and paints henna designs on students' hands, most not from Pakistan.

12:00 noon

Living out Loud, a student group based out of McMaster University, offers free spiritual readings for students and hopes to become a registered club at York. Advertised as the new "supernatural signs and wonders club on campus," its booths in Vari Hall attract long lines stretching from the middle of the hall to the Ross Building. The

students wait patiently for their spiritual readings to be done in private booths. A spokesperson assures students that despite most readings being done through the devil, these ones are done through Jesus. Two faculty members, each showing visible signs of disease (tremors and a bald head), are approached by group members who ask permission to pray over them. Their offers are respectfully declined.

Close by, costumed marketers promote Booster Juice.

1:00 p.m.

Members of Vanier College Productions (VCP) quietly line the upper balconies of Vari Hall and sing an invitation to their upcoming performance.

2:00 p.m.²

Nine students spread blankets and pillows in the middle of Vari Hall. They sit quietly in meditative poses, eyes closed, hands resting lightly on their knees. Students pass the group, rushing to classes. Some stop and sit with the students for a few minutes; some ask what they are protesting, and why. After half an hour, an outsider spontaneously joins the group and initiates a children's game of duck, duck, goose to disrupt the meditators. The interruption is tolerated by the meditators who eventually join in the game. As the game winds down, the meditators explain to the outsider what they are doing and why. An observer acknowledges the skill of the student mediator who "turned things around" and made the game player understand what was going on. "We wanted to see how things played out," the meditating students explained.

At the other end of the hall, a group of students from the Tamil Students' Association hold a protest. A student sanctuary mediator explains:

² The student sanctuary sittings were first described and analyzed by Robert Ferguson in a course paper entitled "Campus Friction" (2009), augmented by additional observations and interviews by collective members.

Part One: The Ecology of York

It was actually the first or second time that we did student sanctuary and the Tamil Student's Association, I think it was, was also having a protest of the angry, shouting type and I think people have the right to . . . voice their opinions about injustices in the world, but I don't know if angry shouting is the way to go about it necessarily. There is definitely injustice in the world and definitely things should be done about it and it's so important to take action but this is kind of an alternative way to think about how people react. So basically, we came to meditate and we had no idea that that event was going to be happening at the same time [as] the Tamil Student's Association protest, and we're sitting here in the middle of Vari Hall and there's youth cheerleaders on one side of Vari Hall and these people shouting through speakerphones on the other side and we're just kind of like the eye of the storm sitting there meditating in the middle of all the noise. (Ferguson 2009:13)

In spite of their meditative calmness, one member of the sanctuary describes the event as a highly social experience being in the middle of all the action:

A couple times when we were going to set up, another member from the club was like "are you sure? Right in the middle? Maybe we should do it off to the side where we won't be in people's way" and I said "no, people walk through here everyday apathetically, we need to get in their way, we need to make them stop and question and we're not trying to be hostile, rude or in people's faces. That's why we are just sitting quietly meditating yet making such a big impact at the same time . . . We did call [the event] Student Sanctuary, not that other members of the student community couldn't join us but it tends to be students who are willing to come and sit down to hang with us. I have yet to see a professor or a staff-member from the university start painting with us. Sometimes they walk by and yeah . . . I've never seen a prof come and take their shoes off and sit

with us, so it is pretty much directed towards the students. Yeah, because the students were the ones, I felt, were most affected by the protest since it was something at the student level. (Ferguson 2009:16)

In one corner, several students skillfully kick a beanbag around in a circle. The hacky sack game attracts an appreciative audience. The light on the underside of the stairs is particularly good for reading. Serious students spread out their work in these cozy corners.

3:00 p.m.

Students participate in a recycling contest to see how fast and accurately they can sort 40 items from a bag into the correct garbage and recycling bins. Many students mistakenly place aluminum foil in with bottles and cans; many also do not know that batteries can be recycled at drop-off points around campus.

4:00 p.m.

A Baroque Orchestra plays in Vari Hall.³ Students stand around listening or sit on the floor.

Voting for student government proceeds near the windows at the edge of the hall.

Throughout the day, students walk through the hall with cups of coffee in their hands, cell phones to their ears, or they have their eyes down, texting, walking into people, ignoring the action in the rotunda. Some walk around the outside of the rotunda to avoid booths and activities in the inner circle.

4:30 p.m.

It's York's birthday! York celebrates its 51st birthday on March 26, 2010. Members of the York Federation of Students (YFS) are handing

³ I wonder if this is the administration's attempt to re-inscribe the space with "appropriate" use, with sounds that are not classed as "disruptive." (LB)

Part One: The Ecology of York

out popcorn, as the students pass through the hall between classes. Students ignore the displays on the history of York, but by 4:30 p.m., the line for popcorn grows dramatically, filling the centre of the hall.

5:00 p.m.

Gathered around a boom box in the corner, the Unity dance group practices for a break dancing competition at local high schools. The group brings messages of non-violence and anti-gang strategies through competitive dance contests. Meanwhile, another group of students have organized an awareness campaign at the other end of the hall to “End Violence Against Aboriginal Women!”

10:30 p.m.

Five students unpack and plug in their electric guitars. Backs against the wooden walls, they begin playing together.

11:00 p.m.

“Hey, there are guys in their underwear down there!” Collective members, notebooks and cameras in hand, descend into Vari Hall where a number of students dressed in their underwear prepare to run through the university. Modelled after a similar run at UCLA (University of California, Los Angeles), the students want to create a comparable event to support a local Toronto charity. The event is advertised on Facebook. Friends and friends of friends come out to support the event. With ribbons and banners trailing, the participants begin the trek through the Ross Building to raise money from student donations.

12:00 midnight

A late night drum circle assembles and begins to play in the almost empty hall.

3:00 a.m.

By this time, Vari Hall is finally quiet. An eerie light from the

fluorescent security lights shines down on the cleaners who come through to sweep the floors.

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What does this scan of events in Vari Hall say about York? The time scan of Vari Hall barely captures the range of activities that take place over 24 hours in this space, and every day is different. What else happens in the hall? Events like: student recruitment, donor courting, protests, and performance art. The space is hard to control and discipline and different vantage points hint at different truths. Look up and you will see banners hanging from the balconies to advertise, celebrate and protest the events of the day.

Composed of brick, maple, mahogany, glass and limestone, Vari Hall is one of the most aesthetically pleasing places in the university. Named after its donors George and Helen Vari, Vari Hall was built around the same time as the Student Centre and York Lanes, and it opened in 1992. Vari Hall served as a “facelift” for the Ross building and a door to the university.⁴

Vari Hall is but one of the places where the culture of York is created and performed, day in and day out, throughout the school year. As a visible and productive place of cultural creation, Vari Hall is a natural place to meet people and exchange ideas. York University reinvents itself every year, just as Vari Hall reinvents itself every day. It is the place where York University talks to itself and about itself to others. Every new incoming class sees Vari Hall through fresh eyes. High school tours find particular pleasure in Vari, as several high school students explained on a tour of the university, “Vari is what we expected to see in a university.” They shout up to hear their voices return as echoes, unconcerned about whether anyone is listening.

Vari Hall contains classrooms where professors control the flow of conversation and the rotunda where students control the conversation.

⁴ George fled Hungary following the Hungarian revolution in 1956 and made his fortune in construction.

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Student groups may use the rotunda for sanctioned activities by applying for a Temporary Use of University Space permit (TUUS) for events such as tabling. After briefly withdrawing this right in 2003, the university returned the right to students in 2006, suggesting that more tabling by student groups might encourage the civil exchange of ideas. Student clubs try to respond quickly to crises, such as fundraising for Haitian earthquake relief, tabling information and requesting donations. The TUUS process responds to tabling requests from students around ten days before the planned event.

Students and other individuals can get swept up in the action in the rotunda as they walk through the space. Marketers and meditators are in the same space at the same time. Politically and ideologically odd juxtapositions jostle up against one another, usually creating not conflicts, but opportunities for intercultural connections.

Students seem more comfortable in Vari Hall than faculty or administrators who move quickly through the space lest they get buttonholed as they pass through.⁵ Activities are ephemeral. Students move in and out of Vari on their way to classes. Clubs set up and dismantle tables throughout the day. Even protests have no great staying power, since classes begin and end and students become preoccupied with assignments and exams. The 24 hour sweep of Vari shows a constantly shifting scene. Even photographs catch only a few moments of a rapidly changing landscape. Above Vari, a video camera keeps a constant watch over a space under permanent surveillance.⁶

⁵ I recall sauntering through Vari Hall one day, thinking about how to approach the dean about my medical leave, when I physically bumped into him. I explained my situation to him at that moment and received an informal email from him within the hour that referred to our chance meeting. Consequently, I was able to bypass many formal steps needed to explain what was easily and casually explained in person. (PVE)

⁶ In 2006, an art installation was created by taping a large red X onto the floor beneath the surveillance camera in Vari Hall and included instructions to “look up.”

Paths, Niches and Boundaries

Ecology is the study of the social and physical habitats where living beings endeavour to live well together (cf. Code 2006:25). Ecology encompasses humans, other life forms and their natural and physical environments.⁷ Why use the concept of ecology as a way to introduce York? Ecology draws attention to and raises questions about the relation between people and their environments; it engages ideas about habitats, habitus, and co-habitability. It examines how a population shapes and is shaped by its surroundings, emphasizing the economies and efficiencies of resource use. However, emphasis on the economic benefits of difference and biodiversity can easily depoliticize differences and hollowly echo the university's pride in a community that, for the most part, "lives well together." Clearly, the ecology of York reveals tensions and complexities that need to be unpacked in future ethnographies. For example, Glendon, Schulich School of Business and Osgoode Hall Law School could all be the subject of stand-alone ethnographies within the broader York campus. In Part One, the ecology of York will be examined from the inside, while in Part Four, the ecology will be focused on the broader community outside York's boundaries, ecology looking out.

Ecology involves analyzing corridors and paths that allow different populations to mix in common spaces, at common water holes. Vari Hall acts as one such water hole, a natural meeting place at one of the major crossroads on campus. Some come to the water hole to connect; others briskly walk by to avoid being caught at the water hole. Similar common spaces include Scott Library, York Lanes and Tait McKenzie Centre. Unfortunately, the corridors and paths connecting various campus niches do not lead to enough common spaces where people can meet and create new possibilities. York

⁷ We leave the task to other ethnographers to examine other aspects of the natural environment, such as the native plant garden developed by the Faculty of Environmental Studies and the Canada geese that swarm the campus. Generally, student engagement with non-human life is fleeting on campus. Students share the York environment with plants and animals, such as squirrels, deer, hares, groundhogs, muskrats, raccoons and foxes.

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University needs more water holes.

The ecology of York University includes its boundaries, its niches, its private places and its public spaces. From a resource perspective, York is constantly described as resource poor but abundant in social capital. That makes people at York the quintessential bricoleurs, individuals who have to do more with less. As the population of York expanded from the originally planned 15,000 students, the institution had to adapt to the new population environment, destroying other kinds of environments, such as woodlots and wetlands, in the process (cf. Herridge 2013), while creating new ones.

York has added a considerable amount of public art to the campus environment. Le Roy's rainbow piece sits in a reflecting pool on the south side of the Scott library, where students can view it through the windows as they go up and down the escalators. Jocelyne Alloucherie's sculpture, "Noire, Solaire, Basse" was created specifically for the space between Vari Hall and the Behavioural Science Building. Students misuse it by sitting on the concrete and granite slabs, dropping cigarette butts into the crushed limestone base. Students appreciate some of the sculptures: "I like the orange thing in front of NHES, but I don't know what it means", explained one student standing in front of Mark Di Suvero's "Sticky Wicket", constructed at York in 1978 from industrial materials. It is easy to miss George Rickey's "Four Squares in a Square" on the terrace of the second level of the Ross Building. This piece of kinetic art captures the changing weather—winds add unpredictability to the movement of the piece, while the panels reflect changing cloud patterns.⁸

How can we consider the sustainability of the campus as an institution over time or understand the ecology of a place that is gradually changing its physical appearance and annually reinventing itself, as it shapes and is shaped by each new generation of students? There is a

⁸ Thanks to Allyson Adley, Collection/Education assistant at the Art Gallery of York University for taking me on a sculpture tour of campus. (PVE) See also the booklet, *York University Sculpture Collection* available at the Art Gallery.

critical and enduring tension between the permanent people—the staff and faculty—and the temporary cohort of students who study at York. Some students stay only a year, but many spread their studies over a decade or more.⁹

York's Student Housing Services sees this transformation in its most elemental form when staff clean and remove the traces of one set of residence students over the summer in preparation for a new cycle of students. Using posters and other personal items, residence students work hard to inscribe themselves onto their accommodations. Staff and managers work equally hard to erase traces of these inscriptions. Housing services recently collaborated with waste management to recycle unwanted items such as books, clothes, electronics and household objects that residence students had used to create their new home at York.

From outside York, and even when inside, it is hard to locate all the paths and niches that make up York. A community of over 60,000 people is not built on face-to-face personal relations but rather on the relation between habitats and niches, with complex paths leading into these niches. With thousands of personal and structured niches on

⁹ In some ways, each incoming class is like an age set, a group of people close in age who experience similar events, such as initiation, and identify themselves as members of a group throughout their life. These social groupings were common in pastoral societies. In the university context, the class of 1968 might have shared a group identity, but the class of 2009 is unlikely to share one.

In some parts of the world—for example, Thailand—a graduating class acts as a corporate group sharing an identity and undertaking joint actions. Orientation at York attempts to develop some form of identity with the university, but, at best, only succeeds at creating identification with a college. Since participation in orientation activities is voluntary, it is difficult to create group identity, and, in particular, commuter students may identify more with their future major than with their college. Even events like graduation do not draw students together in age sets because not all students graduate at the same time. At York's graduation ceremony in 2009, a student mentioned that she had not seen the person standing ahead of her in line since orientation.

campus, only a few will be mentioned here.¹⁰

Not all the niches and paths are created by the university administration. York is full of examples of ongoing re-appropriation of space, with Vari Hall being the prime example. Walking across the campus, some inhabitants choose to follow and create the vernacular paths that criss-cross the lawns rather than the cement paths laid out to facilitate foot traffic.¹¹ These everyday practices of lived space include the intertwined paths and niches that make up the university. These paths probably lead to the most habitable places at York. These may include home departments, college residences, squash courts, dance studios or the theatres. Some students may feel at home in the Hillel office or Excalibur office. Other students may gravitate to the consumerism of York Lanes or the quiet of the library. Memories formed at York tie students to particular places on campus (cf. de Certeau 1984:108).

Boundaries: The Past Beneath

The past is an invisible space beneath York University. York's official history honours the Stong family who were United Empire Loyalists of German descent from Pennsylvania. For more than 100 years, they farmed the land that York was built on. Evidence of their pioneer presence exists in the remnants of the woodlots, hedgerows and orchards on campus.

Recently, York community members have also acknowledged the aboriginal history of the place that the university now occupies—a past nearly erased by the pioneer history. Aboriginal history records

¹⁰ Often the most interesting niches are not visible to the ethnographer. An ethnography can only explore a limited number of niches.

¹¹ The vernacular paths are the natural paths made by people avoiding the formal cement paths. De Certeau notes the “contradiction between the collective mode of administration and the individual mode of re-appropriation” (1984:96). It would be interesting to examine the development of the vernacular and the formal paths at York and the relation between the two.

that Haudenesonee First Nations peoples were replaced by Anishnaabe, long before the Stong family settled on the site. The Parson's site at Keele and Finch, partially excavated and analyzed in the 50s, 70s and 90s by different classes of students from University of Toronto, tells a different, more complex story of late Iroquoian occupation. In the 1400s, well-fortified cosmopolitan villages of different peoples including Neutral, St. Lawrence Iroquoian and people who were later known as Huron occupied the site (Robertson and Williamson 1998, Williamson, Cooper and Robertson 1998). Long after the Huron moved out of the area, the site was re-occupied by Iroquoian groups, including the Mohawk. By the 1600s, the aboriginal history of the landscape was enmeshed in the colonial struggles of the French and English, who also brought diseases that decimated many communities.¹² Later the Anishnaabe replaced the Mohawk. More recently, the aboriginal rights to the land reside in the land claims of the Mississaugas of the New Credit Valley First Nations, whose lands were not fairly ceded by the Toronto Purchase in 1787 (Freeman 2010).

The subway being constructed at York may well have demolished all potential evidence of contact and pre-contact settlement around Keele and Finch. The circle for sacred fire recently built on campus for aboriginal students and other students to use symbolically recognizes the indigenous past, with connections made to the Anishnaabe, the most recent aboriginal occupants of the land. But even that connection erases the complex colonial and pre-colonial history of earlier occupants of the land.

In the early 1960s, York University built a sewer shed that violated the natural drainage pattern on campus. The area's rivers all drained southward into Lake Ontario. However, the university's concrete

¹² I am grateful to Kathryn Denning who reminded me of the complexities and ironies of Huron history, and the ethical questions about when to be quiet about the past and who gets to tell stories about the past. In my first and second year archeology courses at University of Toronto, I sorted and catalogued some of the pottery from Parson's and other Black Creek sites, with little knowledge about the location of these sites or the people who made the pottery. (PVE)

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sewers now drain into Hoover and Black Creeks rather than eastward into the Don River watershed. Black Creek's 15 tributary streams were buried and turned into stormwater tunnels that continue to influence water flow around campus today. Stong Pond is a stormwater retention pond built to prevent flooding, but it is too small to handle all the water flowing through campus. The paving over of streams and creeks may have contributed to the 2005 flooding on Finch, following a hurricane (Sandberg 2009).

Also out-of-sight but under our feet are tunnels for water, sewage, steam and pedestrian use. Most of these tunnels are dangerous places, filled with heat, pipes, wires and foul odours. The graffiti-encrusted pedestrian tunnels connecting the York buildings are now closed to pedestrians, but are still accessed by staff and curious students. Some of the graffiti that illustrate this ethnography were accessed from the tunnel (with permission).¹³

It is ironic that so many histories of York exist when supposedly there can be no deep sense of history in an institution that is only 55 years old. During the university's 50th anniversary year, much attention was paid to York's roots, as groups recalled how their personal pasts intersected with the institution's past. There are several official and unofficial histories of York, each aiming to "correct the record" from the unique perspectives of deans, presidents or university historians (Saywell 2008, Ross 1992, Horn 2009).

At York, there is no feeling of studying in spaces used for hundreds of years. The traditional atmosphere of older universities is appealing to many. Feeling the continuity with scholars past contributes to adopting the self-identity of a scholar-in-waiting. Of course, the Euro-American university tradition represented by the buildings and libraries of Oxford or Harvard or University of Toronto hardly connects to the pasts of many York students. With no long

¹³ Kroy Collective members explored the tunnel system with permission. But the "naughty" tunnels are discussed in a zine called *Infiltration*, in an article entitled *Tentanda Via: tunnelling at York University* by Ninjalicious. Please see the following website: <http://www.infiltration.org/utility-tentanda.html>.

institutional history in the Euro-American tradition, York embodies no one dominant narrative or model of a university or intellectual community. It creates its own traditions from the sum of the faculty–student networks as they evolve through time, regardless of the administration’s attempts to brand the university.

Universities incorporate a wide range of temporalities, dramatically changing the pace of life. These shifts go beyond the annual academic cycle marking the beginning and end of terms. The time crunches for faculty, staff and students all occur at different points in the cycle, contributing to the tensions when rhythms conflict. Faculty usually feel most pressure just before and after the term begins and ends, while students often recognize the most pressure to be in the middle of and just before the term ends.¹⁴ Administrators face the most pressure around March as the budget year ends. Activists may time their protests to intersect with or disrupt both seasonal and academic schedules.

Spatial Boundaries

Unlike many urban schools, York is completely contained within clearly delineated boundaries. York is a city within a city, as students and faculty say. In fact, York is larger than at least 50 Ontario towns.¹⁵ And as always, there is the promise of the subway’s imminent arrival at York.¹⁶ In 2013, four giant earth movers—Holey, Moley, Yorkie and Torkie—slowly made their way under campus to various extraction shafts, disrupting traffic and creating havoc with road closures.

When the subway is completed at York, the perception of York’s boundaries will no doubt change since the subway penetrates the

¹⁴ I recall the pleasure of celebrating Christmas without the pressure of grading during my first sabbatical. (PVE)

¹⁵ In 2006, there were 50 towns in Ontario with populations between 10,000 and 50,000 (www.citypopulation.DE, 2009/05/08).

¹⁶ When I arrived at York in 1984, my department chair assured me the subway would probably arrive the following year (PVE). Colleagues hired since then were assured of the same thing. At the time of writing, the station and tunnels are still under construction.

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campus. In November 2013, the Lands for Learning project was launched to involve the community in sharing the vision for the mixed use developments proposed around the edges of York University. Plans for the “edge precinct lands” include housing and commercial establishments. The project is requesting input from the York community “to ensure they become good neighbours to York.”

University of Toronto, which melds with the city, is harder to isolate. Thus, it is difficult to cut off the campus for strikes or other political actions. In contrast, York grounds are clearly bounded by streets and gates, with unpatrolled public access. Outsiders regularly come in and out to make use of spaces at York.

The GTA has grown north and west of York. The campus was previously considered to be on the outskirts of Toronto, but it is now in the middle. The campus is encircled by an external ring-road system, with parking lots and open fields on the edge of campus. Some see these fields as barriers to integration, isolating York from the surrounding community of high-density housing to the south and west of campus. Signs around the edges of campus remind visitors that although York is a public institution, it is simultaneously private. Signs read “Private Property: University Regulations in Effect,” in an effort to ensure that the university administration has the right to determine who has access to university facilities.

York’s boundaries include Black Creek Pioneer Village, which is located on the northwest edge of campus. Opened in 1960 and owned by the Metropolitan Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, Black Creek Pioneer Village reproduces a 19th century Ontario village and is based around the original Stong homestead. With 40 restored heritage homes, shops and buildings, the site celebrates early settlers and pioneers by recreating an Ontario village from the 1860s. Close by, new immigrant families cluster around high-density low-income public housing units farther along the southwest border of campus. Among the poorest and underserved households in the city, inhabitants of the Jane-Finch area face problems that make it difficult for many to make use of the university’s resources. Urban planners suggested changing the name of the area to University Heights, but

this idea did not sit well with community activists.¹⁷

Commercial industrial usage of the land to the far east of York includes petroleum storage tanks that send up fumes that float over the campus on hot, humid days. Near the flagpole on the east side of campus is the Lorna R. Marsden Honour Court & Welcome Centre commemorating York's major benefactors.

At the south border, a new cluster of dense housing—The Village at York University—has been developed on land sold by the university's development consortium whose mandate is to generate revenue for the university. The more than 800 Tribute homes are relatively expensive; most are over \$500,000. According to original sales materials, homeowners would have free access to York's gyms, fitness centre, pool, tennis courts, theatres and libraries. Residents are acutely aware that house prices east of the creek that runs through York are higher than those west of the creek.

The northern border coincides with the northern border of the city of Toronto. Here, the rapidly disappearing farmland is being replaced by small industry and big box stores that mark the edge of the city of Vaughan, York Region.

New buildings at York such as Accolade East and West have created a more contained campus quadrant, surrounded by the enclosed walkways encircling Vari Hall that make travelling between buildings more pleasant in cold winters and hot summers. Harry W. Arthurs Commons, better known as the University Commons, is a 10 acre open space in front of Vari Hall that features a pool, fountain and piazza and provides a comfortable place to relax in good weather.

¹⁷ In *The Way Must be Tried*, a film prepared for the 50th anniversary of the university, residents of the Jane-Finch area discussed their relations with the university. The residents are not given access to university facilities as promised to homebuyers in The Village at York.

Crossing Boundaries

Given its position on the suburban edges of Toronto, York was always envisioned as, and still is, a commuter campus, more so than other Ontario universities. There are countless stories of commuting to York by bus. A three-hour-a-day commute from Mississauga is normal. Students who described their commute noted that it is easier to sleep or study on the GO buses than the TTC buses. Faculty members admit to doing class preparation on long bus rides to campus.

Both faculty and students try to minimize their commuting time, combining activities into two or three long days rather than driving in and paying for parking five days a week. Zipcars (car sharing service) are a new addition to the parking lots at York.

To ease some of the problems commuters face, a commuter floor will be added to McLaughlin College residence for emergency overnight accommodation. Students who are studying late or face extreme weather conditions will have access to 24 beds on a first-come, first-served basis. Scott Library remains open 24 hours during the exam period, and students occasionally stay in the library overnight. Students also report sleeping in theatres and classrooms when necessary. Considering the limited bus service on Sundays, students with exams early Sunday morning seek ways to remain on campus overnight.

Similar to many University of Toronto and Ryerson University students, many York students commute: current data suggests that 78 per cent of first-year students and 88 per cent of senior year students commute to campus with half having over a 40 minute commute. About half these commuting students use public transit.

Policing the Boundaries

York is a civilized space, where concrete attempts to drive out nature. At best, the wild—woodlots, Canada geese, moles, raccoons—is contained within the civilized. York's four secondary growth woodlots

still exist, but generally, concrete has replaced trees and native plants. Plans are under way to explore the possibility of developing a restoration plan for York's urban forests (Herridge 2013).

For safety reasons, the woods are "off bounds" to students. Although the odd beer bottle and condom can be seen around the edges of the woods, there are no inviting paths to encourage individuals to enter.¹⁸ The boundaries between the wild and civilized are clear, if somewhat artificial. But dangers to personal safety on campus exist both from within and without.

York makes an effort to keep its community members safe, but as in any community of more than 60,000 people, crimes happen. Every robbery and assault raises new questions about campus safety, boundaries and the dangers around the edges of campus. There is no evidence of gangs on campus, but there has been some tagging by individuals. Reports of anonymous thieves demanding cash at a college poker game, laptop and cell phone thefts, muggings and the double rape in a college residence in 2007 have alerted the community to dangers on campus. Individual criminal acts also deeply affect the university community. In 2010, a York research fellow and a don at Bethune College were both charged with making available and possessing child pornography and were dismissed from the university (Maclean's Dec. 8, 2010).

In October 2013, Toronto Life published "Fortress York," a feature article that documented the "notorious assaults" on a campus that has become "a hunting ground for sexual predators" (Laidlaw 2013:67). This sensationalist story stressed that criminal activity comes to campus from the surrounding area, further stigmatizing York's Jane-Finch neighbours.¹⁹ Responses to the article were published in the

¹⁸ I was at York for over a decade before I entered the Boyer Woodlot, the only space of uncivilized, wild nature at York. (PVE)

¹⁹ In 2012, social justice groups on campus and in the Jane-Finch community demanded an apology from Excalibur for perpetuating the claim that sexual assaults on campus originate from the Jane-Finch community.

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December issue, including a statement by York's President, Mamdouh Shoukri who pointed out the "patently false" statistics that distorted the picture of women's safety at York. Other letters from students objected to the "fear mongering, plain and simple" and viewed the article as a "one-sided attempt to defame York University" (Toronto Life, Dec. 2013, Letters:18-9).

York is an unarmed campus; the university employs security officials, property watch personnel and student safety officers. These officers cannot intervene or arrest anyone and must wait for local police. After the sexual and physical assaults on campus in the spring of 2011, Toronto police increased the number of patrols on campus. Muggings are not always reported to York security, yet these reports are relevant to student safety at York. A campus safety audit reported that a third of York students surveyed feel unsafe or very unsafe on campus. The university reports that from 2009 to 2011, crimes against persons declined 15 per cent (Excalibur, Mar.14, 2012).

More than 5000 students, staff and faculty live in The Village at York University—almost 10% of York's population. They can rent small rooms for as little as \$30 per night and rent rooms weekly, monthly or yearly. Students pay between \$500 to \$650 per month. Many international students who come to attend English language courses rent rooms in the area. Brochures explaining housing rights and safety have been translated into Mandarin and other languages for these students. Rooming houses, defined as accommodation where more than four people, are renting rooms are banned in North York where the Village is located (Toronto Star May 7:GT4). New legislation that would harmonize bylaws on rooming houses across the city and restrict the number of rental rooms per house could limit the number of students living in the Village. In 2011, before any agreement was implemented, 10 to 20 York students could have been living in one house. Excalibur asked its readers, "Should York be responsible for the safety of students in the Village?" Of the students who responded, 41.7 per cent said yes, it's where York students live, while 16.7 per cent said no, it's not York property (Excalibur June 1, 2010).

The GoSafe program at York brings students to the main living areas

on the edge of campus but not down the smaller, dimly lit roads where sexual assaults have taken place in the overgrown bushes off paths leading to the Village. Budget cuts to GoSafe eliminated the door-to-door service in the Village (YU Free Press winter 2011:15). A female student told Excalibur that she did not use the GoSafe Services and explained, “I haven’t been assaulted yet.”

In April 2011, after the tragic death of Qian Liu, a York student from China, there was more pressure to implement new recommendations regarding student safety and to expand the GoSafe program. Through the YFS, students called for mandatory anti-oppression and equity training for all staff and students. Others questioned the value of such training. York should push the city for better policing and lighting in the area, and it should form a community watch group, student residents suggested.

According to Toronto police data, crime rates in Toronto and the areas surrounding York are much higher than on campus (Excalibur, May 18, 2011). But the idea that assaulters come from outside the campus, from the surrounding community, is likely a prejudiced assumption. The perception that the university is good and safe and that the Jane-Finch community is bad and dangerous speaks to the unhealthy separation between the university and the surrounding communities.

York’s Sexual Assault Survivors’ Support Line & Leadership (SASSL) is a student group that offers support to students who have experienced violence and focuses on how to prevent sexual violence. SASSL’s support materials remind readers that 80 per cent of sexual assault survivors know their abusers. The group argues for the need to create an anti-sexist environment where everyone is treated with dignity at York.

Diversity on the Cosmopolitan Campus

York values diversity and treats a diverse campus as a public good. Like other schools in Ontario, York has a high proportion of students

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who are visible minorities. To some extent, this diversity reflects the face of the GTA. Besides diversity, students from York are also similar to students at other Toronto universities in income level. The family income of York students is about \$20,000 less than students at Western and \$40,000 less than at Queen's.²⁰

In 2007, over 80 per cent of York students came from the GTA, and 6 per cent came from outside of Canada. Over 20 per cent of GTA university students go to York. Compared to other Ontario universities, there are fewer York students who come directly from high school and more students who study part-time. York students also spend more time working for pay, and 4.8 per cent of students study over seven years from start to graduation. When compared to other Ontario universities, York has more female students (60 per cent are in first year) and more students who are older. York also has more first generation immigrant students and a high proportion of visible minority students. In addition, the university has more students studying social sciences and humanities; 18.6 per cent of undergraduate students enrolled in programs related to social sciences in 2005-06, the highest proportion in Ontario.

In 2009, 45 per cent of York students self-identified as visible minorities. Of these students, 31 per cent identified themselves as South Asian, 24 per cent as Chinese and 9 per cent as black.²¹ There are, of course, other ways to define difference. For example, when Yaffe (1997:245-48) asked students the culture they identified with, their answers included Afro-American, Afro-Canadian, alternative,

²⁰ For more information, please consult the following document: York 101-Vital Statistics: <http://www.yorku.ca/gro/York%20101.ppt>. Note that the income data is estimated based on postal codes and census data not from student addresses. When proxy indicators are substituted for the properties of individuals and households, their validity has been questioned (cf. Robinson 1950).

²¹ It would be preferable to avoid coding differences by region, ethnicity and skin colour as evidence of visible minority status. Non-whites are only visible minorities in relation to and in contrast with white majorities. But we have worked with the statistics available from the university.

black, Latin American, Jewish, Israeli, mixed, oriental, WASP, white, Caucasian and dozens of hyphenated combinations. In a 1995 report on first year students, students self-identified with 202 cultures (Yaffe 1997).

This demographic diversity can be represented in numbers and graphs. The university administration does so with its statistics on diversity, to stress how York benefits from the diversity in the campus community. But such approaches do not capture how people on campus engage with difference, and this engagement can best be explored ethnographically.

If we just looked at the numbers, we are much like other Ontario universities. But the numbers miss the distinctiveness of York culture. York's diversity goes beyond the numbers. In matters of ethnicity and race, fixing and measuring identities is challenging. With a large diverse student body, multiple forms of identification are possible. Canadian students born in Singapore, for example, might identify themselves as Chinese or Asian Canadian or Asian Catholic. To further complicate the matter, half of students who grew up speaking Chinese at home do not consider themselves to be part of any visible minority (cf. Grayson 1994).

To look at another example, people at York who have an affiliation and ancestral connection with Vietnam could be bilingual Vietnamese Canadians who settled in Quebec a generation ago. Or, they could be second generation Canadian-born children of "the boat people" who have a special association with York because of the work of Howard Adelman, the refugee studies founder who encouraged private sponsorship of refugees from Southeast Asia. Or, they might be new refugees or economic migrants coming from Vietnam over the last ten years. Or, they could be international or exchange students who have come from newly refurbished Vietnamese universities and are studying at York but are soon returning home. These different framings matter.

What if York University qualifies as the most multicultural university in the world? Where would we look for a more multicultural university? What evidence would support such a claim? What would

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such a claim mean? Would it matter? This claim matters only if administrators and students buy into the idea that diversity is a valuable resource. Perhaps the more interesting questions are how and why do members of the York community buy into York as a multicultural institution, perhaps even the most multicultural university in the world.²²

If diversity is a code word for differences between people, then York harbours extraordinary diversity.²³ The film *The Way Must Be Tried* states that York students come from 155 countries. Every day, members of the York community must negotiate with difference. Most do it well; some struggle with it; only a few refuse to do it. This negotiation experience is an important part of what makes York unique and what York teaches its students.

York's classrooms glow with varied ethnicities and backgrounds, not as a marker of multiculturalism's success, but as an indication of the distinct and complex histories that bring students to York. One student's story reflected on the difficulty of categorizing ethnicity and even nationality and showed how she came to feel at home at York. She wrote,

For eight or nine months, I spent long hours sitting on the floor of Scott Library at York University, just reading poetry that had been published in the last two decades by South Asians. Finally, something I could relate to! I could identify with the thoughts of these writers, the cultural allusions in the texts and

²² In 2004, Penny Van Esterik et al. published *Others in our Midst: Cross-Cultural Practices of Communicating about Cultural Difference*, a report that explored some dimensions of diversity in international classrooms where introductory anthropology is taught. While the sample was small, the experience alerted us to the fact that in many multicultural nations, universities may attract or admit a much less diverse range of students than can be found at York.

²³ Researchers at George Mason University in Washington, D.C., asked students what diversity meant to them. Student essays show the emerging logics of peaceful coexistence and individual identity, as students saw themselves as "all diverse in our distinct ways" (Haines 2007).

their experience as immigrants, especially since I, too, have been uprooted from Tanzania, Pakistan, United Arab Emirates, U.S.A. and Canada so many times during my globe-trotting. I am not only African and Indian, I also feel Indian and Pakistani. Why can't I say I am all of these? (York Stories Collective 2000:36-7)

Nevertheless, she referred to Canada as her favourite home.

Students who come to York from Guyana or Italy, for instance, may have widely varying experiences integrating their ethnic identities into their respective classrooms. Norma, Gena and Jane expressed their thoughts about the relation between their ethnic identities and their experiences at York. Norma, a graduate student, explained:

They say back in Guyana that our first language is English. Yet, words failed me for more than a couple of weeks as I sat in an undergraduate classroom at York University making numerous mental attempts to be a part of the discussion. I would say in my mind, "Okay, I will raise my hand in one minute."

I just never got around to actually saying anything until it was my turn to present in class. That presentation was for a Caribbean literature course, and we were asked to present in the area of language use. I must say, it was a stroke of genius when I decided to focus my presentation on English-Creole and its effectiveness in storytelling and gaffe.²⁴ I cannot ever remember having such fun reading in Creole. I had opened my mouth at last, and it was on my terms and on an issue that I was passionate about and comfortable with. I am quite sure half the class did not understand a word I read, but the nuances were bang on. My classmates got the gist.

²⁴ This is not the same as a "clumsy social error." "Gaffe" is a term used by West Indians to describe a friendly, informal chat or a juicy story. This word is commonly used in the oral tradition.

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I then took great pride in translating from Creole to English in my best rendition of a Canadian accent. The gales of laughter that followed had a lot to do with the ludicrousness of translating the essence of a Creole poem to “Standard English.” I think it was the A+ that I got for that presentation that caused me to open up and forget that my speech was accented and therefore made me different.

Now why was I thinking I was so different? I came to Canada and York University as an international student two days before the tragedy of September 11, 2001. I came here with preconceived notions of what it meant to attend a university as an international student and what it meant to live as and be considered part of a visible minority. This was very strange terrain for me.

Imagine coming to a strange country two days before 9/11, with no relatives or friends. I wandered aimlessly around York’s sprawling Keele campus, hoping to see a face I recognized. There were many times when I would pass by students and hear them speak, and I would say to myself, “That sure is a Guyanese.” I just never had the courage to ask. I remember wondering to myself, “Why do I see so many Chinese (at that time, I still did the unthinkable of labelling all Asians Chinese) and African students milling around?”

I never stopped trying to spot a Guyanese (even now), but in the strangest way I soon found my niche at York University. After a month of aimless and lonely wandering of York’s hollow corridors, I met a young woman who befriended me. RJ was like my YorkU angel. We would meet every day just outside of the Scott Library, and she would teach me the ways of a Yorkie. I learnt from her how to navigate and negotiate my way around York University. Most of all, I learnt from my friendship with RJ that it is possible to forge a lasting friendship

with someone of a different nationality in a diverse cultural and academic space like York University.

At first, I thought her to be Guyanese until she told me she was Fijian. It was at that point that I began thinking about the complexities of identifications and nationalities at York. They were not as fixed as I thought them to be. To be quite honest, I couldn't find Fiji on a map. Before coming to Canada and York University, I had heard of the place and had a much skewed idea of what the people looked like. I would never in a million years think that I would meet and forge a lasting friendship with a person from Fiji; that is, until I came to York. RJ has since graduated from York; she is now married with a baby girl. We are still very fast friends.

Not long after meeting RJ, I quickly came to realize that differences were nothing special at York. Nobody really cared that I pronounced "schedule" with a *k* or said "corridor" instead of "hallway." Nobody cared that I did not use many "big words." Only I cared. I was very conscious of my difference. Did I stick out as different, as a Guyanese, and why did I care? I am sure that I will never not be consumed with being different. (After all I am a minority in North America.)

But I clearly remember the day my understanding of Guyanese identity became quite fluid. I think it was Multicultural Week, and I was walking by the Student Centre, hurrying to get to a class. I saw a booth that said "Guyanese Social Club," and I just had to stop to inquire what it was all about. I had heard of the club before and always wanted to drop by the office, but just never got around to doing so. I was very excited to eventually speak to a group of people with a similar culture and background. I wanted to be able to speak my Creole and feel normal just for a few minutes.

There were about four girls milling around the booth chatting excitedly with each other. I walked up, said hi and asked about the booth. One young lady explained in a perfect Canadian accent that they were all Guyanese and members of the Guyanese Social Club at York University. Well, I did hear her say that she was Guyanese, but I also heard her say it in a perfect Canadian accent. So, of course, my next question was, "Were you born in Guyana?" They all answered, "No."

So now I'm thinking. . . None of them look Guyanese (but how does a Guyanese look . . . Right?). They certainly don't talk Guyanese (what is essential about how we speak?). So how can they identify themselves as Guyanese? I am standing there thinking that the only Guyanese here is *moi*.

I was intrigued to say the least. I wanted to find out some more about the club and about these York students who identify as Guyanese. I learnt that they were all born in Canada to Guyanese parents. As a matter of fact, of the four, only one had ever visited Guyana.

While they think of themselves as Canadians, being Guyanese defined them culturally. But what does it mean to be Guyanese at York? Does it mean knowing about Guyana? The extent of these young women's knowledge of Guyana was the name of the city, town or village their parents came from. One girl tried to speak Guyanese Creole, but it just didn't sound right with a deep Canadian accent. During the course of our discussion, one girl stepped aside to have a chat with a friend who was passing by. They were excitedly talking about an indigenous Canadian band that was playing at the Underground that weekend. Had I not just met her, I would not have known that she was Guyanese. I left our little meet-and-greet with members of the Guyanese Social Club not knowing if I should feel excited about

eventually finding a Guyanese group at York or just a little bit deflated that there is no “generic” in “Guyanese.”

It has been seven years since that first encounter with members of the Guyanese Social Club. Since that time, I have met more students who identify as Guyanese . . . For the past seven years, I have been a practicing and active Yorkie. I am not sure that there is any one place (except for the Guyanese Social Club and Multicultural Week) where one can find at any given time, a bunch of Guyanese students hanging out together . . .

At York University, the Guyanese identity is as elusive as it is fluid. The social and academic climate at York University allows you to be as Guyanese as you'd like today and as Canadian as you'd like tomorrow. It also allows for a Guyanese and Canadian identity to coexist as one. I guess that is why York feels so much like my second home. It certainly is the reason York was my only choice for postgraduate studies—twice. You get to be whomever you want to be. Heck, Lord knows there are enough nationalities around here to borrow from. I'll stick with Guyanese.

Norma's story is a reminder that it is important to engage with ethnic diversity on campus and hints at the complexity of ethnic identity. Identity politics come into play most visibly during Multicultural Week. On a daily basis, people engage with difference on a personal level. Gena, an undergraduate student, explored some of her experiences regarding her Italian identity construction at York.

I was born and raised in Italy up to the age of 13. Hence, my Italian identity was shaped by my surroundings up to that age, and since then, it has been reinforced by my parents who have continued to maintain and associate themselves with the Italian culture and community during our stay in Canada. Moreover, throughout the years, away from Italy, I

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still keep in touch with friends and family, and thus, continue to speak the language, as well as keep myself informed and up to date with what occurs in Italy.

Coming to York has made me realize the true meaning of the construction of cultural identity. York University is known to provide a welcoming place to a multitude of cultures and ethnicities. Being Italian and noticing the existence of groups of students whose commonality was their culture or ethnicity, I also expected to find other “Italians.”

When I was introduced to some, I soon realized that they considered themselves Italian only because they had an Italian last name, or because their parents were born in Italy but left for Canada at a very young age. Those that I met did not know how to speak Italian, and those that could, either spoke their grandparents’ dialect or learned basic Italian in school. . . . I do not believe that one’s proficiency in the language is the only “criteria” needed for a person to consider him or herself Italian.

I know some people who are part of the Italian clubs at York, and what I have noticed is that they hold pride of their “Italian identity” and in fact, distance themselves from the rest because they only associate themselves with other “Italians.” They hold a romanticized idea of what it is to be Italian, how Italy is and what it means to behave as an Italian. Conversing with them and spending time with them, I have noticed that what they consider “Italian,” is not what constitutes a contemporary “Italian” of 2009.

Living with their parents and grandparents who left Italy at least 30 years ago, their values, traditions, ways of thinking do not match the current ones in Italy. They attempt to reinforce and demonstrate their “Italian identity” by wearing clothes of Italian

brands, such as Kappa, Gucci and Versace. They try to imitate the “Italian” style in order to be recognized as such.

Often, I have been told that I was not truly “Italian” because none of my friends have an Italian background. But, then again, what does it mean to be Italian? For me being able to speak the language holds a fundamental role in being considered “Italian.” The language itself—the meaning behind certain phrases, aphorisms and ways of saying things—represents certain characteristics and values of the culture itself. For example, many Italian sayings and ways of speaking, are imbued with sarcasm, which I believe is characteristic of Italian culture . . .

What has bothered me in the past is that those students truly “act” and see themselves as being “true” Italians because all their efforts are put towards creating this stereotypical image of the Italian, which they have taken from the media or their parents’ and grandparents’ antique visions.

Sometimes I feel that some of these students hold on to this “imagined” identity in order to feel a sense of belonging. Even though in reality, according to my experiences, they fantasize about a place and culture that in reality they have never experienced. Without a doubt, these ideas do not hold true for every single student in the Italian community at York.

Like Norma, Gena was equally concerned with the importance of language in identity formation and expression. Gena also recognized the generational differences between those who have current experiences of the homeland and those who received second hand memories from relatives who left the homeland a generation or more ago.

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Gena raised crucial questions about identity in her reflection: How do people construct, work with and create the stereotypes of a culture? Do they develop a romanticized view of the culture? Do they acquire their parents' sense of nostalgia for the real or imagined homeland? If what is real for their parents becomes imagined for them, then what is authentic culture? Gena carried these concerns into all of her classes.

The reflections from Jane, a graduate student and member of the Kroy Collective, emerged from her field observations during York's 2009 Multicultural Week festivities. She titled her notes "York is Me."

I followed a distant drumbeat and a rush of sari-clad bodies to Accolade East for the opening ceremony of York's Multicultural Week 2009. Gathering in the CIBC lobby were representatives of some two dozen student clubs and cultural associations, forming clusters like islands across the red carpet. In their respective huddles, students were unfurling banners, laughing amongst themselves, taking pictures, flirting. There was playful competition in the air as groups cast backward glances at each other, sizing up their peers while they prepped and preened for the annual parade.

Red Bull girls in tiny blue sweaters distributed the energizing drinks to an already pumped up crowd. From the corner rose the cry: "I-N-D-I-A! India all the way!" The assembly responded combatively with a flutter of flags, thunderous voices and rolls of percussion. An official pleads from the microphone on stage: "Don't compete too hard! We're here to support unity this year!" (Fieldnotes, April 27th, 2009)

Her analysis continued:

The festivities of Multicultural Week figure prominently in the staging of "multicultural" York, part of the university's justifiable self-promotion as a diverse space that embodies the multiculturalism of the city that surrounds it. Its annual roster of official

events provide York students—the ones who wear “ethnic pride” on their sleeves, the vaguely interested, the passersby—with opportunities to socialize, to eat, to indulge in the spectacle of what is already clear, that York University is a culturally diverse community. Yet, visible diversity does not a “multicultural” university make.

Standing on the third floor balcony of the Scott Library, looking down at the rainbow sea of students below, I am struck by this [thought]. As a doctoral student returning to York after a master’s experience at an international university equally renowned for its diverse population, I have had the chance to reflect critically on York University, to grapple with what its particular “multiculturalism” has meant to me. More than its heterogeneous student body, more than its official embrace of a “multicultural” rhetoric, for me, it is in the classroom that York’s “multiculturalism” has been a most salient force.

I began my undergraduate career as a double major in psychology and anthropology. Happening upon the Latin American and Caribbean Studies (LACS) program in my second year, I dropped psychology like a flash. With Caribbean immigrant parents who lived and breathed “the islands,” I was amazed, exhilarated, at the opportunity to complement the education I received, through dinnertime conversations and on my grandpa’s knee, with a legitimate curriculum so different from the histories and geographies I encountered in high school. I could take a course on calypso, and not a “bird” course either, but one that traced the art form’s history and addressed its creators as serious social commentators.

In my anthropology and LACS courses, I found the tools and the words to think about my family, about myself and our mixed-up, ambivalent place in this country, this world. Sometimes (and for the first

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time), I had teachers who looked like me, who sounded like me, whose parents had taken similar journeys. And even when they didn't, for the most part, my professors grappled with issues of race, class, gender and sexuality in meaningful ways, encouraging critical thought, prompting students to examine their biases and prejudices and challenge them. The picture was not always idyllic. Seminar room conversations were often heated, feelings could get hurt, students might have felt their voices or interests stifled. Yet, by and large, what I've encountered in my years at York that I haven't experienced elsewhere is a genuine and frank willingness among students and professors alike to acknowledge the raced, classed and gendered hierarchies that impact all our lives.

In a school where a large part of the population is composed of first generation students, immigrants and the children of immigrants, this acknowledgement is an important and indeed, necessary quality. It's striking to think that since emigrating from the Caribbean in the 1960s and 1970s, nine (and counting...) members of my extended family have called this university "home." We are members of the first generation to receive university education.

Fred, a large Samoan student with shiny blue-black skin, was fascinated with anthropology's approach to race and racism. In an independent study project, he wanted to research the Coalition to Stop Show Boat, the group that was organizing the protest against the musical *Show Boat*, opening in Toronto in 1993. After attending an organizational meeting in the Jane-Finch area, Fred changed his study topic, complaining that he would not be welcomed in the group because they told him he was not black. As someone who self-identified as very black, he was confused when people whom he considered to have very light brown skin told him he was not black. His research paper explored the complexities of skin colour gradations and ethnicity. Fred claimed he never noticed skin colour inside York

and was shocked to find it key to identity politics outside York.

There are incidents of racism, anti-Semitism and oppression that occur from time to time on campus, as there are in all Canadian institutions. However, there are many efforts being made on campus to understand and eliminate such incidents. York's approach to racism has been to try increasing civility and debate around all kinds of differences and increasing accessibility to all qualified students.

Today, racism, anti-Semitism, sexism and homophobia are marginalized on campus, unlike the situation that might have existed 30 years ago. Incidents of intolerance still exist, but they draw immediate protest from students as well as administration. What has changed is the context in which these incidents exist. Some discussions of racism ignore the changed historical context of racist incidents.²⁵ For example, white male privilege was more obvious in the 1960s than in the present decade. But not every racist incident is an example of institutional racism. Individual racist incidents are greeted with more disgust and protest than in the past.

To blame all racist incidents on the establishment of white privilege on campus is to follow only one possible discourse on racism. Rather than focus on universities as a tool for white privilege and part of the ruling apparatus of imperial power (Smith 2005), our informants draw attention to the parallel discourse that explores the engagement across difference that occurs every day at York.

It is not always easy to raise topics of race and racism in classes. As anthropology professor Karen McGarry commented, "Some students thought I was being racist to even point out racial differences" (2008:129). The students cited above take pride in the diversity and

²⁵ The report on diversity at the University of the South (O'Connor et al. 2010) stressed the need to place racist incidents in historical perspective. To understand racism at York, more attention needs to be placed on student reaction to racist incidents. According to the students, this would include emphasis on how administration and faculty deal with racist incidents.

tolerance they experienced at York. In McGarry's class, "Another black female student proudly proclaimed that . . . she never experienced racial or ethnic prejudice at York because, as she stated, 'It's an environment where we are all so different anyway. It's not like there's a clear majority of any one colour of people. I think everyone understands that and appreciates it'" (2008:123). But another anonymous undergraduate found that it was difficult for her to talk about such subjects in class. She wrote that "if you bring certain things up in class, you become the centre or focus, the only person in the class who talks about these things, always bringing up 'race,' it gets really tiring . . . It's just mentally very draining and difficult . . ." (York Stories Collective 2000:37).

In her study of an American university, Nathan found that students were more willing to talk about their sex lives than race relations on campus and that minority students resented being "expected to educate whites about minority issues or speak 'as a representative of their race'" (2006:60). What O'Connor calls "engaged diversity" takes place in classrooms, sports teams and residences on campus. Nathan too found that integration was greatest in these arenas rather than in student clubs which were often single ethnicity groupings (2006:60), much as they are at York.

Mother Tongues

On February 21, 2008, the Bangladesh Student Federation (BSF) held an event to celebrate International Mother Language Day. The students brought awareness to the importance of mother language rights in Bangladesh. An organizer of the event commented on the great number of languages spoken at York and how the diversity of languages heard around campus often leads to discussions about the complexity of ethnicity and identity.

Students come to York University with resources—material, moral, intellectual, emotional and cultural—shaped by their life experiences (cf. Clark 2008:105). York is unusually blessed with student resources, including languages and diverse backgrounds. Making use of and fully

developing these diverse experiences in York's classrooms can be a challenge for faculty when York is one of the poorest funded of Ontario's universities, with a lower operating grant funding per student than the Ontario average (York University n.d.).²⁶ But it is possible. Recall Norma's pleasure at finding a course where her Creole skills were validated and rewarded rather than viewed as a detriment.

More evidence of diversity concerns language resources. Student enrollment figures from 2001 to 2013 indicated that domestic students reported speaking 167 different languages, while visa students reported 86 languages. These numbers confirm faculty impressions that domestic students were exceptionally rich in linguistic resources. The survey did not indicate whether students could report more than one language other than French or English. Some languages are only reported spoken by one student. The university tries to add language courses to respond to student demand.²⁷

Many languages, and many combinations of languages, can be heard at York. Linguists could also comment on the indispensable value of the constant code-switching at York. For example, a student born in Romania who immigrated to Canada when he was 12 years old views himself as a Canadian. He avoids students of Romanian heritage because he wants to learn the nuances of English from English-speaking students. He enjoys York's multicultural environment, but he seeks out language experiences that will help him feel more comfortable in all-English-speaking groups.

Another student who is a native Hebrew speaker also sees herself as a fluent English speaker; however, she thinks in Hebrew. This thinking in Hebrew presents some problems. Consequently, she addresses these issues by asking Hebrew language specialists at York for help,

²⁶ I recall discovering that among the 45 students in my class, 37 languages were spoken. I always meant to explore concepts such as nurture, hunger and disordered eating in the languages that students knew, but never managed to get to it. (PVE)

²⁷ Thanks to Brian Kennedy from the Office of Institutional Planning and Analysis at York for providing the numbers on languages spoken by York students.

not specialists from the ESL services. She explained that people who teach Hebrew understand the reasons for her troubles, and could quickly explain the problem to her in her native language.

In the Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) Building, collective members observed a group of Chinese students who spoke almost exclusively in Chinese. The only English word spoken was “©Tim Hortons.” A few days later, they encountered another group of Chinese students speaking a combination of Chinese and English, switching back and forth to accommodate a speaker who was less comfortable with one of the language choices. Another informant spoke Cantonese at home and sought out Cantonese-speaking Chinese Canadians at York. After several years at York, she was able to find a social niche where she could be around students with similar values and language experiences. She was able to create a large social circle out of a relatively narrow field within York’s multicultural environment. She much preferred to be around those who spoke languages that were familiar to her. But she identified herself as “the queen of Chinglish”²⁸: “I use it ’cause I think in both languages . . . and I am part of both places.” She used “Chinglish” when she could not easily translate across languages and because she feared that, after several years at York, her Cantonese was developing an English accent. She enjoyed joining clubs where there was a diversity of students from different cultural backgrounds and an acceptance of difference, but preferred clubs where the majority of students were Cantonese. Perhaps the appeal and comfort of York emerged because, as a Chinese Catholic, she felt “out of place” going to a predominantly Jewish high school.

Her language experiences and approach to diversity were shaped not at York, but at her high school, where differences in religion and ethnicity shaped her ethnic identity and language use. Many students

²⁸ “Chinglish” is a word commonly used to describe the mingled languages of Chinese and English. Other common fusions with the English language include “Finglish” (Finnish and English) and “Singlish” (Singapore English). Since “Chinglish” was used by the student to refer to her own speech pattern, we have used it here.

come to York from schools that were neither inclusive nor diverse. York may be their first opportunity to learn intercultural communication every day, class after class. Everyone also learns about sexism and racism in different ways, from different places, including high school. York, then, becomes the training ground for students to acquire survival skills and communication strategies in a multiracial, multicultural society.²⁹

These stories suggest that while the university may be diverse, the experiences of individual students may not always be. Within the diverse campus, individual moments and niches may indeed be “awfully white.” But there are different pockets all over campus, pockets that are “awfully Jewish,” “awfully Muslim,” or “awfully Asian.” How do ethnographers deal with these more homogeneous pockets that exist as subcultures within large institutional cultures? ³⁰

Gender and Sexuality

Women are dominating university classrooms but still struggling to get to the front of them. New research by two Ontario sociologists shows that, while the majority of Canadian university students are now female, when it comes to faculty it remains very much a man's game. ‘There are qualified women; they're just not getting a fair shake,’ co-author Janice Drakich of the University of Windsor said in an interview. ‘Women are still not being treated the same way as men. Systemic discrimination still exists and it still flourishes.’ Drakich and co-author Penni Stewart of York University analyzed the most current Statistics

²⁹ This subject is explored in greater detail in Frances Henry and Carol Tator's book, *Racism in the Canadian University* (2009).

³⁰ This methodological question should be addressed in the next ethnography of York. The question was inspired by Richard O'Connor's comment that the University of the South was “awfully southern white Episcopal,” and when he asked if there was a similar niche for the “awfully white Anglican” at York. We could not find one, but that does not mean the niche is not there.

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Canada data on students and faculty on Canadian campuses and found that though women represent 58 per cent of those taking classes, they make up fewer than one-third of full-time faculty and 18 per cent of full professors. (Toronto Star, Jan. 20, 2007)

Women faculty at York University have been trailblazers, coming into their own just as the women's movement gained public momentum. Without the weight of tradition to hold them back, women faculty flourished at York. Since its inception, York has believed in and supported access, diversity, equity and social justice. The early businessmen who founded York may not have held progressive views of women, but in 1960, they hired the first woman faculty member at York—Alice Turner—to teach mathematics, a non-traditional field for women even today. By the 1970s, women were well represented in positions of power among York staff and faculty; however, there were hints of challenges that women faculty faced, such as when they occasionally joined the faculty wives in serving tea (Teiman 2007:27).

By this time, women also made up over 40 per cent of the student body; today, they make up around 60 per cent of the student body. But sexism still existed on campus. In 1966, Excalibur displayed an advertisement showing a woman's torso with homecoming buttons covering the nipples, but after a decade of consciousness-raising, it critiqued its own shortcomings in a 1979 retrospective (Teiman 2007:28, 30).³¹ Gender was the most prominent equity issue in the 1960s and 1970s; gender equity programs became institutionalized during the 1980s. This no doubt makes it easier for women to feel at home at York.³²

³¹ Our discussion on gender, sexual orientation and disability in the following section owes much to the valuable work of Gill Teiman, whose book (2007) provides detailed histories of the development of equity policy at York.

³² When I came to York in 1984, I realized that I had been to schools with a much chillier climate towards women than I found at York. The contrast was so great that I was oblivious to many of the oppressions identified by the women faculty who had been at York for a longer time.

In spite of this progress, certain members of the media consistently attack York's support for women and for feminist issues. Margaret Wentz (Globe and Mail, Mar. 7, 2006) celebrated International Women's Day by ridiculing York's feminists:

If you are unaware of just how bad things have got, you can also consult the experts at York University, which is so feminist it even teaches feminist geography. . . If you want an update on "anti-racist, post-colonial and transnational feminisms," York's the place for you. The trouble with these experts is that almost every claim they make is wrong.

Sexual orientation emerged as a diversity issue at York in the 1960s, where it was primarily focused around support for gay men. Lesbian concerns emerged later as a part of a more inclusive feminism (Teiman 2007:58). Student clubs reflected the changing concerns of the community, from the York University Homophile Association (YUHA) of the 1970s to Gay Alliance at York (GAY) to the more inclusive TBLGAY association of the late 1990s (Teiman 2007:170). The current TBLGAY association stands for Trans Bisexual Lesbian Gay Allies at York and offers a positive space to socialize and campaign against oppressions such as homophobia.

Able/Disabled

York University is also a pioneer in supporting students and faculty with disabilities and has been since the 1970s. Because the "culture of inclusion" is integral to York's mission, all administrations have supported the disability program. Although York has a duty to

For example, I was involved in a class-action suit that women faculty launched against University of Notre Dame in the early 1980s. I felt at home on the first day I arrived at York for a job interview and continued to feel at home when teaching. Perhaps, this was because I was a well-educated white woman, but having taught at sexist American universities, I enjoyed seeing the power of my female colleagues and the respect they usually received. Occasional sexist colleagues at York stood out as exceptions to the rule. (PVE)

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accommodate students based on the Ontarians with Disability Act, the academic culture put York ahead of other Ontario universities on accommodating disabilities. Alternative formats for examinations, customer service and even employment issues have all been on the table at York even before they became legal requirements for universities and other institutions. The changes required by the Ontarians with Disabilities Act in 2001 had already been implemented at York. In 2008, York gave over 7,345 exams in alternative formats to accommodate differently abled students. York has the largest program in Canada for deaf and hard of hearing students.

Over the past 30 years, support for students with disabilities has changed at York, as technologies have changed. On April 28, 2009, the space in Vari Hall displayed the “original artifacts” used to accommodate students, including four-track tape recorders and Braille machines, all large and intimidating pieces of technology. In the early days, it might take 40 volunteers reading textbooks into tape recorders to accommodate visually impaired students. The course might be finished before the textbook was available to the student!

Today, new technology has replaced all these devices; with MSN or Facebook messaging, new software on small laptops and other innovations make accommodation easier, faster and more customized for the individual student. But the mature student who learned Braille, for example, might have a harder time developing the computer savvy that younger students bring to York.³³ Able York and Access York focused particular attention on technology in the 1990s.

High school students with disabilities chose to come to York because the supports were already in place. The services available in 1978 connected students, most of who were blind or in wheelchairs, with volunteers rather than staff. Renovations to Central Square made it more convenient for students in wheelchairs to eat in the cafeteria

³³ In 2010, I experienced a stroke in my optic nerve that limited my ability to read. A number of voice-to-text programs made writing and research possible, but old reading habits slowed down my ability to adjust to this new technology and slowed down the work to complete this book. (PVE)

(Teiman 2007:72). Many of these services still relied on private grant money. “Thus began a tradition of the University trying to maintain a service for which there is inadequate funding, with reliance on dedicated staff, volunteers and lots of goodwill” (Tieman 2007:74). Since the 1990s, the university committees stressed physical accessibility and barrier removal, as well as responding to ad hoc problems.³⁴

In a letter praising York’s Learning Disabilities Program (now Learning Disability Services), one student explained that it was the best support she had ever received, praising the accommodations she received and LINKS (Learning, Inspiring, Networking, Knowledge, Support). The first of its kind in the world, LINKS is a support group for students with learning disabilities. Support networks among students can be quite specific; one student explained how she found support at York as a South Asian woman with disabilities who was living a non-traditional lifestyle.

In 1999, the Canadian Foundation for Physically Disabled Persons gave York an award for “its commitment to creating an inclusive environment accommodating the needs of students, staff and faculty with physical disabilities” (Tieman 2007:177). This was the first time a university had been given such recognition.

Gerald Gold, a professor of anthropology at York since the late 1970s teaches and writes about his experience as a disabled anthropologist, redefining conventional fieldwork experiences and developing the vantage point of fieldwork in virtual places and virtual communities. These virtual communities of disabled persons, a context he refers to as “virtual disability,” has become an alternative focus of research for

³⁴ Although some examples of barrier removal may be dismissed as trivial, critical disability theory encourages us to view ability and disability as a continuum; as we age, we all need more support. I received rapid accommodation from York for symptoms related to thoracic outlet syndrome and vision loss. My colleague also praised how rapidly stools and lecterns were supplied by York facilities when she experienced occasional dizziness while lecturing. (PVE)

him and for others with disabilities. Here virtual files became like field notes as he redirected his ethnographic skills into new sites (Gold 2003).³⁵

Once critical masses of students on campus either need accommodation or are educated about accommodation, there is greater awareness and potential for advocacy around disability issues. For example, student groups raised accessibility issues to challenge the proposed renovations to Vari Hall, a topic discussed at the end of Part One.

Creating Communities

Everyone speaks of the York community, but few specify what they mean by community. How does a term like community apply to the more than 60,000 people who inhabit York? A critical perspective might stress that the whole discourse of community masks the corporatization of the university, as corporate values increasingly come to dominate the university (Nelson and Watt 1999:vii).

The earliest definition of community referred to people of a district, who share a common identity, experience, space and bond. Williams (1985:76) argued that words like community no longer meant the same thing after the Second World War. Clark (2008:84) defines universities as places with “a singular hospitality to intellectual values.” This hospitality depends on the faculty and students who hold those values, not the institution itself. But schools do acquire reputations.

Students look for certain characteristics in a university; these characteristics become part of the university’s informal reputation rather than its direct recruiting policy. For example, York is not known as a football school, a fraternity school,³⁶ a “gut” school or a party school. It is, however, known as an accessible, diverse,

³⁵ In 2003, York began offering a master’s degree in Critical Disability Studies, another example of the link between activism and the classroom discussed in more detail in Part Four.

³⁶ Fraternities and sororities have been banned on campus since 1961.

interdisciplinary and progressive school oriented towards social justice. York's self-image plays off this diverse, progressive social justice orientation, but its public image veers farther left to a more radical and critical image reinforced by "headline events" like strikes and student protests.

Reputation is not the same as brand image. Outside professionals such as public relations firms supply brand images, including the current campaign, "This is my time." Work on York's brand image was initiated by the president in 2012. York's professional schools or "sub-brands" were urged to have a consistent look in the new brand hierarchy using the brand tool box and York's image bank. Faculty became York's brand ambassadors. York administration argues that the public would understand the York brand, its personality, if cohesive visual standards were followed (Yfile Feb.14, 2012). This is not the way ethnographers would go about defining York's image or public personality.³⁷

However, the university's image and reputation are affected by and reflected in published reports. York does not fare well in surveys to establish university rankings.³⁸ In the November 2009 issue of Maclean's, York was ranked 36 out of 48 in best overall reputation (Maclean's 2009:154), which was based on the scores given by university officials, CEOs, corporate recruiters and leaders in civil society. In 2011, York was ranked 30 out of 49 (Maclean's 2011:150). While many schools had photographs of labs or classrooms, the only image provided of York was of campus security officers. In 2011, York signage was shown beside a Maclean's article on "Really Bad Advice," where York student leaders, among others, complained about finding themselves short of a critical course needed to graduate (what students call getting "Yorked"). In 2011, York ranked ninth in

³⁷ We recognize the great disconnect between what we observed on the ground—that is, the lived experiences of students, staff and faculty while they go about "trying the way"—and the image-making branding work of the university administration as they promote York.

³⁸ Quantitative surveys cannot easily capture the essence of a place. We hope that this ethnography captures more of the campus culture and the student experience at York.

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the comprehensive category, but first with regard to funds allocated to student services (Maclean's 2011:134). In the 2014 rankings, York still ranked ninth, but dropped to third for student services (Maclean's 2013:76). However, it is difficult to compare universities quantitatively or by reputation. One long-time administrator mused, "We are not like the small new schools now. We grew past them, but yet we are not treated like the older elite research institutions either . . . We almost stand alone." We address this problem again in the conclusion.

The public image of a university is resistant to change (Clark 2008:95). Clark argues that the history and values of the institution are only secondary factors for students as they choose their schools (Clark 2008:105). Clark defines a number of subcultures that differentiate American universities, such as collegiate, vocational and academic (2008:107-8). According to Clark, part-time work and commuter campuses impede the development of typical college cultures on the American model. In vocational colleges, more students are at the poverty level, working part-time and attending school to obtain a better job. In academic colleges, students put more effort in school, study outside of class, use the library, internalize faculty habits and aim for graduate school (2008:108). These characteristics do not map onto discrete categories of students at York (although they may describe some niches) nor do they begin to describe the intricacies of the academic or campus culture at York. While pub nights may be important to many students, others are singularly oriented to serious study outside of class; and still others occupy specific sports niches.

Communities contain different categories of people. There are differences between faculty and students, staff and faculty, administration and students, but the categories also overlap—staff who are students; students who are staff; students who teach; teachers who study; administrators who teach; and faculty, staff and administrators who are former York students, alumni. Collective members quickly learned that finding these former students who now hold managerial and administrative positions in the university was the best way to get support and help for their projects. These alumni "get" York, in the same way that the ethnographers tried to "get" York.

Consider Bibi who studies at York and cleans university offices at night. She was born in a small town in Punjab, India, where she lived a “comfortable life” in a family that put more importance on the education of her brothers. Nevertheless, she excelled at school and received high enough marks to receive her BA and MA from a regional university. While her interests were in studying economics, her degrees were in English, the subject available in the nearby school. Meanwhile, her future in-laws chose her as a suitable wife for their son in Canada because of her good education and attractive face.

Bibi was married in the early 1990s and moved to Canada to start her new life. Her husband’s relatives helped them buy a house in Brampton. She was anxious to improve her education and enrolled in the Toronto School of Business, while her husband drove a taxi. But soon after, her husband, who was diabetic and had other health concerns, lost his job, and the family faced economic problems. Her in-laws expected her to repay the loan for the house. She gave up her plans to return to school; she worked a series of jobs in a uniform factory and a gas station and cleaned houses. In spite of carrying more than one job, she and her husband lost the house and moved into a rented apartment. Over the years, she had three boys and spent several months in India looking after her husband’s parents.

One day, a friend told her about York University and helped her get a job interview. Bibi was hired as cleaning staff in 2004. From that point on, she felt closer to her dream of furthering her education. In addition to good pay and benefits, she was attracted to the free tuition and began planning her educational goals with the help of people in student advising and her supportive supervisor. They also helped her transfer 18 credits from her school in India. She is currently in the process of getting her degree in health and society, as well as a certificate in human resource management. In 2005, she took a 9 credit course and an ESL course to upgrade her academic skills, and she has been taking two courses each term since then.

She works from 3:30 p.m. to midnight at York, cleaning offices, but she also works weekends at Tennis Canada. Usually, she works 16 hours a day. She chooses courses that are offered in the late afternoon

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or evening and finishes her cleaning work around class time by working extra hours before and after classes. Her supervisor has helped her with this work schedule. She credits her supervisor and the advisors at the Student Centre for encouraging her to complete her degrees while working at York. The courses have also given her the ambition to upgrade her skills at work. She takes every opportunity to try new jobs and to learn more about resource management at York. She wants her teenaged sons to study at York.

With the Italian workers sticking together and the Caribbean workers sticking together, Bibi found it hard to fit in when she first started working at York. In addition, the South Asians in her community thought that it was degrading that a well-educated woman would do a low status cleaning job. She feels that they do not understand the advantages of working at York. She also likes to see the mix of backgrounds at York.

The stress she feels does not come from the cleaning work or the course load, but from the stress of personal politics on the job. She advocates for more socializing and bonding among workers and for more opportunities to learn about each other's cultures, perhaps through potluck dinners or writing stories about people's lives.³⁹

She praises York for teaching her about people from all parts of the world, broadening her mind and helping her engage with the differences she encounters on campus. She also praises her supervisor for giving her these opportunities. Bibi looks forward to completing her certificate and her degree and, perhaps, one day starting a business of her own.

These overlaps between students, staff, faculty and administration become particularly troublesome when strikes loom. For example, do graduate students who act as teaching assistants and course directors who make their living from part-time teaching share the same concerns? Did the CUPE members participating in the 2008-09 strike

³⁹ Bibi's interest in learning about the experiences of other workers at York may have encouraged her to tell her story.

assume that they did (cf. Nelson and Watt 1999:3)?

Perhaps it is easier for faculty to see York as a community, a virtual reality that is larger than the sum of its parts. Many faculty and staff have spent 30 or more years working at York, even as administrations and students come and go. Older faculty members recall when York behaved as a community. “The university was like a family with a wedding about to take place. . . . It was organized chaos,” an administrator recalls of the early days at York (Horn 2009:34). In the early years of the university, people could see the whole as an imagined community. Over time, it is easier to see the institution fragmenting into a number of self-interested subcultures. Departments, colleges and the unions became the collegium or community for some.

During strikes, faculty come to pay attention to a particular union subculture that many ignore the rest of the time. When strikes occur, the union or even the picket line becomes the collegium. Much could be written on how picket experiences create certain kinds of communities that contribute in a unique way to York culture.

Requiem for Vari

Just as communities constantly change, so too is the space where communal activities are carried out. In particular, Vari Hall is continually being reinvented, and it has always been contested space (cf. Rodman et al. 1998). The opening time scan of the rotunda demonstrates a range of ways that the space is used throughout the day and night. Groups and individuals ebb and flow through the hall. Users always expect to share the space with others. At any given moment, groups with very different objectives are funnelled together in the hall. Both protests and performances compete for attention in the rotunda, sometimes by draping banners from upper railings or using the sound features of the space to amplify the sound of drumming or tap dancing.

But is the rotunda private property as declared by the university

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administration, or public property? Who owns the space and who has the right to decide who is trespassing? As a result of protests in Vari Hall, faculty and students have expressed concern that TUUS permits have converted public space into private space for which permits are required.⁴⁰

With the escalating tensions from some student protests and how they have been handled on campus, the administration wanted to modify the structure of Vari Hall in order to increase the civility of informal demonstrations. Members of the administration refer to the modifications such as the central desk as a way to prevent protests. Vice-President for Students Robert Tiffin admitted to student groups that the renovation initiative is intended “to quell protests” (Excalibur, Feb. 16, 2011).

Students responded to the proposed changes with formal and informal protests and petitions organized by groups such as the “Committee to Defend Student Space”, “Keep Vari Hall as It Is—Real Student Space” and the “Vari Hall Heritage Preservation Committee”. Students argued that the proposed renovations would not benefit students, particularly disabled students who would have difficulty accessing the new space (Excalibur Feb. 16, 2011).

When changes did not occur over the summer of 2010, many students assumed they had “won” the fight. In spite of the well-organized student protests against the proposed renovations to the space, changes were made in the winter break of 2010-2011. Over the winter break, benches and a large information desk appeared in the centre of Vari Hall, intruding on student space, and limiting options for public assembly.

From an aesthetic point of view, Vari Hall has not changed for the better. What used to be a play of light on glass and wood is now interrupted by benches, counters and a strangely shaped information booth in the middle of the hall. The new booth/kiosk structure

⁴⁰ YUFA Stewards’ Council Statement on Vari Hall Events, Feb.16, 2005.

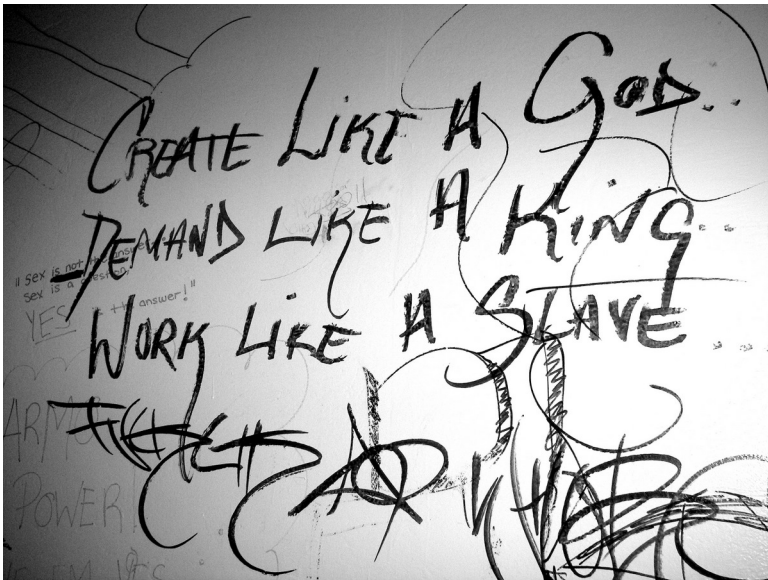
disrupts the traffic flow of people passing through Vari, as students must veer right or left to avoid it. Under administrative auspices, the desk is usually occupied by the Student Community & Leadership Development, which runs the Red Zone. Staffed by senior students, the Red Zone is a service that helps new students get their York card and answers questions about York, including how to access Internet services and join student clubs.

Students have not had time to re-appropriate the new space for themselves, but they are working on it. Since the information booth is not always occupied, students pull up chairs to the counter, plug in their computers and use the counter as a desk or lean against its lighted sides.

The space has shifted from informal common area to formal, underutilized administrative space. It will be interesting to see if attempts at resistance and reclaiming the space will increase in the future, or if the days of Vari Hall as protest central are over. Other changes are clearly beneficial to students. The new benches and counters around the edge of Vari Hall provide extra electrical outlets for computers: “any place to recharge is good.” But according to student researchers, “The redesign of Vari Hall limits student mobility and usage.” Or as one graduate student explained, “The vibe is not the same.”

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...trying it on for size...
Preparing for graduation ceremonies, Vari Hall



...study date...
Vari Hall



...critical engagements...
Graduate student conference, Vari Hall



...performance and social change..
Vari Hall



...inspiring policy change...
Founders College

Event 2: Graduation

Today is graduation day at York University. Marshals wearing fluorescent orange-and-yellow vests direct a well-dressed mob in suits and saris, jeans and national dress from around the world. Many in the group clutch bunches of red roses. Donning graduation robes, they make their way into the huge white tent pitched near Osgoode Law School at the south end of campus. The procession ends with students seated in rows and rows of chairs while proud family members sit in the rows farther from the stage, proudly waiting for their child's name to be announced. The reality of convocating in a tent bothers many graduating students and faculty; however, the facility is arranged in such an appealing manner that once inside the tent, the white walls provide a suitable backdrop for the bagpipes, the violins, the festive flowers, the proud parents and the gowned graduates and faculty. York's coat of arms glows under the spotlight above the bleachers where the new graduates sit. Written on the coat of arms is *Tentanda via*—"The way must be tried."

The drama of convocation plays out behind the scenes. In Vari Hall, students carefully stage convocation. In performance terms, there is a warm-up phase and a cool-down phase between the moments on stage. The warm-up⁴¹ for the students occurs backstage in Vari Hall, out of sight of guests. Vari Hall transforms into a liminal⁴² and secretive space where the graduating students prepare for the procession into the tent.

What a transformation! The open space is now enclosed in red drapes blocking outsiders from viewing the students. Behind the drapes, the students throw on their rented robes after receiving verbal instructions on how to hood themselves. "Hold the point. Hold the white side of

⁴¹ Before actors perform, there is a "warm-up" stage where the actors make final preparations and get into their roles, physically and mentally (Schechner 1985:217-19).

⁴² Liminality is a state of being "betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial" (Turner 1969:95).

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your hood away from you and toss it over your head. Shift the tassel on your hat. When you are ready to march in procession, drape your hood over your left arm.”

After an ineffectual “practice hooding,” students find their assigned location in the procession among others graduating in their program. “It was nice to see people I had classes with,” notes one graduating student who expressed some regret at not seeing his classmates again since their shared classes. Others greet students they had not seen since orientation.

In the liminal warm-up state, almost suspended in time, bonds between individuals develop quickly. This feeling of community or *communitas*⁴³ is not something that emerges every day at York. Given the size and complexity of the campus and the number of commuting students, feelings of togetherness are difficult to foster. At convocation, the students not only share a similar consciousness and sense of excitement, pride and worry, but they also have something significant in common. They all sought a common goal, and they all achieved it. Now, they will graduate together.

The faculty also warm-up while they prepare for what they have done many times before. Often, the faculty turnout is low for the ceremony. Faculty members explain that they come when they are a master of a college, when they are a member of senate or when they are requested to attend by a graduate student.

One faculty member who prefers to “avoid ritual” began coming after his own daughter graduated from another university and she expressed regret that her professor who inspired her was not there to see her graduate. Her comment forced him to reassess how students might respond to graduation. For him, as for many other faculty members, the emotion that the ceremony evokes comes from seeing the diversity of graduating students and the knowledge that many of them were the

⁴³ *Communitas*, as defined by Victor Turner (1974), is a feeling of intense social solidarity and togetherness, a spirit of community that arises when people share common experiences.

first in their families to graduate from university. Others mention the emotions evoked by the students who wear distinctive ethnic clothing under their graduation robes for the event. In June 2008, women's shoes were the particular focus of some discussions among the faculty who sit on the stage with bright lights in their eyes and watch hundreds of feet under identical black robes pass in front of them. During that convocation, the four-inch spike heels, crystal and gold sandals and the occasional flip-flops attracted comments.

With the warm-up completed, the ceremony begins with the procession. The sound of classical music fills the space as the graduating students file into the tent. Everyone stands. Some spectators even stand on their seats. Others prepare their cameras and face the back doors trying to pick out their loved ones from the line of black-robed students. Students text-message on their cell phones to find their family members in the crowd or to let them know exactly where they are on stage. Following the undergraduate students are the masters and the doctoral students who receive a standing ovation. Lastly, the sounds of bagpipes reverberate through the air as the faculty members enter, followed by the beadle who carries the mace ahead of the university's Chancellor.⁴⁴ The mace imposes a symbol of order and discipline on the ceremony and invests the Chancellor with the authority to bestow degrees on the students.

Facing the realities of financial life after graduation, students complain that it costs the school hundreds of thousands of dollars to put up a tent for convocation twice a year when York could build a real building for graduation. "We feel like we are part of Cirque du Soleil," says one. "We're Canadian; we like camping. It's all good," counters another. High above the students, large speakers carry the announcer's

⁴⁴ The beadle carries the 28 pound brass mace, a gift given in 1962 from the City of Toronto to the new university to symbolize the city's contribution to York. It was designed by Gerald Trottier, whose preliminary sketches have been donated to the York archives. The 10 projections on the shoulder of the mace depict the provinces. The coloured stones at the ends of the projections represent the ethnic diversity of Canada. The four arms at the head of the mace that support the orb of the earth represent the ideals that humans strive to achieve.

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voice: “No cell phones.” Nonetheless, the joking continues. One student exclaims, “The metal’s bending!” The students picture the speakers hurtling down, crushing them below. “Squish! With our little black robes and feet sticking out from underneath,” replies Laura.

Amidst the levity, the formality of the event is not forgotten as ushers in the tent ensure that students move only in predetermined ways by corralling them into processional lines that are maintained as students take their seats and wait for their names to be called. Students who believe that their names might be difficult to pronounce provide phonetic pronunciation notes to guide the announcer. Some students see this as evidence that York is too large and impersonal; others see it as a reasonable and thoughtful accommodation to the linguistic diversity of the student body. Parents, guardians and friends listen to each name being called and watch as each student crosses the stage to receive the diploma. For many, graduation is a time for self-reflection and transformation. Luke comments, “I’m part of a greater community, a part of the graduate body. Not a student body at York anymore. The greater body.”

Once on stage, the students face the audience and the audience stares back at the stage. The students, blinded by flashing lights, are still confused and anxious about what will happen next. Many reflect that they just follow what everyone else was doing because they did not know what to do next. “I don’t like surprises,” complains Laura. “I couldn’t hear the speeches very well. The speeches weren’t directed at us. So I was bored.” Some students start text-messaging their parents and fellow peers on the stage to pass the time. Luke, who also could not hear the speeches, admits, “I started to text-message.”

Guests of the graduates try to get the students’ attention even after the students are seated on stage. One student explains that she felt nervous when she reached the stage, but felt comforted and reassured knowing that somewhere in the crowd, someone was waiting for her name to be called. Many students only know about graduation ceremonies from high school or television shows; thus, neither the family nor the graduate knows exactly what to do. It is difficult to prepare for events that only happen once. The marshals complain that

it is hard to separate the graduates from their families because the families are so excited. Soraya, the first in her family to graduate, explains that she did not have her parents to help her with work or speak to her about school because they did not go to university. “I had to find like-minded people for help,” she explains on graduation day.

As a liminal rite of passage,⁴⁵ the transition from one state—student—to another—graduate—is embedded in the convocation ritual. One graduating student reflects on the sometimes jarring effects of that transition and the finality of the process, “how strange at the end [of my program] to see my degree in print. There was something very final about having the paper in the frame in front of you. [Even the] paper felt like it had more weight to it somehow that day.”

The transition to graduate sparks a childhood memory for the student. The student continues,

For me, even stranger, [was that I was] used to seeing my dad’s degree from York growing up; now, I see my own name on the same red and matte York background. It was weird that I was not going back for another year, but the ceremony made it feel a bit more final. I am still anxious about my future and what to do next, considering I had to go to a minimum-wage job the next day at five in the morning. I felt like I deserved better.

The Chancellor transforms the students into graduates with the words *Admitto vos ad gradum* and directs them to place the hoods on their shoulders to mark their status as graduates.⁴⁶ The ritual significance of the moment was not lost on John, “It was apparently a big deal; more so a big problem. You had to be careful not to elbow the eye of the person beside you!”

⁴⁵ The original work on rites of passage was done by Van Gennep (1908), with later work done by Victor Turner (1969, 1974).

⁴⁶ During the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) outbreak in 2003, students were told not to shake the Chancellor’s hand to avoid spreading the disease.

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Some students resent the medieval ritual, arguing that Latin does not fit with York's modern mission statement. Yet Latin is a reminder that every graduation is part of a long tradition that connects current graduates with generations of scholars before them and sometimes unites parents and children within the tradition of graduating from York. As students become alumni, they transition into a new relationship with the university, marked symbolically by receiving the alumni pin from "the pin bin."

Not all students recognize the significance of the Chancellor's words as he intended them. One graduate expresses the irony of being encouraged to think and perform individually and creatively when at York, but at the "critical final moment" of leaving York, she is instructed to conform as part of a group and herded like cattle through the ceremony. On the other hand, several students explain that they did not register the fact that they had officially graduated until they were led out in procession. Luke says, "I was so overwhelmed trying to get the hood on and wondering what to do. The turning point was when the bagpipers played and we followed them out. That's when I knew I was officially sworn in." Guy comments, "[I graduated] ...when I left the tent." But such knowledge of having graduated is not always comforting. Laura reflects, "I was Laura the student. Now what am I?" In an email expressing his impressions of the graduation experience, one graduating student summarizes, "Excitement leading up to it. Boredom during. Sad afterwards."

"University teaches you to wait in line," explains another student after the ceremony. "I had to wait in line to get the robes. I had to wait in [line in] Vari Hall. I had to wait to shake people's hands. Then when you just think it's over, you even have to wait in line to get your degree."

After the ceremony, new graduates and guests mingle outside the tent to take pictures and exchange congratulations. The reception provides an opportunity for new graduates to purchase a video copy of their own graduation, as well as York rings, York bears, York T-shirts and other commemorative items. Some stay for lunch on campus; others

head off to restaurants for a meal and a celebratory drink.

When the graduating classes were smaller, graduation ceremonies could be accommodated in other places on campus, such as the space between the Ross Building and Scott Library. In the 1970s, graduation was very much a college-based affair, with the graduating classes proceeding from the colleges in a procession led by bearers carrying the college flags. The colleges also provided hooders for the students, unlike the massive self-hooding done today. In addition, the colleges hosted the receptions for the students and their guests. Older faculty members recalled that these were much more lavish affairs with more interesting food, graduation cake and a cash bar for beer and wine.

Convocation practices vary over time at York. Students feel that the graduation in 2009 is a milestone because it marks York's 50th anniversary. "Convocation 2009 will be like a rite of passage for the university . . . There's transformation of property and programs; Atkinson is being amalgamated into the Faculty of Arts . . . and the archives building is going up," reflects Tif as she connects her transition into a new status as graduate with York's 50th anniversary. Furthermore, with the new archives, York, in the literal sense, has a history of its own. However, many students do not know anything about York's past. With the talk surrounding the 50th year anniversary during the graduation, people are becoming more aware of changes being made and how they relate to the long-term growth and status of the university and the transformation of community within it. The graduation in 2012 was unusually green. With filling stations now scattered around the campus, York convocation gifts included reusable water bottles in York red and emblazoned with the convocation logo. In the last few years, convocations have been held in the Rexall Centre, a tennis stadium on campus.

There is a lot of talk about Canada and York as a family during convocation. Tif explains, "It's almost like you're more of a Canadian citizen now that you've graduated." This connection between York and the wider nation extends into the formation of community within the university. Another student muses that in first year, it was hard to break in to the bubble that is York, but by fourth year, she felt her

perspective shift to the world outside of York. A cosmopolitan university that draws diverse ethnic, religious and national communities together to produce unique academic cultural practices, York teaches students how to negotiate the transitions and passages from high school student to scholar to alumni.

Apprentice Academics

Convocation is a ritual of transformation, a cultural performance that transforms students into graduates and alumni. “Cultural performances are not only a reflection of what we are, they also shape and direct who we are and what we can become” (Madison 2005:154). Through these performances, we come to realize truths about ourselves. There are many layers to cultural performances:

[M]any levels or modes of seeing, or experiencing, are present simultaneously. A person sees the event; he sees himself; he sees himself seeing the event; he sees himself seeing others who are seeing the event and who, maybe, see themselves seeing the event. Thus, there is the performance, the performers, the spectators; and the spectator of spectators; and the self-seeing-self that can be performer or spectator or spectator of spectators (Schechner 1985:297).

At transformation performances, spectators have a “stake in seeing that the performance succeeds” (Schechner 1985:131). The formality of the carefully controlled event discourages protests or disruptions. Since the heart of the graduation ceremony is repetitive in content, the audience members wait and listen for the one name among hundreds that has meaning for them. Sometimes disruptions are welcomed, as occasionally popular students’ names are met by whistles and stomps, drums or air horns, as they walk across the stage.

Convocation is not only the transformation of student to graduate, but it is also the transformation from member of the student community to a community of alumni to a member of the wider social world. Some students reflect on this transition from one community to

another with a nostalgic fondness. Tif relates, “I feel like I should continue . . . I miss school, the social aspects, community. Even when I hugged my prof, even though he put me through hell all year, I miss him too . . . [He was] someone to socialize with.” While many students find “community” at York, others draw attention to the disconnect that sometimes characterizes large schools. Some students felt disappointment during convocation. Due to York’s size, many students become attached to only the staff and professors of their home department. Laura wishes the professors of her own department were there to shake her hand rather than other representatives of the administration who meant nothing to her.

Graduation represents evidence that students have learned to navigate the intellectual world they inhabited in the university. How do York students learn academic culture or learn how to navigate the demands of academic life? Some never do and drop out. Some never do and still learn enough to graduate. Yet, many learn much more from their years at York than merely the content of their degree programs. Students acquire this academic culture as they progress through their own university careers, from their first year to their last years at York, and gradually increase personal control over their intellectual lives and futures.

In this section, we provide some insights about how academic culture is acquired at York, drawing attention to some of the places where this work occurs—classrooms, laboratories, studios and libraries. Along the way, writing and computing will be considered in more detail, as well as some of the challenges students face as they follow their distinct paths through York.

In some ways, learning how to model the intellectual values of the university resembles how an apprentice learns a craft. The apprentice model looks at how students learn scholarly practices from their teachers, tutorial leaders and other students. How do students learn to do what anthropologists, historians, musicians and chemists do? Do they learn this from seeing their teachers in class or from reading their professors’ publications? Students need step-by-step instructions on how to model their thinking and how to do research as a psychologist

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or a biologist. Even graduate schools rarely unpack all the practices involved in learning how to do intellectual work. When faculty members try to communicate about the process of working through problems in their own research, they tend to compress their steps, rarely revealing, perhaps even recalling, the missteps along the way.

However, the term “apprentice” can be misleading. For example, are teaching assistants and course directors full teaching employees or apprentice teachers? This ambiguity underlies many of the labour disputes at York. The idea of graduate students as academic apprentices has some merit, but it also has drawbacks. From a critical perspective, Nelson and Watt recognize that “graduate-student teachers work as apprentices in the guild we call academe and someday will take their rightful place beside their journeymen-mentors as professors in academic departments” (1999:60). They argue that debt and harsh market alternatives are the realities for many part-time course directors, and they critique the administrative practice of labelling course directors as apprentices getting on-the-job training to justify low wages with no raises for their experience (Nelson and Watt 1999:63). Similar criticism has been raised about interns and internships for students.

In this book, the term “academic apprentice” will be used to describe how both undergraduate and graduate students pick up the intellectual work model of academic culture, not to how students are employed. Canadian labour legislation would not permit apprentice-like conditions today in any work sector. The word “apprentice” seems more appropriate in academia than words like “customers” or “clients.” Calling students “partners” in their education denies the university’s hierarchical structure that gives faculty the power to assign grades.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ There have been efforts in numerous places and times to develop free universities to avoid the hierarchical structures of universities. York has made attempts to minimize hierarchy. For example, it has never created a private faculty club on campus, unlike in many other schools. The former Grad Lounge always contained undergraduate students meeting with graduate students and also faculty meeting with graduate students. This

Apprentice models help provide insights into some of the stories that emerged in the ethnographic fieldwork. For example, first year students at York cannot use high school as a model for understanding how to write university exams. There are many different models of testing methods at York—in-class essay exams, take-home exams, open-book exams, multiple-choice exams—and these vary by department tradition and university guidelines. The examination process changes over time and adapts to increasing class size. For many first year students who are unfamiliar with the university examination system, the exam procedures seem as daunting as the exam content.⁴⁸

Several first year students expressed their concerns about not knowing exactly what to expect when they write their first exams at York. The students often asked their teaching assistants implicit rules about exam etiquette; such questions included where to leave bags and phones (particularly when phones are used as watches), placing YorkU student cards on the desk, signing in and signing out to use the restroom and bringing extra pens (not pencils). Generally, exams at York are held in large spaces such as the gymnasiums and the Rexall Centre. Sometimes there are multiple classes writing exams in the same space, making it difficult for students to know where they are supposed to sit and what they are required to do. Learning to take exams at York is not solely an individual experience that students suffer through alone. Peers often aid each other while studying and preparing for exams and alert each other about exam procedures on the exam day. In an effort to allay student fears, some teaching assistants will go over these aspects of exam-taking when preparing their classes for the exam itself.

The examination process is not the only event where apprentice

mingling may have been a tribute to the lack of hierarchical separation between students and faculty or, more likely, a reflection of funding priorities.

⁴⁸ After the strike in 2008-09, the exam process appeared even more frightening to undergraduates, particularly with Sunday exams proposed for the first time at York. Students were concerned about how to deal with the restricted bus schedules on Sundays and in the evenings for those exams ending late at night.

students learn from each other as well as from their mentors. A third year student from Bangladesh described an experience in the Scott Library:

One day, one girl was studying next to me. She was reading her text and making notes from chapters. Her style of taking note[s] and her way of studying was very inspiring. I was motivated to study more. She [had] a very good copy book, and she had all different kinds of markers and pens with her. She was going through the chapters very fast but highlighting the main points and writing the main points in clear handwriting using different colour codes. She was reading very attentively and nothing was distracting her from reading. At one point, I felt guilty observing her and felt like maybe I [could] have been disturbing her too! So, I also started studying . . . I studied around one or two more hours but I really could study well . . . that like inspired me . . . that environment inspired me to study.⁴⁹

By observing how the other student was studying and even trying those techniques herself, this student was inspired to turn her observations into practice by working longer and more effectively.

Use of course kits also reinforces the apprentice work occurring at York. Students often purchase course kits composed of photocopied articles from a professor's own research collection; sometimes the professor will even include his or her notations on these articles. Some students view these notated papers as a window into how the professor thinks about a subject or an author, reinforcing the idea that the professor is constantly learning, revising and commenting on the work of others, just as students are expected to do. As one graduate student explained, he might use a photocopied article with the professor's comments and underlining and, in another colour, highlight his own reactions before passing the article to his girlfriend

⁴⁹ This comment comes from Amanda Wakaruk's ethnography field notes of Scott Library. Most quotes from her fieldnotes are also cited in Wakaruk 2009.

who makes her commentary in yet another colour. This colourful palimpsest becomes an aide-mémoire for a deeper discussion and for incorporating the emergent ideas into their own work.⁵⁰

According to the observations of some students, apprenticeship can extend to mimesis when graduate students begin to dress like their supervisors! Thus, apprenticeship is both an academic mentoring process that can also manifest as a particular form of professionalization—the presentation of the self (cf. Goffman 1959).

The Classroom, the Laboratory and the Studio

Every day, in laboratories, classrooms and across campus, we are challenging the ordinary. We are finding unique ways of looking at the world; giving people the opportunity to create their own destinies; and fostering a climate of flexibility, originality and unbounded thinking (York U Facts 2008).

York graduates are products of the teachers they encounter and the institution itself. But what about the built environment and the places where students learn? Analysts of public school environments know that classroom material culture including cheap plastic furniture and the absence of windows often has a negative effect on learning. Suburban schools, and private boys' schools often have better equipped labs than girls' schools or inner city urban schools.⁵¹ The physical spaces where learning takes place matters.

Consider the elegance and formality of the wood-paneled York Room, with its framed art and long carved meeting table, located on the ninth

⁵⁰ Until I heard this story, I used to spend time trying to white out my comments and expletives written on the photocopied articles that I gave students, in an effort to give them a “blank slate.” I no longer do this. (PVE)

⁵¹ I recall my father, a public high school teacher, deciding that I could not attend a private girls' school because he found that their science labs were poorly equipped. (PVE)

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floor of the Ross Building. Since the construction of the Ross Building, the room has been used for masters and doctoral defenses. The formality of the room sets the stage for the highest possible standards of academic debate. Now that the president's office has taken over the booking, the room is used for other purposes. Today, graduate students often defend in ordinary seminar rooms, where the process appears much more casual and informal—a mixed blessing for those who value the performativity of intellectual debate. Has this change of venue altered the demeanour of students who defend in spaces where they usually eat their lunch or meet their friends? Or, does it reflect a more subtle move from intellectual debate to collegial collaboration as graduate students undergo the “defense” process in familiar spaces?

Students have a role in creating familiar, collegial spaces out of formal spaces. For example, in 2009, the graduate student lounge in the anthropology department was covered with pinned up pictures, including an Indiana Jones poster; student union information; and a motley collection of other papers archived on the walls over time. A swath of mosquito netting hung above an adopted couch, reminiscent of anthropology's engagement with fieldwork away from home. Two years later the mosquito netting disappeared and new posters decorate the walls. Within the room the graduate students gather between classes to lament their work; to discuss their relationships with the undergraduate students they teach; or to reflect on and work through conceptual, theoretical or methodological problems of class work, comprehensive exams or research. While not a formal academic space, the lounge often serves as an impromptu educational space as graduate students mentor each other on the rigours of academic life.

For York students, most of the apprentice learning takes place in classrooms, in laboratories, in studios, in libraries and in the lonely all-night writing sessions scattered all over the campus and the city. How do these classrooms, laboratories and studios accomplish the intellectual modelling necessary for the “unbounded thinking” that York University encourages? What effects do the classrooms, laboratories and studios themselves have on student learning? How

does the structure of learning spaces facilitate these processes? Do different learning spaces foster the production of different types of knowledge? It is interesting to consider why social science courses do not have labs or studios (cf. Meacham 2013:13). If place has an emergent quality, and its meaning is shaped by contexts and co-produced from both individual and group interaction, then academic cultures are created in many different ways and in many different spaces at York. Of course, not all academic work is accomplished in these official academic spaces. However, in this section, a few locations where learning takes place at York are explored further.

Classrooms

The Keele Street campus has around 100 lecture halls, 150 classrooms, and 150 seminar rooms. They are more than just spaces with seats; they are teaching and learning environments that suit some people better than others.⁵² For some York faculty, the worst teaching classroom is one that is too large for the number of students enrolled in the course. One faculty member said, “Teaching 70 in a space for 200 is the worst. When the 70 students are packed closer together you feel more of an energy.” According to one experienced teacher in the social sciences, the emptiness, the spaces between, drains energy and makes one feel uninspired. Both students and faculty expressed preference for small, intimate classrooms that always looked and felt full.

From a student perspective, interesting content and a good professor can compensate for being in a large, impersonal classroom. For example, one professor teaching in a large lecture hall regularly ended the lecture a few minutes early and invited students, who may have questions, to talk together after class. About a dozen students would cluster at the front of the class for a more intimate, personal discussion about the lecture. One senior student reported that she could clearly recall the after-class lessons learned from the personal interaction at the front of the hall but always forgot the content from

⁵² I cannot teach without a lectern and a table, and I prefer student desks that can be moved for group work. (PVE)

the impersonal lecture.

The large lecture halls often appeal to those who want to be invisible. In theatre-style lecture halls, attention is focused on the front, and the hierarchy of teacher–student is clear. Generally, these are not the places for expressing individuality; they are not personal spaces. One student reflected,

It's great if you have not done your readings. You are only there to listen to the professor and not to interact. The power relations between student and teacher are expressed spatially. There is no necessary way to connect the lecture to your everyday life. You are just there to absorb information from the prof.

While many faculty members preferred wide, shallow classroom spaces over long, deep classroom spaces, some students preferred the long, deep classrooms because it was easier to hide in the back if they were not prepared for class. Students also noted the placement of doors, planning the easiest way to come in when they were late for class, and out when they wanted to leave class early.

Smaller classrooms for tutorials are often arranged in a circle or a setting that discourages students from being invisible. The exchange is more personal, less structured and with more chances to ask questions. Through the casual exchange of ideas and perspectives, new knowledge and ways to look at a subject may be introduced. But both students and faculty recognized that even at round or oval seminar tables, attention is still focused on the “teacher-end of the table.”

Upon entering a space, both students and faculty first notice whether a classroom has windows. Without windows, the space “feels stuffy,” regardless of the course content.⁵³ Both students and faculty also

⁵³ The respondents only cared for windows they could look out of, not windows that allowed others to look in. This latter comment makes windows in classrooms operate more like a panopticon (cf. Amit 2000), although the gaze looking in often appears to be more motivated by curiosity rather than surveillance. No collective members recalled seeing senior administrators looking in classroom windows.

preferred the lightness of Vari Hall compared to the dreary darkness of rooms in older buildings. One TA stated that classrooms are just functional, and the only things that matter are the content of the course and the way the professor delivers the material.

York's classrooms, ranging from small, intimate tutorial rooms to theatre-style lecture halls, are all neutral teaching spaces. In keeping with the secular nature of the university, there are neither religious symbols on the walls nor illustrations suggesting disciplinary allegiance. An observer cannot easily discern whether the classroom is used mostly by mathematicians or philosophers. Most professors endeavor not to leave their traces, in the form of papers and writings on the board, for the next professor using the space. However, several students mentioned that they enjoyed reading the notes on the whiteboards and blackboards that are sometimes left from the previous class. Generally, both students and teachers come into classrooms with what they need and leave with the same materials.

Most academic departments have seminar rooms that can be used for graduate classes and department meetings. These multi-purpose rooms (MPR) carry the traces of the varied past experiences of their users. "I have had good and bad experiences in the MPR. The room itself is not important," explains one graduate student. However, several noted that the dynamics of a graduate seminar held around a table compared to a seminar held where students spread out in a circle in comfortable chairs is different. "Some graduate students will talk around the table but not in a circle of chairs; others, the reverse. It is easier to focus around a table, and easier to let your mind wander in the chairs."⁵⁴ Some spaces encourage good conversations, but good conversations can develop in poorly designed spaces as well. Classroom culture is created in the social interaction that develops within those four walls,

⁵⁴ One academic department bought special tables to transform the space, replacing the one large, formal boardroom style table with the more flexible modular round and oblong table segments. However, the department learned that assembling and disassembling the tables is defined as a union job, not something that faculty and students can decide to do at the spur of the moment.

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regardless of a room's layout. When asked about their favourite classrooms, students often preferred the classrooms closest to their home departments.

A considerable amount of academic work is accomplished in the halls and in the spaces between classrooms. One graduating student explained that sitting around at York, she felt more productive and organized, in spite of distractions on campus such as surfing the Internet and socializing with friends. Being in a space defined as "school" enabled her to focus because she was surrounded by peers who were also focused on completing school tasks—finishing a reading, studying for a test or writing an essay. Discussions with her friends confirmed that they too can only concentrate at school, and they sought out special spots, some in the library or college common rooms, to concentrate.

Will the acts of sitting in classrooms to listen to lectures become as obsolete as going to the library to read books? In the 2008 student survey conducted by York's Computing and Network services (CNS), now University Information Technology services (UIT), online lecture notes and slides were the most common and most important on-line resource used by students. Younger faculty members are more likely to use the newest instructional resources and to post lectures online. But other faculty members report low class attendance when lecture notes are posted online.

Students with laptops tend to sit around the edges and back of large lecture halls in order to have access to the electric outlets. According to the 2008 CNS survey of 4111 students, 31 per cent never bring their laptops to class and 19 per cent always bring them. However, some faculty members ask students not to bring computers to class in order to help students focus on the classroom interaction. According to one professor in the social sciences, laptop use in classrooms diminishes the interpersonal interaction in class because students are less engaged with issues.

Classrooms are also spaces of resistance. There is a difference between the intended use of classroom space and the actual use. Students

appropriate space in the classroom by spreading out their materials, saving spaces for friends and challenging public–private spatial boundaries. They carve out space and time for themselves by reading newspapers, doing crossword puzzles, texting, checking Facebook and playing games on electronic devices during classes. While the sight of several rows of students reading newspapers in a lecture hall is upsetting to lecturers, computer use has made “doing your own thing” less disruptive during class. Only a vigilant TA sitting at the back of a lecture hall can tell whether students are doing classwork or social networking on their laptops. Students also know which classrooms are likely to be available after hours for “dating activities.” Other more public classroom disruptions include invasions by students dressed in costumes and false fire alarms that often occur during exams.⁵⁵ In 2013, a York student dressed up in a costume and performed a “Gangnam Style” dance on campus, passing through several large lecture halls.⁵⁶

Classrooms can also become places of comfort:

Three degrees and seven years of university later, I am the subject of countless jokes about my addiction to academia and my reluctance to join the “real world.” But in university, I was comfortable, immersed in a world where I knew I could succeed. I was less confident about my chances in the “real world.” I also worried that if I left school to travel, I might never return. After getting my first degree, I was certain of two things: I didn’t want to leave this

⁵⁵ Minutes from a Security Advisory Council meeting quotes Robert Castle (then Executive Director of the Student Centre) as saying that 99 per cent of fire alarms in the Student Centre are false; it costs the university \$1,000 for each fire service call. Even if an alarm is known to be false by the fire department, fire services must still make a visit. According to YFile, York paid \$162,189.62 in 2005 to the Toronto Fire Services for false alarms.

⁵⁶ To watch the Gangnam Style parody video, please see the following website:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XLl0Az3cwbs&feature=em-share_video_user

campus life and I had to enhance my resume for real-world success. I loved the student existence. I could sleep in, then head to a coffee shop to join others working on their laptops. I was gratified by the independence of setting my own agenda and the sense of achievement when handed back a project with an *A* scratched on it. (Freeman 2008:13)

Group work assignments were considered frustrating for “good” students, but helpful for “bad” students. These sentiments could still be felt by students in theatre and business, subject areas where group process itself is the product and purpose of some lessons. A few students claimed that they did not like peer learning and group work because they viewed professors as repositories of expert knowledge and assumed that their peers had nothing to teach them (Tsui 2000:430).

Laboratories⁵⁷

York has around 80 classroom laboratories where science is taught. An engineering student differentiated these classroom labs from general labs where computers are located and where students relax from specialized labs (13) where students work on electronics, robotics or chemistry. Engineers and science students use labs more than classrooms.

Consider an undergraduate chemistry class that is taking place in a lab at York. A typical lab class lasts for three hours. There are about 12 tables in the lab; two students assigned to each table. Each student enters the lab with safety goggles, lab coat, lab manual, electronic calculator, laptop computer and other accessories. At each table, there

⁵⁷ We are indebted to Natasha Myers and her students in ANTH/STS 3550 (2009), *Science as Practice and Culture*, for much of our understandings of lab spaces at York. Ethics approval and permission was obtained for the class project entitled science@york. Direct observations or quotes from the students are cited from their field reports, but since their fieldnotes were shared within groups, we thank everyone for their valuable contributions.

are sets of beakers, test tubes, pipettes, pipette pumps and other apparatuses. Beside each table, there are water baths; inside the water baths, there are a range of chemicals such as potassium iodide and acetic acid.

The lab assistant explains the experiment on the chalkboard, drawing diagrams about how to set up the experiment. She tells the students to follow the lab manual as a guide and to raise their hands if they have any problems or questions. She distributes to all the students the graph sheets that will be used to plot their results. The undergraduate students are required to use their observations to answer questions from the lab manual. They must hand in their results and written answers before leaving the lab. A more polished report may be submitted later. Beside the sinks, there are detergents and brushes for cleaning equipment. Once students finish their experiments, they wash their equipment and rearrange the tables before leaving the lab.

Lab classes require students to actively participate. When students leave the lab, they have completed the day's classwork, but in classrooms, work for most students begins after the lecture is finished. According to students, people can snooze through a classroom lecture, but not through a lab. Science externalizes its culture, making it easier for a student to be an apprentice academic. Labs lead a student through what one cannot describe in words, as opposed to the interior work of the humanities and social sciences where most of the work starts after one leaves the classroom.

Compared to classrooms and studios, labs contain more interesting things to look at. Labs are full of people with goggles and lab coats. The equipment is a major part of the learning process. Unlike classrooms, labs are places where course requirements are met and places of research work where careers are built. Labs contain simple equipment such as test tubes and also complex, expensive machinery such as refrigerated centrifuges, cell incubators and special microscopes. Equipment can be so complex and expensive that specialists are needed to teach researchers how to use and repair it. This equipment may sit alongside commonplace metal buckets filled with chunks of ice. One student observer explained, "This bucket

seemed oddly homey, reminiscent of backyard BBQs and farmyards. In this clinical laboratory of whitewashed walls, gleaming instruments and machines, the presence of the bucket was almost comical.”

In the laboratory, the scientists, students and their equipment are actors who work together to produce scientific facts. Specific types of machines help define the distinctness of a research group. These machines help to make sense of the social organization of a laboratory. At York, all the major machinery is kept in common areas and is shared among all the labs in the building. Lab members place great trust in their machines and feel responsible for looking after them. One graduate student described the mass spectrometer she had to supervise as being “fast, accurate and reproducible; it gives you peace of mind.”⁵⁸

The apprentice model is more developed in the sciences, particularly in graduate and postgraduate education. Labs for teaching and research have a different atmosphere than classrooms. In most labs, the graduate students are essential to the research enterprise—the research simply cannot be done without them. Face-to-face interactions and peer mentorship play a critical part in training students in the sciences. Research labs are places where undergraduates, graduate students and postdoctoral fellows meet and interact. A research professor who is usually a principal investigator on a funded project oversees the students’ work. Teaching assistants in science are often closer in age to undergraduates, relating to them well and modelling to them the idea of graduate research work in science (Fallis 2005).⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Natasha Myers’ recent work concerns the ways that molecular machines may get naturalized into “nature’s tools” instead of being considered the “elaborately crafted *figural machinery* of the investigator” (2008:118).

⁵⁹ This observation may also apply to teaching assistants in classrooms and studios. However, in laboratories, the mentoring function is incorporated into the training of graduate students. The age difference between lab assistants and students was obvious to my father, Allen Fair, who was hired in 1963 by the head of science Robert Lundell in order to set up the experiments for the first-year natural science courses at

Peer mentorship is the primary mode of transmitting laboratory culture. Scientists reproduce themselves by training novices in the daily routines of conducting an experiment. In labs, student scientists learn to be meticulous, patient and persistent through trial and error (Traweek 1988:74). The mixing of undergraduates, graduate students and professors has a special potential for creativity; the undergraduates are “like kids in the chocolate factory,” as they contribute to the production of scientific facts. They ask graduate students, who are more advanced apprentice scientists, questions that might not have been anticipated. These questions from “left field” are tolerated, even encouraged by the graduate students because undergraduates may bring a new take on a question, a new way of seeing the problem. Graduate students come to realize that their ongoing role in the laboratory includes learning how to mentor junior lab members. Some graduate students resent this and see it as a burden, while others embrace the idea and relish the opportunity to interact with undergraduates.

Labs socialize their members into the laboratory culture. While undergraduate students may only be performing repetitive tasks like marking and labelling miscellaneous samples, they are learning first-hand the culture of the laboratory and qualities necessary to succeed in the world of science: competitiveness, work ethic and determination. Even members of the cleaning crew are important because they facilitate the work of the lab.

Learning in laboratories is more of a team effort than learning in classrooms. The communal spaces of lab students have to be

Glendon. In 1968, my father moved to the new science buildings at the Keele campus. Because of his career as a high school chemistry teacher, he was able to write up lab instructions and assist students who had no previous experience with science experiments. In his family autobiography, he recalled that during the year, the Glendon students did only three natural science experiments in the lab. The science majors at the Keele campus were more skilled with specialized science experiments than the ones at Glendon. When graduate students became available to assist with the labs, they replaced the older lab assistants, including my father who was 74 when he retired from York University. (PVE)

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maintained. Weekly lab meetings are not only about research, but they are also about distributing chores, such as cleaning and maintaining lab spaces. Labs are as multicultural as other learning environments at York. One student researcher noted that everyone from her lab was from somewhere different, but they worked well together because everyone respected each other and respected the contributions of each person. Lab researchers tend to socialize together, but even when they are outside of the lab, their conversations eventually lead back to work in the lab.

Laboratories are not only sites for making science, but are also sites for the making of scientists. Graduate students with varying amounts of lab experience mentor each other when the principal investigator is not available. This peer mentoring spills over into special benefits for undergraduate students who have a place in labs. In the labs at York, graduate researchers seem right at home, their lab coats signifying their sense of belonging to the lab. As one graduate researcher hurried from one machine to another, tucking something here, nipping something there and wrapping different devices with cellophane, a student ethnographer noted “an air of precision and calm collectedness” about the way lab tasks were accomplished. This observation of a seasoned lab worker with a high level of skill might contrast with the practices of first year graduate students and undergraduates. Student scientists in training may not have acquired the dexterity of their mentors and may be seen fumbling with different machines and materials before they have acquired the skills and practices of the experienced researcher.

Labs have complex social organizations. Traweek (1988) discusses how lab spaces create a sense of hierarchy and seniority. Hierarchy determines how the work is divided. Principal investigators head the laboratories, and their names appear on every publication that is based on their lab results. They determine the direction of the research and choose the personnel working in the labs.

The social organization of the lab is reproduced in scientific texts in a number of ways. The hierarchical structure is replicated in the authorship of the publications. But all researchers involved in the

work share credit for the success of the lab. Lab projects are communal; the potential rewards are shared among participants. The work of the lab may be integrated into large online databases that transfer information to other scholars in the wider scientific community to facilitate comparative analyses. Thus, all lab students have a clear vision that they are part of a team that adds to the pool of scientific knowledge.

For example, the Centre for Research in Mass Spectrometry at York was established in May 2000. It promotes research collaborations with other universities, hospitals and government institutes, including Environment Canada. In 2008, about fifteen post-doctoral fellows and research associates and twenty-five graduate students were associated with the lab. Their work is in high demand, and many graduates from the centre are directly hired by hospitals or health-related industries. The centre has 15 mass spectrometers.⁶⁰

Since mass spectrometry is used for many applications that directly affect people's lives, the researchers in this area have a powerful rationale motivating their research work. But other actors also influence knowledge production in the lab, such as the government, the funding agencies and the media. These actors play important roles in the way that scientific information gets communicated to the public as well. The Faculty of Science and Engineering at York received \$30 million in research funding in 2008. The funding provides opportunities for a variety of working relationships, including the commercialization of new technologies. For example, some labs investigating the molecular basis of disease are in a position to develop new drug therapies from their research. The business and pharmaceutical companies who would potentially benefit from such developments are often involved in funding or in the decision-making process to get a project funded. There is no doubt a bias towards approving research projects that will likely lead to potentially profitable outcomes.

⁶⁰ For more information on the Centre for Research in Mass Spectrometry, please visit the following website: <http://www.chem.yorku.ca/CRMS/>

Strikes can diminish funding for laboratories and can tarnish the reputation and prestige of York's labs and, therefore, the research itself. Recognition and prestige are important for attracting the best students and government funds to the university. Many science students felt that publicity about strikes damaged the image of York and raised questions about the quality of education and research conducted in the labs. Following the faculty strike in the spring of 1997, students in science expressed the least support for the strike (16.4 per cent), with over half the science respondents opposed to the strike (Grayson 1998:Table 1). Lab students were also concerned about the strike in 2008-09 because they needed continued access to the machinery and experiments they were running. Lab work is hard to interrupt, as a student explained:

I could easily stay more than eight hours a day. 'Cause . . . [it] depends on what you're doing. It's not every week. Certain weeks you're doing something, and you just can't leave it; you have to finish it. You can't just say "It's four o'clock; I've got to go home now." But you stay until it's done, and it could take a long day, but it's better that way than to have to redo everything and come back another day . . .

Oh yeah, you have to sit there . . . 'Cause you have to move the fractions—one millilitre fractions, five millilitre fractions—depending on what you're doing and then every so often—one minute or two minutes—you have to move the tubes by hand.

Life science students also need to take care of their experiments on a daily basis; usually their research experiments are alive and require constant feeding and monitoring. For some lab workers, their research comes before their stomachs; they eat at irregular times because hours may pass before they have a chance to eat. Due to the nature of their work in labs, students were permitted to access their labs during the strike of 2008-09, provided that health and safety regulations were maintained and that supervision was from non-CUPE 3903 employees. Laboratory work is considered to be a legitimate practice

during the strike.⁶¹

Each lab has a distinct “culture,” but some mythologies are widespread across various labs. For example, researchers explained that at York, the people in the labs are helpful towards each other, whereas at the University of Toronto, rumour has it that lab technicians will change the labels on bottles, so that if their chemicals are used, another’s experiment will be ruined. This apocryphal story probably exists in reverse at the University of Toronto about researchers at York because such stories serve to keep the lab group cohesive.

Studios

While classrooms and laboratories develop critical attitudes and skills, studios “free the creative imagination to play” (Clarkson 2005:2). From the age of six or younger, Canadian students are socialized into classrooms of various types. “We are trained to sit in uncomfortable chairs and look at a teacher,” explained a theatre major who loved being able to sit on the floor during studio classes. There are more than 200 studio and workroom spaces at York.

These include the creative spaces of theatre, music, film, visual art and dance. Studio spaces are specialized for particular art forms. For instance, while dance studios encourage the use of mirrors to monitor dancing bodies, theatre studios may cover them to avoid visual distractions. Theatre studios create a sense of intimacy by their relatively small spaces that permit only a small number of students to gather at the same time.

The dance studios at York are beautifully appointed with plenty of lights and mirrors. The overall shape of the studio determines how group work can be accomplished. Teachers determine how to arrange the class in relation to equipment such as barres and mirrors.

⁶¹ To learn more about the policy guidelines in effect during the 2008-09 strike, please visit the following website: http://www.yorku.ca/yfile/special/faculty_and_librarian_faqs.pdf

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Studio courses are an important component of dance programs. Some dance courses amalgamate a lecture on dance history with studio time; other courses are mainly studio time, with less lecturing. One long-time faculty member in the dance department spoke of talking more in past courses than she does currently, after recognizing that the students are there to dance and that the instructor must incorporate the theory or history seamlessly into the dance component. The students reported enjoying the opportunities to dance rather than to listen to theories when they are in a studio.

In dance history classes, students can feel the tension of “holding back” in the studio space when, for example, they reproduce a Baroque dance. A teacher or viewer stands at the front of the class and watches dancers approach in pairs. The students contrast this experience with the freer, more improvised styles of Renaissance dance. This embodied understanding of historical dance styles is only possible in a studio space. An ideal teaching environment combines a lecture style history or theory class held in a classroom with a dance component held in a studio.

When preparing for studio work, teachers and students transform their appearance by putting on dancewear. A classroom teacher, for example, uses changing of clothes to signal a change in persona, so that the students see her as a dancer when she enters the studio. Clothing change and warm-up mark one’s entry into studio space.

Once in the studio, social relations change as well. Studio teaching requires and permits touching, while this is not permitted in classrooms. As a result, students and teachers have a closer, more personal bond. Studio spaces break down barriers between people as they reveal themselves to each other; their injuries, stress, depression, and eating habits are made visible. According to a teacher who uses both classroom and studio space regularly, students confide in studio teachers in studio spaces more than in teachers in classroom spaces.

Classes of all kinds can be tiring. But, compared to the experience of some classroom classes, studio classes can be energizing, not energy-depleting. Students also generally relate differently to each other in

studio spaces compared to classroom spaces. Studio time has the potential to encourage the development of cliques and negative competition. Depending on the teacher, studio learning can be structured to encourage and support students. Grading in studio work is not strictly based on dance ability, but also on effort, attitude and personal progress, which considers where the student has come from when the course began to where the student is when it ends.

A fourth year student describes her dance class experience in similar terms:

Dance classes often include one hour working on theory or history or dance styles, for example, followed by time spent in the studio, applying what you learned to your own body. Take the technique of a famous dancer, for example. Dancing in that style in the studio would permit us to understand in our own bodies what the famous artist meant while creating certain dance steps or explaining about feelings and emotions that would emerge from the dance moves. The studio allowed us to put into practice the knowledge that we were being taught—allowing a more complete understanding of all sorts of knowledge. Until the person puts into practice what has been learned, there will never be a complete understanding of the material. Furthermore the studio allows the student to feel comfortable, as the setting is completely different. (For example: you would be wearing gym attire; you wouldn't be wearing shoes; you wouldn't be using books or notebooks; you would be sitting on the floor; you are being active instead of just talking; you are simultaneously moving and talking.)

Dance studios encourage the creation of art through body movement. They are places to express yourself and to learn how your own body acts and responds to different surroundings. Studios challenge the idea that that learning belongs in a classroom. Changes of settings encourage creativity and exercise different parts of the brain . . . Studios require participation

through performing, and they encourage different relationships to teachers and students. These more personal encounters bring other skills to the table. But you are judged by others on your dance ability.

Many kinds of artists keep in contact with York faculty and come back as professionals to perform in arts festivals at York. On a radio program, a York graduate spoke of her mixed feelings of fear and pride when performing in front of her former teachers at York.

Tim Posgate, a Toronto-based jazz musician, attended York from 1985 to 1989. As a guitarist, banjo player, band leader and jazz composer, he has seven CDs under his label, Guildwood Records.⁶² Tim's first three years as a music student were spent at McLaughlin College, where he interacted with non-musicians in residence. For his last year at York, he moved downtown where he began to live the life of a jazz musician, day and night. In high school, he struggled with the decision of whether to stay with his successful rock band or to go to university. Once he decided on university, he chose to study at York, since he knew that he wanted to be a jazz musician and that York had one of the most innovative and creative jazz programs in Canada. In high school, he sought out jazz guitar teachers who also taught part-time at York.

While in residence at York, Tim remembers partying and playing hockey with guys from various programs. His residence life and musician life came together when he had to take a fine arts related course and picked choreography and dance composition. In a class of female dance majors, he was one of two male musicians not trained in dance. The teacher tried to keep them in the class by promising them an *A* if they came to the classes and put 100 per cent of their effort into the studio dance class. They stayed. Tim says, "It was my only *A* at York!" He also remembers the day when the entire men's residence floor lined up in front of the dance studio windows to watch his class.

⁶² Information on Tim Posgate Hornband and other bands can be found on this website: <http://www.guildwoodrecords.com/>.

Tim still composes and performs with a sensitivity to dance composition gained from that course. He remembers another class that changed his life—a course on Canadian culture taught by Carole Carpenter. “We were exposed to all different ways to explore Canadian culture—visual art, theatre, literature; I became a ‘Canadaphile’ because of her course,” he recalls. On his website, he explains that he is passionate about many artistic disciplines including poetry, visual art, dance and theatre and is collaborative in his working style, all points he attributes to his experiences at York.

Tim does not dwell on his academic successes at York. He says, “I barely scraped through; I was a squeaker, particularly in my non-music courses like natural science. And even my first music audition wasn’t good enough to get me into the jazz workshop in my first year.” But this audition motivated him to succeed in later workshops where the contacts he made put him right in the middle of the Toronto jazz music scene. He never thought much about grades; thinking back, he was never sure how he earned his grades, particularly in music improvisation courses. However, he remembers the spirit being “great.” One of his best moments at York was when he received an Oscar Peterson award, and had the opportunity to listen and talk to the great musician. He remembers Oscar telling him that to be a great player, “every day, you need to put on records and play along, emulating the feeling from the music.” Tim now passes this same advice on to his music students.

His most lasting memories of York concern the music workshops. From his first courses in musicianship with David Mott that “knocked me off my feet” to the specialized jazz workshops in his senior years, he spoke of how the networks of students and teachers whom he first encountered at York expanded and stayed with him as he became a professional musician. Many of his present musical connections can be traced back to teacher–student ties from the late 1980s.

This network of teachers, students and musicians sustains him now. Since employment opportunities go up and down, York music alumni put each other on the guest lists for their shows. As musicians in Toronto, they cannot always afford the tickets to hear each other play.

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Tim explains, “He goes to hear me play; I go to hear him play.” Other friends from those York workshops keep in contact with Tim to learn about new ideas, to discuss the music industry and to assess the new players on the scene. One of his closest friends from the workshops, Andy Milne, produced, (and was featured in) Tim’s first CD, *Hoser City*. Artie Roth, another friend from the workshops, invited Tim to play in his successful jazz trio in the early 1990s. When Tim needs a bass player, sometimes Artie will join in for a performance. Students who played music with Tim at York stay in touch and invite him to play with them. “If we played together in the York workshops, I always knew it would be a top-rated gig; because I knew where he came from.” His friends are now the jazz teachers for the next generation, even if only a handful of them have succeeded in their own musical careers.

The faculty of in-studio courses are often complex mixes of performer–academic and scholar–performer. The roles of student, teacher and musician overlap in Tim’s network. For example, Barry Elmes, chair of music at York from 2007–10, was Tim’s teacher. But Tim called him up in the early 1990s, and Barry agreed to play in Tim’s band. Barry Elmes and Al Henderson have a jazz band called Time Warp. Tim spoke of his own hesitation and nervousness when he invited his former teachers to play in his bands; but they usually accepted his invitations. He had the opportunity to play with the Time Warp Rhythm Section in the early 1990s, and felt a “tidal wave of feeling” when playing with such excellent musicians. He recalls when his former teacher David Mott came to hear him play and had suggested that the group should stand, not sit. Tim made the change and the change improved the sound of the group. In 2001, Tim joined Richard Underhill’s Shuffle Demons band in Europe. He recalls the advice from his teachers when he graduated: “start a band; bring in your friends; play in bands your friends start; and create a music scene.” Using his York network, Tim has done exactly that.

York’s classrooms and studios are not the only places where musicians network. In his fourth year, Tim began to play in a hockey group consisting of York jazz students and teachers. He said, “I played

hockey every week with the best jazz musicians in Toronto; they still play hockey together.” For Tim, the essence of York was the open-mindedness, creativity and self-direction that he encountered, “accompanied by the help that was there for you when you needed it.” Tim has returned to York on occasion to perform, sit on panels and speak to students about careers in music.

Tim’s story supports the reflections of the music faculty at York who believe York University’s music program is more open to innovation than the program at the University of Toronto. With its emphasis on early music, world music, jazz and popular music, York stressed “ensemble participation rather than technical virtuosity” (Beckwith 2003:7), and it was the first school in Canada to offer jazz, popular music, ethnomusicology, world music and computer music (Beckwith 2003:98). In his recollections, Austin Clarkson describes “Water Whistle,” a unique musical performance carried out in York’s swimming pool, where water was pumped through hoses with whistles on the ends. The audience floated in warm water to listen to the whistling composition (Beckwith 2003:49).

This is a glimpse into a few of the many places at York where learning takes place. From York’s inception, there was an intention to favour general education requirements of a liberal education to ensure breadth and avoid early overspecialization.

Ideally, students will have a chance to try out all three learning spaces while they are at York, but they may quickly come to prefer one style and place of learning over another. Some prefer lab culture where there is a recipe to be learned rather than classroom lectures in the humanities or social sciences where there is a conversation to be had. Undergraduate students may be more familiar with learning recipes and may need a few years before they trust themselves with starting conversations. But there is much overlap between these places. Tim Posgate recalls, “We didn’t think about music studios, but [we did about] workshops; these are like our laboratories for creating and experimenting musically.” To Tim, theory classes took place in ordinary classrooms, but they were more like “labs.” Workshops did not take place in studios because there were no dedicated music

rooms. Classrooms had to be converted to workshop spaces every class by “dragging out of date, broken equipment into the classrooms, and setting them up”.

The Life of the Library⁶³

The academic library has been described as a scholastic third place, a refuge, and a meeting place. It is a place for learning and enlightenment (Wakaruk 2009:56). To some, the library is big and ugly, dusty and smelly, with flickering fluorescent lights. But Scott Library is a place all York students know about; perhaps, it is the space on campus that best connects students to the broader academic culture of the university. Scott Library is a microcosm of York, “squishing more people in with few resources.”

Students struggle to balance discipline and comfort in their efforts to combine work with social activities. The following quote illustrates a group attempting both:

The small table has been cleared of course kits and laptops. . . . [The items] have been replaced by containers of food that are neatly lined up along the edge of the table where it meets the wall. A student sits backwards on the study carrel’s attached bench, purposefully distributing napkins and plateware to her peers gathered around her on the floor. One of them is juggling a fork and a travel mug while organizing scholastic paraphernalia in his backpack. He looks up, takes in my clipboard, and catches my eye. ‘You want some?’ He beams, gesturing towards the food. I return his smile and attempt to make supportive eye contact with the rest of the group, some of whom are now nervously fidgeting. ‘Don’t

⁶³ Much of the material for this section comes from the fieldwork of Amanda Wakaruk and her major paper, “Life of the Library: An Exploration of Public Space Use and Meaning,” MES, York University, 2009. As a valuable member of the Kroy Collective, Wakaruk also contributed to enriching other sections of this ethnography. Some of her library research was also informed by Collective members.

worry, I'm just documenting how people use the library; I'm not here to confiscate your supper.' A visible sigh of relief passes over the group, broken by one of the women who inquires about my motives for recording what they are doing. (Wakaruk 2009:33)

The Best Places to Study

Choosing where to study in the library is important, and students select a space that suits their immediate needs, an embodied practice that can be interpreted as a form of spatial literacy. But students do not always use library space in ways that the designers of the space expected. Group study rooms are used for solitary or group study; communal study areas are used for social learning activities; areas designed for social learning are used for quiet study.

Furniture influences the use of space to a certain extent. One student commented,

It's nice to have that option if you want to go study and have the quiet space, you go inside the second and third floors . . . That, and also there's a second floor lounge there [Current Periodical Reading Room], and then after that, the balcony, if you want more of that whole thing. If I want to sit and talk, I just kind of go there. If I want to do some more studying and kind of talk, I go upstairs.

I know some people come here to socialize and I've taken the second floor as ok—it's social . . . You can't do your work and concentrate—don't even expect that. [And] if you go into the lounge, that's another story.

I find that if you're in a big room full of people and most of them are studying, it makes you study too . . . [it] keeps you focused. . . . I'm not going to sit there and scroll through Facebook or whatever if I'm in a big room full of people that are studying because,

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like, I don't know why, it just helps me. So that's also why I go there—because it really helps me focus and that's why I come to the library in the first place.

I don't like those [communal areas] cause . . . there's not even, like, a wall or something between the desks, so everyone's looking at one another and I'm the type that catches the eye really easily, right, so if someone's looking . . . like I look at him immediately . . . That's why I don't study there.

Students are not constrained by furniture arrangements or intended uses. They often reinterpret library spaces in novel ways, exercising user control over the space to create a personalized and more meaningful learning environment. This reinterpretation is evident in student descriptions about how group study rooms, study carrels and the balconies are used:

I personally like the individual, enclosed rooms; it's a bit more . . . it feels like I have my own space even though it's within the bigger space of the library. You feel like this is somewhere you can drop all your guard down and just be yourself. It's kind of private so I really like the closed rooms with the windows and the chalkboard.

[In the library carrels] you have some privacy but again it's just sitting down and doing work whereas I need to be able to engage with the work on different levels; I have to stand and walk around to do that kind of thing. I guess I need a study room whereas a study area is just sort of if you're doing readings or taking notes or something but I need to be able to engage with the work I'm doing on different levels.

I like [the balconies]. It's like you can still study and you can still socialize at the same time. I find that you get a lot of work done but it doesn't feel like you're doing a lot of work . . . I was comfortable up there, you're open, I guess you can't really describe it

though, it just kind of felt good.

[It's different from other study sessions] cause we were more open and able to talk whereas most times I study with a friend we just sit there and study and that's it . . . I like the balcony because it's just quiet enough . . . I don't like it when it's dead silent 'cause that makes me nervous (Wakaruk 2009:35-6).

Another students comments,

I always knew there were spaces to study . . . so this year I said, 'ok—I need to get really good grades. I have to really apply myself.' So I figured I would come here. And I have a study friend . . . so we come here and we book a room and do readings and studying and things like that.

I am in my fourth year. So up until now I've rarely studied in the library. So this is the first year that I've actually gone to the different rooms and stuff (Wakaruk 2009:54).

Do some students need the discipline of the university library because they do not have a quiet space at home? Evidently, not all students find the quietness of the library appealing:

And it's quiet but it's not. . . . I guess 'library' has it's own kind of quietness . . . it's quiet but it's not like a comforting quietness . . . it feels like people are just being quiet because they have to be, so for me, when I'm up there it feels like there's this suppression of noise and I try not to make my shoes squeak too much or if I have a cough I try to cover it up so I feel extra self-conscious of making any sounds up there and it's kind of weird. (Wakaruk 2009:49)

One fourth year student explained that Schulich has the best study space, "You don't have to be from the business school. But in Scott Library, you need to prove you are a grad student to use the grad

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room. But librarians can tell. Undergrads come in groups, talk, use cell phones, and grads come alone and try to cut themselves off.” Other serious undergraduate students saw the law library as the best quiet spot for serious study.

The aggregate observational data gathered in the Scott Library (Wakaruk 2009:34) indicates that social activities (e.g., talking, using a cellphone or social networking on a website) made up 20 per cent of all activity at study carrels, 24 per cent of all activity at study tables and 22 per cent of all activity at computer workstations. While these statistics are lower than the percentage of social activities taking place in group study rooms (64 per cent), the data indicates that at least one in five people were engaged in social activities in areas that were originally designed for quiet or solitary study. Over 30 per cent found the library resources good for writing papers and reading; slightly less used the facility for group work, quiet study or data analysis. York libraries are the favourite places on campus to do research for 91 per cent of respondents; 78 per cent use libraries to do written assignments, 57 per cent to study, and 66 per cent to work on group assignments. Most students value the library as a comfortable, quiet place, with natural light and without line-ups.

But, like homes, libraries are not always safe places. Besides all the consensual sexual activity that is said to take place in the far reaches of the stacks, there have been a few cases of sexual assaults inside the library as well. A York student was charged with sexual assault for allegedly molesting a woman in a secluded part of the library in September 2009 (Toronto Star Sept. 21, 2009).

Students could not imagine a university without the library:⁶⁴

[Closing Scott] would negatively impact me because
I still use the space if not necessarily for books . . . it
would take away the one space outside of [my home

⁶⁴ Future research should examine additional libraries on campus, including the map library, for example. Specialty libraries like the Nellie Langford Rowell Women’s Studies Library may have very different characteristics.

department] that I'm kind of familiar and comfortable with and like to use.

People go to the library even when they don't have essays to write . . . I don't see the library just as a resource for paper writing or just as a resource for studying or for students . . . I think that the library - even a university library—offers much more than just a place to get the stuff you need . . . I think that the community would lose something when it doesn't have a library. It's a place where . . . you don't have to pay anything, you don't have to have any economic status to be able to get these books and the information and you can come here and do your own studying on a personal level . . . not having a library with physical books in them is a big no-no, it's a big loss.

You just assume there's going to be a library when you go to an educational facility or institution. You assume that there will be a library, just like . . . it's just one of those things that's built . . . It's part of the character of the institution. So having a library—not having a library, that's like a huge chunk out of that. (Wakaruk 2009:64)

Generally, faculty spend little time in the library because they have private offices, making it difficult for students to model the academic work and research life that they want to understand and emulate.

The ethnographic work in Scott Library raises more questions than answers. However, the ethnography provides some hints for the direction of further research. For example, what styles of studying do students use? Do these styles differ by discipline? How do undergraduates use graduate students as models for intellectual work if undergraduates cannot study with them? Do TAs provide that intellectual modelling for undergraduates when TAs talk about their own research projects?⁶⁵ In addition, how does use of the library differ

⁶⁵ Undergraduate collective members confirmed that they appreciate

as students progress through their academic careers?

Writing and Computing

How do computers affect study patterns? Does working with computers isolate students or make them feel connected to all other researchers working on the same subject? Students use their laptops in study rooms accessing e-resources to save money (in photocopying charges) and time (trying to find hard-copy resources), two resources in short supply for students at York. Information technology (IT) resources, however, can provide an excess of information, where students get instant access to dubious or questionable information that librarians would not normally have in the library. Many websites have no accountability; there are always more sites, so when do you stop? And where do you start? Students may be unsure of how to treat texts that lack authoritative authors and clearly defined purposes. Despite the possible lack of confidence in the authenticity of online resources, students find it easier to find e-journals than real journals and appreciate the speed, convenience and ability to “get the facts” online.

Most York students are more familiar with digital resources than with books, as they reveal in the following quotes (Wakaruk 2009):

I actually am afraid of looking for any article or journal article in the library. Rather, I find it easier to find it [via] e-journals.

I mean eventually I got [the computer account] setup and I used it to look up the books I needed and getting the books for the first time was kind of annoying because the call numbers were kind of. . . . I wasn't used to them so it took me awhile to locate the books that I needed, I had to walk around . . . and it's really kind of stuffy up there.

I remember some of my friends in third and fourth

hearing about their TAs' research projects, particularly when students can see how the projects link back to their own course work.

year still didn't know how to use the library. And I don't know why some people get it and others don't. [laughs] But I remember she would make me go every single time . . . the place would mean more to the person who knew their ins and outs, knew their way around compared to the ones, 'Thank God I'm out of here. I still don't know what I'm doing' . . . if you need to find someone every time or you're so annoyed and you know, nervous to go into a place because you don't know what you're doing or how to get the books you need [it's frustrating].

I was talking to a professor once and she was telling me about how she's still not used to the fact that . . . you know how you used to pull out the big drawers to find your book? And you would go through the little tabs? And then you would find the call number that way? [card catalogue] She was saying that her learning experience had changed so much . . . just because of that. She said it's just not the same feeling without the cards going between your fingers. And I have no idea what that's supposed to even mean.

There is clearly a generation gap between the "digital natives" who study at the university and the "digital immigrants" who teach these students. Although card catalogues are no longer used or understood through lived experience, some professors and parents communicate this obsolete perceived legacy to current users of the library. Today's book stacks could soon become yesterday's card catalogue.

Writing and computing are ubiquitous activities at York University. Students and faculty spend numerous hours every day trying to communicate their ideas in writing. For many students, more than for faculty, much of their inspiration for written work comes from being in the library and understanding the audience for whom they are writing. While students often write for an audience of one, their professor, academics like to think they have a broader audience.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ I recall an experienced Asian studies professor stating in a presidential address that an academic paper is read on average by three people (in

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Learning to produce an academic paper means that students must fit their writing activities into their daily routines.

A third year student reflected on the process of writing a clearly defined paper comparing two organizations. Although she had three weeks to develop and write the paper, she ended up writing it in four days because other papers were due at the same time. One of her first steps was to plan how to divide the paper into parts before she would tackle one part at a time. Using primarily class readings and assigned materials, she wrote the paper at home. She found herself constantly writing and rewriting paragraphs as she worked:

During the four days, I would wake up and turn on my computer and work on it on and off until going to bed at four or five in the morning; but then I realized that I didn't get much done. Regardless of whether I worked on the paper or not, I don't get off my seat until I go to bed.

Similar to many students, she is totally dependent on her computer for planning, making notes and writing the paper. Although her paper was submitted on time, she recognized that she spent so much time revising sections that she did not have time to rethink, revise or improve the overall quality of the paper.

For another third year student in the social sciences, writing a paper is also a time-consuming and complex process. For example, producing a 12-to-14 page paper that examines the types of social alienation that students face in university requires doing research, preparing notes, writing an outline and revising the initial draft. To write this paper the student took a reflexive perspective and examined her own experiences at school in relation to Marx's theoretical work on alienation. Letting the theory inform her own practice, she began preparing her first draft when she felt that her argument was sound. She started the paper one week before it was due, even though she had

addition to family and reviewers). In contrast, I was recently published in an e-journal and was informed that the paper had been downloaded by 1,954 people over four months since it was posted online. (PVE)

the topic two months in advance. The student still felt rushed to complete the assignment. She spent a series of nights on the assignment, leaving one night at the end to edit and have her friend proofread the paper for her.

This student, like others, began the research process by searching online journals and locating key resources through the York library website. It took three days to gather the research materials she needed, even though this was a long-standing research interest. From this research base, she then wrote a central thesis for her paper and an outline of its structure. This detailed outline included paragraph-by-paragraph topics that contained quotes from the research materials she collected. Using her outline, she wrote the paper from beginning to end, inserting relevant quotes throughout. She handed in the paper on time. Despite the meticulous detail and time-consuming method of research and writing, she was not completely satisfied with it. The student explained that being pleased with the quality of a paper,

depends on the length in general; if the essay is too long and I am sick of writing it, then I hand [it] in when I get sick of it, even if my sentences do not make any sense. Since this one is 12-14 pages I was kind of satisfied; I could have done better but its (sic) all good.

The student continuously used her laptop for the writing process. Providing a portal to online journals and the library website and acting as a word processor, her laptop was an integral part of the paper writing process. The portability of the laptop made keeping notes and revising initial drafts available virtually anywhere, on and off campus. Coupled with the research capabilities of wireless communication, the use of the laptop freed her from needing a computer desk in the library. The research and writing process became portable through the Wi-Fi functionality on her laptop. "I use my laptop all the time when looking for journals, books; reading over notes from lecture; when reading journals online; and, of course, when writing my essay," she

explained.⁶⁷

Some graduate students procrastinate before writing papers for longer lengths of time than undergraduates. But as these comments by undergraduate students reveal, graduate students are not alone in their concern for getting their best work down on paper. However, they often have more leeway on submission dates and more opportunities to learn how other students are approaching their papers. In fact, they may still be writing their papers when other class members are getting their graded papers back.

Technology in the classrooms is changing rapidly for both students and faculty. After studying students' use of the University of Rochester library, researchers found that there was not a large "technophile–technophobe" division between faculty and students; instead, they found that there is a significant number of students who are inept with technology (Fried and Gibbons 2007).

There are diverse perspectives among faculty regarding the use of technology in the classroom, particularly during lectures. As previously mentioned in this section, some professors do not permit laptops in their classes for a variety of reasons. One humanities professor explained,

Too many students stray from note-taking to movies and YouTube, MySpace and Facebook, and heaven only knows what else. . . . I also argue that we are encouraging three critical skills by insisting students resort to old-fashioned note-taking: the art of note-taking itself; handwriting (somewhat, though not entirely facetiously); and most importantly, the cultivation of attention span . . . transcribing the handwritten notes to laptops after class serves well as a revision exercise for those students who take the time and trouble.

⁶⁷ Laptop thefts are not uncommon at York and can be devastating for students who do not have their writing projects backed up on home computers.

In some tutorials and seminars, students use the internet to confirm hunches about extraneous class-related material that they might introduce to the rest of the class that are from the news or other sources. As another professor explained,

I've no policy statement on laptops etc, just a sentence in the course syllabus of any lecture course that simply says the lectures are to be free of electronics: no laptops, iPods, cell phones, tape-recorders, cameras etc, and that registering in the course and accepting the syllabus constitutes a contractual agreement to this stipulation. If asked, I allow laptops for disability students and their note-takers, and sometimes for tape-recorders, though I require documentation of their status.

Recalling an incident that occurred during lecture, he reported,

I've actually had a teaching team member castigated by a young woman who was watching music videos with the sound so loud in her headphones it distracted people around her. When asked to desist, she swore at fellow students and told them to mind their own business. My colleague eventually removed her from the lecture hall.

A professor in Syracuse took this one step further when he walked out of class when a student in the first row sent a text message during lecture. He does not permit intentional behaviour such as text messaging or reading newspapers, but is more tolerant of cell phones ringing in class, since it is easy to forget to turn off a cell phone.

Some students explained to the humanities professor who believes in note-taking by hand, that they can no longer write in cursive because they have completely relied on a computer, particularly for spell-check and grammar. It is, of course, far easier to read a student's word-processed document than a handwritten document. After university, students will also be expected to use the latest technology.

Disruptions, Interruptions and in it for the Long Haul

Most students pass through York in their expected three, four or five year span. But many students face disruptions and interruptions of various kinds. Some students take breaks to have babies and raise children, coming back to finish their degrees when their children are in school full-time. Mature adults also go back to school after losing jobs or retiring from jobs.

Strikes disrupt studies as well. Like the elephant in the room, the CUPE 3903 strike of 2008-09 cannot be ignored.⁶⁸ CUPE Local 3903 (Canadian Union of Public Employees) represents teaching assistants, graduate assistants, research assistants and contract faculty at York University. The CUPE strike caused the university to close down from November 2008 to January 2009, and this was the disruption that was on the minds of most students when the Kroy Collective members were carrying out their observations. Students expressed disorientation upon coming back after the strike, feeling like it was September again. One student said, “I don’t know where I am.” The anxiety of waiting three months to get assignments and tests back took its toll on many undergraduates. A student asks her teaching assistant after the strike, “Should I hate you?” Following the strike, some students did not want to be associated with York and left the university or transferred to other schools. However, fewer than one per cent of the student population at York transferred to another institution because of the earlier strike in 1998 (Grayson 1998).

Other students found themselves defending York to friends, family and neighbours who reacted to the media coverage of the strike that “made a bad situation worse,” according to collective members. Out of pride in the university and a sense of identity with York, these students felt obligated to correct misperceptions. Some students recognized that the strike was symptomatic of larger structural

⁶⁸ This ethnography did not focus attention on strike experiences. In fact, the strike disrupted research for the ethnography.

problems at the university; such problems included the increase in part-time teachers, and the low level of provincial funding for Ontario's universities and York in particular.

A Kroy Collective member and recent York graduate who started working for the university three months before the strike shared some of her thoughts about the strike of 2008-09:

I was temporarily laid off for the duration of the strike, along with many part-timers working in customer service. It was difficult for me financially and I empathized with my co-workers. While students were available to work, they weren't offered the hours; yet, when the strike ended and the semester became a rush, we were expected to work extra shifts. At least I felt better knowing many people were facing the same predicament as I was.

The stress level has risen due to the shortened term, and there have been many complaints regarding this issue. However, I can tell you that people are simply trying to move on and get their work done. The library study room is now open 24 hours a day for students. Furthermore, to my surprise, few angry words have been spoken to me about the whole ordeal . . .

It was nice how quiet it was on campus. Everything slowed to a crawl (away from the roads and picket lines where drivers went insane and drove erratically). Once out of their cars, people were incredibly patient. Aside from the picket lines, there were no line-ups anywhere—no lines for coffee, no lines for washrooms, no lines for buses in the bus loop—just peace and quiet.

Given that the campus was almost entirely deserted, I was able to converse with people who—to my surprise—were willing to continue the conversation. One older employee, working in customer service, explained how hard it was for her to stand on her

feet all day with bad hips and a bad back. Furthermore, as I engaged in conversation with students about their studies and research, they recommended readings for my interests, and I did the same to them. I try to continue these types of conversations, but it is next to impossible now. Put simply, people are not friendly when they are rushed, or feel rushed. I enjoyed engaging in conversations with the workers and students on campus . . . and still do. It prevents me from getting caught up in the "grind".

This experience has been an excellent way for everyone affected (especially students) to recognize the impact academic politics have on student life. Students are often sheltered from this. When I first heard about the possibility of a strike, my first thought was: There is no way there will be a strike with York's 50th anniversary around the corner. They will settle everything by November 6th. Apparently, I didn't know how these things work . . .

At least I've learned from this experience. In my third year, my TA attempted to talk to the class about the previous strike. I didn't understand, nor did I care to understand what she was talking about and why she was so interested in (and yet frustrated with) bureaucracies, union issues, workers rights, problems in academia, and so forth. Now I get it. Any student who has experienced this ordeal is not quite as sheltered from real life issues, and the problems surrounding them . . .

Despite what some people have said with respect to this situation, I don't believe it ruined the students' undergrad experience. Think of the adventures! We all had a good laugh watching the pirate video on YouTube. Also, think of the sit-in that several strikers and undergrads had prior to the holidays. It was more of a slumber party of people trying to stink their way into the President's Office. (Yes, they

smelled so bad it was unbearable! I got off the elevator one day and nearly fell back in). These are memories no one can forget!

Students may be bitter about it, but deep down they know this could happen to them. They know they could face this again outside school, and possibly be the one on strike. The strike has been one disruption among many, one where no one was seriously injured. We have continuously faced issue after issue at school, while still managing to carry on. The York community has dealt with TTC strikes, VIVA strikes, SARS, riots, international political issues, etc. These adventures form a part of our very broad experience as part of the York community, connecting us with and teaching us about the pressures of life in the outside world, while making up the very memorable and interesting life history of a university. York students learn real life lessons!

The writer felt the change in the pace of life at York, the unexpected quiet, life slowing to a crawl. The strike experiences slowed down life for some and sped it up for others. The strike changed the use of time and space on campus. To part-time workers in food services, it meant layoffs and loss of pay. To those who did not accept the need for action, the strike was simply a waste of time, for students, for staff, for faculty. What does it mean to waste time? For some senior graduate students, the time spent walking the picket lines was seen as a waste of time that should have been spent on thesis writing or class preparation. Yet some looked upon that duration of time as a vigorous activity break from a sedentary routine and a rare chance to talk with colleagues and make new friends. The pace of life changes on the line, as days are organized around shifts and meetings. Some recalled the solidarity created as a welcome relief from the individual labour of research, writing and class preparation.

For students not on the lines, a strike day is much like an unscheduled PD day or a snow day at high school, where the day looms empty, unscheduled, ready to be filled in creative ways. Is it time off or time

out? Is it time unaccounted for? Since no one knew when the strike would end, events could not be planned far in advance; rather, they had to be spontaneous.

During the strike of 2008, some self-declared bored students dressed up as pirates and videoed themselves mock battling amid the picketers at the picket gates. Posted on YouTube, this video generated comments from viewers, often fellow York students, ranging from commiseration and laughter to angry sentiments directed towards CUPE members.

Another pair of students, twins Alexander and Thomas Arthur, made a rap video, “Lazy Strike Day,” that documented their strike day at home and at York, lamenting:

For us students, our lives on the hit list . . .
Remember the good times and the friends we miss.
This better end soon or else it’s going to get tragic,
it’s a legal strike but we might need some magic.⁶⁹

From the perspective of some graduate students, who became members of CUPE when they took teaching assistant positions, the strike obscured rather than illuminated the financial and social hardships associated with their meagre wages and often indifferent treatment by York. York’s history of strikes forms part of its reputation; but as a result of past strikes, teaching assistants are among the highest paid in the province and professorial pensions are among the best in the country. Unions attempted to make the public understand that the salary demands were necessary to ameliorate the difficulties of living in an expensive city such as Toronto to pursue graduate studies.

What did not receive media coverage during the 2008-09 strike, and thus were not brought to the public’s attention were the difficult decisions graduate students had to make regarding the choice to picket. Picketing and picketing-related equipment is not permitted on

⁶⁹ The rap video can be found at the following website: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0qd1ce5mQNs>

university property. Picketers are obligated to ensure the safe and orderly access to and exit from the university for non-striking faculty and staff and for students who live on campus or who need to use campus facilities. The decision to picket was particularly difficult for commuters who had to weigh the time and travel costs against strike pay.⁷⁰ With a \$10 per hour strike wage and a requirement of 20 hours picketing a week, graduate students received paycheques of a maximum of \$200 per week for working four hours a day for five days. Students with dependants struggled to reconcile their commitment to the union with the potential risks of a substantial loss of income, against travel costs, parking costs and the costs of child care.

The cultural time out of the strike was used by faculty to finish writing projects. Some baked and cooked, freezing meals for the term ahead when time would be in shorter supply. An unscheduled, unexpected break in routine allowed time for projects like making a video, taking more dance classes, renovating a house, recharging one's "batteries." Other faculty felt that they spent all the strike time on email addressing the concerns of their students.

When the faculty and librarians went on strike in 1997, Grayson (1998) conducted a telephone survey to assess students' academic and economic hardships caused by the strike. The most serious problem raised by three-quarters of the students was not knowing when the strike would end (Grayson 1998:6). In the 1997 strike, students expressed concerns that the strike would cause them considerable academic and economic hardship and that they would have difficulty finishing their courses (60.5 per cent). In a post-strike follow-up survey, 86.1 per cent of students had no problems finishing their courses; of the remainder, 6.2 per cent cited major problems (Grayson 1998:8). Students were also concerned that they might forget course material (58.5 per cent) and that the strike would interfere with their

⁷⁰ Even the matter of strike pay was not problem free. Not all paycheques were made out to employees. After the strike, forensic accounting revealed that the snowman students built at one picket line received a paycheque.

plans for summer jobs, summer school, or applications to graduate school (Grayson 1998:6). Of those surveyed, 17 per cent believed that the strike would diminish the quality of their education (Grayson 1997).

During the period of the 2008-09 strike, the university faced its own financial problems and budget cuts in each of the following three years resulting from the global financial crisis, the loss of investment capital, and the fallout from the collapse of the U.S. banking system.

Since the academic culture at York emphasizes social justice and responsibility, it is not surprising that strikes play such a large role in the political climate of the university. Throughout their time at York, students discover that learning is not limited to receiving grades but extends out to critically consider wider issues of social justice. York approaches education as an opportunity for students to engage in questioning, reworking and participating in broader social issues. Thus, strikes as a legal form of unionized protest become another means for students to understand worker activism.

The Long Haul

Since its inception, York has encouraged mature students to begin new degrees at York or to finish incomplete degrees after interruptions prevented them from continuing. Until 2009, Atkinson College facilitated the integration of university courses into the working schedules of mature students by offering part-time evening and weekend courses. Since the restructuring of some faculties at York in 2009, Atkinson has become part of the expanded Faculty of Liberal Arts and Professional Studies (LAPS), which also houses the Division of Continuing Education. With over 45,000 undergraduate students, 5,000 graduate students and 600 faculty members, LAPS would be considered the fifth largest university in Canada if it were not part of York. As one of the largest faculties of its kind, LAPS houses humanities, social sciences like anthropology and economics, and professional departments. As an attempt to increase the flexibility of course offerings, and thus encourage enrolment, LAPS combines part-

time study and full-time degree programs into a system where a student can pursue multiple objectives simultaneously, from a bachelor of arts to certificate diplomas.

York attracts students from a wide age demographic. Bertie Friedlander, for example, came back to school in his seventies to begin studying full-time for a degree in anthropology. At the age of 76, after graduating, he returned to pursue a master's in the anthropology of aging and studied the lifelong learning practices of retirees (Friedlander 2006).

Laurie Baker's mother was 21 years old when she started taking evening classes at York. She took courses for about 18 years and finished with a bachelor of arts and a bachelor of education. Laurie still remembers hearing her mother reading in the office late at night when she would wake up from a bad dream. Laurie recalls papers and books spread out over her mother's desk, a cold cup of coffee sitting next to her and the single office lamp leaning over her mother as she worked. She asked her mother to explain what it was like going to York for so many years:

I started in 1971 and had gotten married in 1970. I think I took a course that year and was there until 1989 . . . I think that was my last course . . . I didn't go days, just evenings. I went to day school during the summer. I did the BA, then the BEd, and interspersed was the certificate for special education. It's very hard going at night. After you were born, Grandma looked after you on the farm in the evenings, one night a week.

I don't know how I did what I did; you get yourself in a mindset and you just go and do it. I couldn't do it now, but I don't regret doing it. At night, all winter long I went, battling the weather. It's like "one shall overcome" all the rest of your life . . . "one shall overcome" the weather (to finish school). I kept going because it inspired me. It was an inspiration. Things you hadn't thought of before—it provoked thought. It kept drawing you back. I would come

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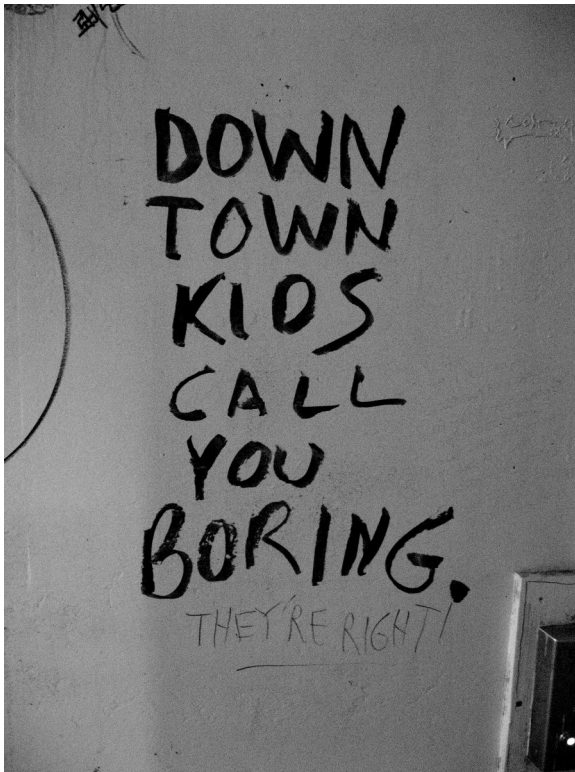
home; your Dad was in bed, and I would start telling him things. I was “pumped.” You get into a subject and you get interested in it; you get involved. It was tedious at times; work all day, school at night. You learn how to manage your time because you don’t have any. I ate supper in the car [because] every minute counts. You have to manage life in order to accomplish what you set out to accomplish.

Education is the all-encompassing mind-work that inspired me to keep going. Also, I needed the credits for my job. Teachers today already have their BA and BEd. I spent all those years getting something the kids today already have. It was hard work, but inspiring. When you learn something, you profit from it . . . My course benefitted my job; I was able to get a better career.

The motivations for returning to York after an extended absence, pursuing night or weekend classes during part-time study are varied. Valuing the capacity for independent and creative thought that comes from continuing their education, students in it for the long haul demonstrate the determination and commitment it takes to accomplish their educational goals.

The academic culture at York is greater than the sum of its parts. York’s academic culture exceeds the boundaries of the classroom, lab, studio and library to include the daily lives of its students, faculty, support staff and the many people needed to operate a large institution. But a glimpse into York is a reminder that much goes on outside these academic spaces.

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...overseeing the action...
Advertising for Multicultural Week, Vari Hall



...global crossroads...
York Lanes



...tastes of the food fair...
Multicultural Week



...drumming up excitement...
Vari Hall



...preparing for a protest against student debt...
Vari Hall

Event 3: Performing Diversity during Multicultural Week

During the deep, dark days of winter in early February, York students prepare to celebrate for a few hours. An annual event, Multicultural Week celebrates seventies-style multiculturalism—a staging of difference marked by dance styles, music, dress and food. The student-initiated event is supported by York administration and operated by student organizations. Voluntary participation animates this festival of diversity, in place of potential ethnic tensions.

Over 60 clubs participate in the Multicultural Week of 2008, tailoring their needs and abilities to the categories in which club members could participate. Groups choose to participate in one or more categories, whether food fair, stage performance, fashion show, parade or other gatherings like the new dance event created by the DJ World Cup, an afternoon dance party of over 400 students that brings dance from night to day. One fourth-year political science and South Asian studies student explained: “You know when people say ‘no one jams during the day’? Well, that’s not true. . . . York jammed and jumped during the day, and it was awesome!” A third-year health and society student echoed the same comments, reflecting how the week is an exception to normal life at York.

Multicultural Week is a week to bring everyone from different countries together to share, enjoy, learn and appreciate something new about each country’s unique music, food, literature, art and other things. . . . it’s a great opportunity for all York students to come together, celebrate diversity and ‘get’ culture.
(Excalibur Feb. 25, 2008)

A frowning faculty member who hurries to class tries to push his way through the cultural parade. He is delayed for a moment by the exuberance of the Vietnamese student club, as they relish the moment to show their culture and spirit. Caught up in the moment against his will he is on his way two minutes later, smiling and appearing much more relaxed.

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For many students, the cultural performances are their favourite events. The lineup to enter the theatre for the performances of 2009 reaches almost to the main doors of the building. The popular performances traditionally close the week's activities, with theatre staff letting only a few people enter at a time to fill the empty seats as other students leave. Performances consist of skilled, choreographed national folk dances that are blended with non-traditional music and dance styles such as hip hop and break dancing.

Competition is fierce, as clubs are judged based on their performance for a prize of \$500 for first place and \$250 for second place. Wild cheering greets the Afghan dance performance. After the Afghan performance, the troupe that represents the ethnically diverse culture of Trinidad and Tobago proudly claims the islands as the home of soca⁷¹ dancing and of the only musical instrument invented in the 20th century, the steel drum. These alluring and athletic dancers sport no "native costumes" other than comfortable beachwear.

The Sri Lankan performance stresses friendship amidst internal diversity, presenting both Tamil and Sinhalese dances amid the enthusiastic flag-waving and cheering from an engaged, but politicized audience. In the wake of what appears as a cross between a performance and a political rally, some audience members ask, "What was that all about?" Neighbouring students say, "Just enjoy the dancing." When the Malayali dancers take to the stage with women dressed in red sequins and men in cream-coloured pants and shirts, an audience member asks the crowd, "York University spirit?" The audience member receives a loud approving cheer.

Rapturous applause continues to fill the theatre and greets the Pakistan Student Association performers. The announcers explain that the dance serves to commemorate the evolution of Pakistan from around AD 1500 through to its independence and its present day. Young women dance on stage with mock swords covered with reflective aluminum foil. The skilled sweeping of the swordplay evokes applause from the audience. The birth of Pakistan is signified by the male

⁷¹ Soca music combines soul and calypso in an intense, driving beat.

dancers, with hands over their hearts and the women with flags, hands against their heads in an army salute. As the men start to dance, the audience begins clapping rhythmically. Later, the performers dance offstage and then re-emerge. Some wear striped polo shirts and others, solid white shirts with green sashes. Multiple costumes changes follow during the array of successive dances. Pakistan in the 21st century is represented by performers winding around each other holding individual posters spelling “Pakistan” in graffiti-style letters. The crowd erupts, chanting “P-S-A! P-S-A!” A dance remix begins, accompanied by the raising of the flag of Pakistan and chanting with responses from the audience, as the dancers exit the stage.

Performance after performance continues to rouse the audience with dazzling costumes and choreography. As seats in the theatre empty between performances, new people trickle in. “Awesome, freaking awesome,” exclaims one audience member. The Indian Cultural Association (ICA) won first-prize with its intricate choreography that featured York students. A dance director and six choreographers—all students—prepared this dance group for nine months prior to the performance; none of these performers were York dance students. The ICA’s president had a background in dance, providing, perhaps, an edge in the overall presentation and staging of the performance. The audience cheers the expertise, mastery, beauty, and enthusiasm of the stage performances, as they do for all Multicultural Week events such as the parade and fashion show.

Foods of the World

In the 2009 Multicultural Week, 32 cultural clubs participated in the food fair, selling elaborate meals and specialty snacks in the Contact space under The Underground restaurant in the Student Centre. The space was draped with national flags and homemade palm trees as well as other reminders of home or ethnicity, framing foods choices from cuisines as far as Armenia, China, Croatia and South Africa. On the day of the food fair, students formed a long line, waiting for the fair to open. “They come to relax,” said one of the organizers. As students snacked, they compared the tastes of York to “celebrating our unity,

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not our differences.” The student groups used their profits to support causes such as sending money to earthquake victims in central Italy,⁷² providing tutoring assistance to other students, and for operating funds for clubs

Student clubs that participated in the food fair were motivated by the desire to celebrate their ethnic identity, to educate other students about their food, and to experience the tastes of home on campus. To promote and celebrate Punjabi culture, the Punjabi Association serves vegetarian food to appeal to more people. The association explains that this move presents the simplest compromise for the mix of Hindu and Muslim students attending the fair as well as those of other faiths. The Afghan Students Association serves a variety of stuffed Afghan breads and some desserts; as students of many different ethnicities buy its food, some say they chose the Afghan food because they were sympathetic about the war in Afghanistan. In countries with extraordinary food diversity such as India’s, the offering of roadside street foods provided a good way to sample cuisines from many areas. Students customized their selections with various sauces that were available in little cups, an innovation of the Indian Cultural Association. Students operating the Sri Lankan booth chatted as they cooked; “Awesome” responds a non-Sri Lankan student after the first bite of the snack. “What do you normally eat at York?” we ask. And a friend in the Sri Lankan booth responds: “We’re not fussy; we eat fast, cheap food here because at home, people are starving; we shouldn’t be fussy.”

The Malaysian and Singaporean Students’ Association sold *nasi lemak*, a specialty noodle dish of the Malay region. The club members complain that they cannot find authentic ingredients to make real local dishes; however, despite a lack of authentic ingredients, they preferred to prepare their local foods in their own kitchens rather than eat on campus. At the Vietnamese booth, long line of students, many of whom were Vietnamese, waited for jelly drinks and Vietnamese sub sandwiches, *bánh mì*. The students operating the Philippine booth offered rice and pork dishes; the same type of meals they bring with

⁷² The earthquake in central Italy happened a few weeks before the event.

them in their lunch boxes and microwave in the Filipino Student Association office.

The Federation of Nepalese and Tibetan Students served vegetarian and chicken dumplings with sauces. “They cheered us in the parade and called for peace, they report.” One of the student servers who loved his local Tibetan food ate sandwiches and pizza when at York, explaining how he selected a meal on campus: “[I eat] whatever is cheap.”

Kazakhstani food was offered for the first time at the 2009 food fair. Kazakhstani students explain that they made all their dishes themselves and note that other groups bought their offerings. “The Armenian breads and stuffed grape leaves come from an Armenian caterer,” they complained. But an Armenian student interjected that an Armenian York alumni had made the food. The Kazakhstani students were hassled by organizers because one of their dishes containing meat was no longer hot. “Heat it or remove it or we will get sued,” an organizer threatened. The staff of The Underground restaurant helped the student group by heating the food when necessary and checked that the food was safe. Student organizers were worried particularly about meat and dairy items and warned participants that “if anyone served meat without a heat source, we could all be closed down.”

The Polish student group made and bought food; they also marched in the parade, participated in the fashion show and stage performances all in their first year of partaking in Multicultural Week. These students were in ethnic dress as were many of the female students operating other food booths. Syrian students enter the parade and food fair for the first time in 2010. A costumed Syrian couple runs the length of campus to join the Syrian delegation in the parade. A student from Mauritius complains that she knew nothing about the events and vowed to convince her club to get involved next year. She said, “We should have been there to explain our food.”

The club Federazione Canadese Italiana, founded in 2007 to serve the community and to tutor students in Italian, planned to use the funds raised from selling special desserts for a relief fund established in the

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wake of an earthquake in central Italy. Federazione members explained that their class schedules did not permit them to participate in the parade or fashion show. They explained that even if members had participated in, for example, the fashion show, the clothes they may have showcased would be as Italian as the everyday clothes they wore to the food fair.

Some of the food booths sold only meat dishes; others, all vegetarian. Students guided each other towards particular foods: “Pork here; beef there” and, perhaps more importantly, “no pork here, no beef there.” “How do you know whose foods are halal?” one student asks another. Halal food is clearly identified in the food fair, but the student’s question prompts Kroy Collective members to ask students about halal foods elsewhere on campus. Students answer: “Popeyes® [Louisiana Kitchen], Indian Flavour and Mangia Mangia are all halal.” “Good,” says a trusting student, “I’ll eat there.”

Many who have never attended the events of Multicultural Week are skeptical of the celebration of diversity in the form of a multicultural food event, arguing that the event was an example of image management. But the event itself did not feel tightly managed except around food safety.⁷³

While many students made a beeline for their own group’s food, most took advantage of the opportunity for cross-cultural grazing. Spicy offerings were common at the food fair, with timid students urged to try “just a little hot sauce on the side.” In spite of the potential for ethnic tensions to be expressed through food, there were many signs of unity and cross-cultural appreciation at the food fair. The active trade between South Asian, Iranian, Afghan and Tamil booths, for example, was one such sign as they sampled each other’s versions of fried rice and sweets, noting the taste connections between them. Students looked for analogies in food dishes.⁷⁴ “These desserts *really*

⁷³ Many faculty members reported that they were not aware of the multicultural activities. University staff members spoke to us about the event and anticipated the opportunities for novel food choices at lunch.

⁷⁴ One of my first published articles on food described an urban food fair

came from our country,” some explained. Participants and students compare dishes and purchase their favourites to take home. The food fair makes such border crossings visible, although they can be seen throughout Multicultural Week.

Staging Multiculturalism at York

Multicultural Week began in 2002 by York students to express students’ desires to share aspects of their culture with others and embrace the idea that one does not need to belong to a particular ethnicity to appreciate and enjoy certain cultural practices. Celebrating diversity in this way, York’s Multicultural Week bears some similarities to the Toronto International Caravan. The Caravan began in 1969 and offered an opportunity for communities to showcase their “food, dance, clothing and distinctive culture” (Toronto Star, Apr 4, 2009). Founders Leon Kossar and his wife Zena were cultural minorities and reporters for the Toronto Telegram. They encountered curiosity about Toronto’s new immigrants from their readers and nostalgia for home and the desire to share elements of their culture with others from the new immigrants. The celebration also contributed to an image of Toronto as a city at peace with its diversity, consistent with the official multiculturalism policy of 1971.

Looking beyond notions of celebrations, anthropologists and others have criticized Canadian multiculturalism policy. Mackey (2002), for example, has examined Canadian multiculturalism policy and practice as forms of diversity management that leave the practices of the majority to serve as unmarked categories against which culturally diverse “others” are judged. Although multiculturalism was first introduced in the 1970s to a more homogenous Canada demographically, in practice, multiculturalism in Canada still retains its emphasis on food, fashion and festivities as forms of cultural recognition. The more systemic and structural or governmental aspects of Canadian life remain largely unaffected by ideas about

and how producers and consumers of food negotiated ethnic identity by finding analogies among different ethnic foods (cf. Van Esterik 1982). (PVE)

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multiculturalism.⁷⁵

Events such as Caravan made participation easy for curious “Anglos” who could cross boundaries and take in acceptable aspects of immigrant culture. Or, as cultural theorists suggest, it was an event where unmarked whites who were supposedly “without a culture” could consume the culturally “marked” other who had more interesting clothes, music and food. Despite its success, Caravan ended in 2004, shortly after Multicultural Week began at York (2002), as Toronto struggled with tensions between celebrating and overstressing cultural differences.

Multicultural Week in 2009 at York, an event promoting an unthreatening and positive environment could be seen as an antidote to the tensions following the strike of 2008–09. The event was especially appealing to smaller groups who might not be able to celebrate their culture at York otherwise, due to financial constraints or other issues. Indeed, 2009’s theme, “Celebrate Unity, Represent Culture,” was stressed at the opening ceremonies, perhaps in a bid to suppress the antagonism floating around the campus after the strike and a number of protests on campus.

Since Multicultural Week’s growth after 2002, articles published in *Excalibur* have affirmed Multicultural Week as an event that reflects the cultural diversity of York students. The event is “well-known for being a reflection of the diversity that exists on campus.” Moreover, the celebrations are “a trademark at York University, reflecting the ethnic mosaic of its student population and the vibrancy of its many cultures” (*Excalibur* Feb. 7, 2007). Jeremy Greenberg, who initiated Multicultural Week and later coordinated the student alumni programs at York is U, was quoted saying that entering the multicultural village was like “stepping into another world, with flags from around the

⁷⁵ Consider, for example, how debates about the potential introduction of Shariah Law prompted many to reaffirm the dominance of the Ontario legal system, thus demonstrating the limits to “tolerance” and acceptable forms of difference. For more information about the introduction of Shariah Law in Ontario, please see the article: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ontario-premier-rejects-use-of-shariah-law-1.523122>

globe, fellow students in their cultural attires, [and] a jam-packed main stage with the very best of York's cultural organizations performing" (Excalibur Feb. 9, 2005). Greenberg later praised Multicultural Week as a positive reflection of cultural diversity at York, "the diversity of backgrounds among students makes York University a perfect venue for a multicultural celebration . . . we are proud to be a multicultural community. Our campus is home to people from 130 different countries around the world" (Excalibur Feb. 1, 2006).

While the university administration does not organize the event, Multicultural Week provides an opportunity for York to remind students about shared community values:

As we celebrate Multicultural Week, we call upon every member of the York community to live up to our historic commitment to social responsibility, equity and fairness in our dealings with each other. It is imperative not to let our own opinion—however sincerely held—be the tool with which we attempt to oppress, alienate or silence others. (Flyer circulated Feb. 2008)

Not all students see Multicultural Week as being a positive image of diversity. Cynthia, a York student, explains:

I just find Multicultural Week, for me, emphasizes the difference between cultures and ethnicities, and I find that it just separates people—that, well, I'm from here and you're from there and we're different—and I understand it's supposed to be positive and we're celebrating difference, but to me it's just another mechanism for dividing people and bringing up borders.

Many of the week's events did set student clubs in competition with one another—the parade, fashion show, food fair, DJ dance and the stage performances. The DJ dance event positioned Iranians against Guyanese, Pakistani students against Chinese, with no ill effects. Fred, a student of Chinese ancestry who was born and raised in England

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complained, “my culture won’t fit on the table . . . dragon boats, dragon dances? . . . I’m British.” Tanaka recognizes that multicultural celebrations can lead to increased conflict between different ethnic groups and leave white groups feeling alienated. In Tanaka’s California college, white students complain that they have no roots and no stories about where they came from (2003:1).

On the other hand, every Multicultural Week event provided an opportunity to interrogate authenticity and the construction of ethnicity. Student groups tended to use food, fashion, music and dance as markers of ethnicity. But in each domain there were concerns about authenticity. Were the musicians or dancers all York students? Did the students make the food or did they buy catered food? If the ethnicity of the maker was appropriate, then exceptions could be made, as in the case of the Armenian student group whose food was made by a York alumnus.

The week was also organized by students and not “staged” in a strict sense, except by cultural groups who worked hard to provide the best demonstration of cultural practice to their peers. The events were a celebration of diversity rather than the management of diversity with folk dances accompanying local food. The food fair provided an opportunity for some students to eat foods they had never eaten before and for other students to eat what they had been missing since coming to York. The event made students aware of their own limited food choices and how many other foods there are to eat in the world.

When food is used as a marker of ethnicity,⁷⁶ questions of food authenticity frequently arise. However, the more commonly asked question concerned not authenticity per se, but whether the club members selling the food made the food themselves or bought the food. Answers varied:

We made it all.

⁷⁶ Heldke’s book, *Exotic Appetites* (2003), explores the problem of recognizing and defining authenticity in food.

Our mothers made it for us.

We bought it from our favourite Caribbean store on
Keele Street.

Some groups, such as the Indian Cultural Association, offered a combination of homemade and store-bought food. The Chinese Debating Society was sponsored by “a very friendly and helpful company that supplied flavoured tofu desserts for sale.” Some clubs bought from local caterers, often run by alumni, who came from the country being represented and who gave student organizers reduced rates; as a result, clubs sold food for a token amount, usually \$1 or \$2.

The food fair at Multicultural Week not only provided an opportunity for like to congregate with like, but the event also provided many opportunities for cross-ethnic celebration, if not collaboration. On the other hand, everyday work in every class at York requires cross-ethnic collaboration, something that generally remains uncommented upon. For the rest of the year, outside of Multicultural Week, differences are entangled in more complex cosmopolitan practices. Most of the time, these encounters are civil and productive; when they are not, people take notice.

Tensions

The Multicultural Week’s activities may reflect current political tensions—Croatians and Serbians, Sri Lankans and Tamils, Pakistanis and Indians, Israelis and Palestinians. In past years, when the events were staged in York Lanes, the Croatian booth and the Serbian booth were kept far apart. In 2009, the York Sri Lankan Student Alliance and the Tamil Students Association kept their distance. But students also distance themselves from national politics: a student from Sri Lanka explains, “some of us have never been to Sri Lanka; others have gone back and forth; we don’t do politics, only civilian aid” implying that civilian aid is not already political.

The Pakistan Student Association (PSA) won an award for

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Multicultural Week's stage performance in 2008, while the Indian Cultural Association (ICA) won in 2009. This could have exacerbated any rivalry or tension between the PSA and the ICA. However, the student leaders of the PSA and the ICA view their relationship as a successful model of co-operation and camaraderie, resisting the import of tensions from their homelands. This aspect of camaraderie is even more intriguing—perhaps because it is a successful story of peaceful intercultural dialogue at York, when most events during Multicultural Week are premised on winning rather than cultural spectacle. There is, however, politics behind the judging, including how the judges are selected. Participants in the Multicultural Week stopped short of branding the judges as biased. Instead, the week's events provide evidence of the meticulously maintained networks of community groups at York rather than a network of fractious rivals.⁷⁷ Student groups stressed “positive competition” generated by the week's activities. More often, attention was focused on sharing their opposition to current conflicts such as the Afghan and Iraqi wars.

Multicultural Week 2013 had minimal promotion. But in the week following the events, Excalibur announced “Israeli flag vandalized during Multicultural Week” (February 13, 2013). News of the vandalism spread rapidly through Twitter and Facebook. A number of students complained that Multicultural Week encouraged groups to move beyond friendly competition to harassment and discrimination, even though Multicultural Week 2013 began with a smudging ceremony with the Aboriginal Students' Association (ASAY) to cleanse the campus of antagonisms in preparation for a unifying week.

Multicultural Week has been accused of being a way to mask racism on campus. During the week itself, the difference discourse is limited to celebrations of ethnicity through the scheduled and entertaining events and attractions such as food, music, dance and costume. The week is part of the staging of York, but it is not part of York's

⁷⁷ Considering the waves of protests that gain media attention at York, it would be valuable in future ethnographies of York to examine the effective networking that keeps student groups co-operating and competing during the preparation for and events of Multicultural Week.

branding. It is easy, and politically correct, to be cynical about Multicultural Week if one has not been involved in any of its events. Few faculty appear at the events, perhaps because they are unable to suspend their cynicism or are too critical to appreciate the power and pleasure of play (or are just too busy).

Multicultural Week hints at the complexity of creating community in a large commuter campus.⁷⁸ Students have created niches for themselves and thrived, often expressing surprise at the unexpected ways they connect with others at York. Even as commuters, students are astute at finding niches.

Currently, Multicultural Week depends on the voluntary participation of cultural and ethnic clubs, where people “belonging” to that group gather, host traditional events for themselves and perform their culture during this and other campus events. Student clubs also help international and exchange students adapt to a new environment and learn about different styles of learning. But most ethnic club members were born in Canada and acquired their Italian or Polish or Chinese culture from their families. Many do not speak their parent’s language nor have they been to their parent’s country of origin, experiences illustrated in Norma, Gena and Jane’s stories from Part One.

Diversity and Community

Residence life and home life are experiences that may buffer diversity or encourage tradition. Gonzalez describes Chicano students in American universities who felt “out of place” on white campuses and went home to family on weekends. They started Chicano clubs on campus to feel comfortable with what they call “their own kind” (2002:211). Cultural organizations often include in their goals to help preserve the cultural identities of student groups and stimulate interest in their cultures (Urciuoli 2005:166).

⁷⁸ Taub (1998) points out that commuting, part-time and mature students present particular challenges to building campus community from the top down.

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Other York niches, much larger niches, are the colleges, a mystery to some students and faculty, while a community lifeline to others. Colleges appear to be in constant jeopardy at York, often targeted for budget cuts. For many faculty and students, colleges are the primary means of creating an academic community outside of departments. The Founders College fellows, for example, enjoy meals and events together, creating community through commensality, in spite of budget restrictions. A recent president of the Founders College student council attends these events and uses them as a way to build bridges between residence students, faculty fellows and the college. In nearby Winters College, the success of the Absinthe Pub is attributed to the unique college culture.

York's colleges provide housing for around three thousand, seven hundred and fifty students in nine undergraduate residences. But in 2011, 400 residence rooms were empty, and the university decided to close the Founders College residence. A residence room costs approximately \$5,000 for eight months. An estimated 16 per cent of first-year undergraduate students attending York in 2006 lived in residence. Only 5 per cent of senior students lived in residence in 2006.

It is often easier to find community in college residences. Students who spend their first year in residence where community is created are better able to connect to the larger institution, according to a report in *Excalibur* (Feb. 16, 2011). For mature, graduate and law students and students with families, York also has apartments available. Some apartments and residence rooms are adapted to accommodate students with physical challenges.

Before classes begin each fall, colleges begin the task of trying to create community during orientation. On a rainy August day in 2008, frosh and frosh bosses in blue T-shirts frolicked in the yard behind Founders College. Before orientation was planned, the student council decided between a time warp or military theme and chose the latter for the 2008 orientation activities. One student who waited to roll around on a giant rented blow-up toy explained that he decided to live in residence because his commute to York would be over two hours each

way.

DisOrientation is an alternative radical orientation run by the Ontario Public Interest Research Group (OPIRG) and other student organizations. It is designed to introduce new York students to the political and social justice groups on campus. DisOrientation runs workshops on topics such as anti-racism and anti-oppression and holds other events such as the radical walk, which introduces students to activist causes around campus.

Generally, students report that orientation activities are not negative (except for one college where students learn how their college is better by disparaging other colleges). Winters College's orientation leaders often led frosh on a campus tour. All frosh would wear hand-painted T-shirts. Home becomes tied to college affiliation, as one frosh leader was heard saying to students, "Let's go home." Students quickly learned that that meant going back to Winters College.

Residences develop personalities that are shaped by the students who reside in the buildings. Some of the elements of these personalities begin to form during orientation. The layout of residence rooms influences community life. According to residents, residences organized into suites with shared facilities and those with single rooms represent distinct subcultures. Residences tend to be close knit, and it would have been difficult for members of the Kroy Collective to break into residence communities to carry out participant observation. If the ethnographers had stayed in residence, they could not be anonymous.⁷⁹ The residence experience, however, is not positive for all students. Some students in residence have said that they feel trapped at Downsview rather than feeling freed from home or "at home."

Residence dons are integral to attempts to create community within

⁷⁹ We considered staying overnight in different residences to be able to give a more complete picture of the York culture, but we felt that our presence would be intrusive and raise ethical problems.

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residences.⁸⁰ They organize movie nights, game nights, dinners, dances and pub nights. Even shy students are encouraged to interact with others during these events and in common spaces, such as shared washrooms, laundry rooms and study rooms. Many students in residence try to return to their suburban homes on the weekends for peace and quiet and home-cooked meals.

In Part One, we noted that students inscribe a sense home in their residence rooms using decorations, activities, and imaginative marking of shared space. Students personalize their neutral standard institutional space by bringing items from home, and adding posters to create more “homey” personal spaces (cf. McCracken 2005). One student who spent his undergraduate and graduate years in residence explained how he made his small residence room feel inviting. He used carpets, candles, music and posters of events he attended to remind him of his family, his roots. He brought spices from home, grew herbs in pots and baked to provide himself with the smells of Italian home-cooking.

Creating a home away from home at York suggests a process of feeling at home, feeling safe and content. Feeling at home includes feeling part of an intellectual community. Or, as students at an American university explained, feeling at home in a community means being able to fart comfortably (Nathan 2006:49), conveniently ignoring those who have to put up with their comfortable flatulent neighbours. But, as feminist scholars remind us, home is not always a stable, happy or safe place; it can be unsafe, unsettling, challenging and political. Involvement with student clubs provides another means for students to feel at home at York.

Student Groups

“With 250+ student clubs and organizations, you’re sure to find one that aligns with a favourite pastime, new fascination or future vocation. Meet people who share your interest in chess, counter-

⁸⁰ Urciuoli refers to these residence dons as “apprentice social engineers” (2005:164).

culture or computers and also swap know-how and have fun at the same time,” York brochures urge. When students enter York, they are flooded with options for “getting involved”.

Woven within the daily pattern of classes are threads of deeper interdisciplinary learning and intercultural communication that take place in student groups and organizations. This unselfconscious learning that occurs within the hundreds of student-run groups on campus create or contribute to a sense of community for York students.⁸¹ Sports, music and theatre groups are particularly well-developed at York. Many of the groups on campus are cultural clubs. York’s cultural clubs become a link to the home culture, a community away from home. These clubs emphasize that they are inclusive of all students, not only those who identify themselves with a particular culture or ethnic group. But as the leader of the Nigerian Students Association recognizes, “the group serves to help those students who are far from home find a community at York.” However, the club advertises that everyone is welcome, particularly those interested in studying the region. Cultural clubs stress diversity and inclusivity, although this intention may not play out perfectly in practice.

Students from different cultural backgrounds have organized clubs that allow their members to feel part of an Italian or South Asian or Korean community at York. Membership in these groups and spending time with others of the same heritage allows members to use their shared language and experiences, giving them a chance to feel as if they are back home.⁸²

An interesting dynamic exists between students of a particular cultural

⁸¹ We do not have evidence to say whether the sense of community in these groups is developed at York by design or accident. The clubs may strengthen a sense of community already established elsewhere and reinforced as a community at York. Note that Facebook and other social networks often build on networks created off-line, that are then intensified, expanded and strengthened on-line.

⁸² In future research, it would be useful to interview both international and immigrant students to ask them whether these cultural clubs alleviated feelings of homesickness or encouraged nostalgia for home.

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heritage (Italian, for example) who were born in Canada, students who immigrated from Italy, and students who were born in Italy and have come to Canada to study; the stories of Norma, Gena and Jane in Part One revealed some of these dynamics. Some clubs are geared towards helping students who are new to Toronto; they offer field trips that take students around Toronto and to iconic places like Niagara Falls. In a city and campus as diverse as Toronto and York, it is not easy to tell who comes from another country. Melissa explains:

Students who are here studying English, they don't often get a chance to meet regular students, like regular Canadian students, because nobody can see that you're from another place. Here, just walking down the street, no one will know that you're from another country or you're here from somewhere else learning English or something. Or, if this was a country where everybody [looked] exactly the same and was the same, you know, ethnicity, you would stand out and you would be able to talk to people more easily because they would know that you were here for a certain purpose. So, because people blend in, it's really hard for people that are here studying other languages to actually meet Canadians and use English on a regular basis. So, I think it's a good opportunity for them, as well as for our students, because our students don't get much of a chance to use the language that they're learning outside of the classroom.

In 2008, Mixed Students at York University (MSAY) advertised with banners their aim to “bring together people of mixed heritage as well as non-mixed people at York University” and increase awareness of mixed heritage issues. They also stress that “You don't have to be mixed . . . just believe in uniting people no matter what colour, creed or class, when many [other clubs] are more interested in reinforcing boundaries and dividing lines,” writes a faculty supporter of MSAY. Of course, everyone is mixed heritage. The MSAY is no longer listed as a York club.

Pakistan Student Association (PSA)

A recently elected president of PSA@YORK spoke with a collective member about how he balanced the demanding schedules of being a full-time student and also a student leader. A true organizer and communicator, Mohammed is also passionately involved with his family and school networks and is firm in his political and social convictions.

Mohammed was the director of operations for the PSA in the year before he became PSA president. During his term as president, he was in his fourth year of economics and had plans to enter law school. He repeatedly and proudly spoke about his status as a York student and as a leader of the PSA. He explains that York is included in the club's title ("PSA@York"), unlike other clubs.

The group plans to expand the number of executive positions in order to distribute responsibilities and to schedule more meetings to discuss club matters. Demonstrations and protests have never been part of the PSA repertoire of events. Mohammed explained that he wanted to work with PSA volunteers on day-to-day matters, acknowledging that volunteers had limited time and energy to donate to the club. He felt a debt of gratitude to York's "history of leftism" for helping to steer his political convictions away from his initially conservative loyalties. Mohammed's move from right to left politics occurred concurrently with his increased sense of compassion for others and spurred on by his growing understanding of human rights and humanitarian causes. At York, he learned new understandings of "people as humans" rather than people as bodies or statistics.

The PSA, like the Indian Cultural Association (ICA), is primarily a cultural club. Mohammed found that life within the York club community was "vibrant and interconnected" and that it was easy to make connections with other clubs at York. He felt that his experiences at the PSA have had as much to do with Pakistan as they have had to do with York. Compared to other Ontario schools, he felt that York encouraged more learning outside the classroom and that

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learning how to deal with the politics of York's administration and other student groups taught him valuable lessons that could not have come from other any other place. Being involved in clubs at York can be a "springboard" to positions in other clubs and institutions.⁸³

One of the more important events of the year for the PSA is their annual year-end spring dance fundraiser, for which attendees pay a relatively high admission price. As a result, the PSA@York is the most financially secure of the 14 school-based PSAs in Ontario. According to the YFS, the PSA is the only student group on campus to have operated with a surplus every year. The 14 PSAs all collaborate with each other, but at the same time they recognize that PSA@York is the province's leader in Pakistani student clubs. Other strong PSAs in Ontario are at McMaster University and University of Toronto; but the PSA@York has a significant following outside of the York community.

Indian Cultural Association (ICA)

Ali, a former ICA president, was born in India, and was an economics and business major. In his first year at York, he was a dance student and had previously worked for a dance company. Although he did not expect to become involved in ICA, he joined and became director of Multicultural Week in 2007 and the ICA president in 2009. The closing ceremonies of Multicultural Week were a "surreal experience" for Ali, dovetailing nicely with the conclusion of his degree. The performances in the Global Village were the most important part of the week's festivities for him. He led the winning multicultural dance performance and hoped that the group would receive future invitations to perform for York International or for television stations such as CHIN TV or MTV Live.

Ali felt that he became much closer to his Indian culture after joining the ICA, compared to the cultural bonds he felt with India while he

⁸³ Holding executive positions in campus clubs are valued for providing evidence of leadership skills. In fact, experience in student organizations is considered a training ground for corporate life (Urciuoli 2005:160).

was living there. To him, the ICA strengthened his ties and loyalty to India. He expressed frustration that York limited performance opportunities because of the demands for institutional performance spaces and high rental fees.

The ICA does not conduct impromptu performances in open campus spaces like Vari Hall nor support political demonstrations. Ali referred to the ICA as a “non-confrontational group” and confirmed the co-operation he experienced between the ICA and PSA during Multicultural Week. The presence of a large South Asian student population on campus provides more personal connections with different parts of the South Asian diaspora. For example, there are more ICA members from the Middle East than there are from any other diasporic region, including East Africa. Non-Indians also make up part of the ICA, including students from Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Canada.

Other Niches

Other students find their niches in sports or theatre groups like the Vanier College Productions (VCP), founded in 1972, as members explained:⁸⁴

I finally found both my literal and symbolic “home” at York, my corner, my hallway, my office, costume room and theatre tucked away in the midst of administrative and faculty offices in Vanier College. Here in the midst of such incongruity was a hive of possibility and creative energy. But it is not the miniature auditorium or the code for the lockbox which everyone knows. . . . It is the people who collectively embody VCP.

VCP is a family, and once you are in the doors, you’re always welcome and always home.

⁸⁴ These insights and quotes come from Ellen Stuart’s paper on VCP for Anthropology 4200 in 2009.

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The first real sense of community that I got at the monster that is York. . . . I felt safe. Without VCP, I don't know where I'd be now.

To me, VCP is friends, family, a place of acceptance and support and love. Because of VCP, I'm always stressing to others the importance of joining extracurricular clubs. VCP is home.

The hidden niche that is home to the VCP is the Joseph G. Green Theatre, a black box studio that was constructed from a converted radio station and that seats 150 people, located out of sight on the upper floor of Vanier College. For some members, VCP was the only reason to come to school. One member commented that "rehearsal would be right after classes." Most members discovered VCP at college orientation. Many shared their concerns about not fitting in at York, until they experienced the sense of community at VCP.

The Trans Bisexual Lesbian Gay Allies at York (TBLGAY) is an organization that provides resources and support for the LGBTQ⁸⁵ students at the university. The LGBTQ community has been historically oppressed, and like many other groups on campus, students come together to form a collectivity of people with shared experiences. Within the heterosexual spaces of York, LGBTQ students attempt to navigate their way through the complex web of academics and sexuality. Student groups such as TBLGAY provide a place where students can feel welcome and at home.

Not all individuals who self-identify as queer felt as though they fit within gay spaces on campus. The struggle between finding a sense of community within TBLGAY at York and maintaining one's own agency through sexualized and gendered performance creates tension

⁸⁵ LGBTQ refers to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Queer or Questioning people. LGBTTTTQQIAA is sometimes used and refers to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, Asexual and Ally. Categories related to sexual orientation change quickly in the student community. The initials LGBTQ are meant to be inclusive of all abovementioned communities.

for many. While the club co-ordinator considers TBLGAY to be a space where “queers and allies are openly welcome and are made to feel comfortable,” some students experienced a feeling of exclusion, isolation and oppression within the group. One student explained, “‘gay space’ reinforces the idea that ‘queer’ should be regulated and segregated to little pockets of public space to let the heteronormativity emanate around them.” This feeling of the space being exclusionary comes from finding rigid stereotypes in the queer community when students felt they did not fall into neat categories of gay and lesbian. These students viewed TBLGAY as a space that segregates, stereotypes and creates liminal experiences for the queer community. “Gay space” was also defined as a “gay place” to hangout and be a part of a clique, offering a site of resistance against the hegemonic heteronormative community within York.

There are no queer spaces on campus that openly discriminate; however, no queer–gay space is truly open to everyone. For example, some “queer activists” do not feel comfortable entering gay space, while others feel that “gay space” is a platform for politics. Gay spaces provide a sense of safety and community for like-minded queer students. Students who are open, who are Caucasian and who have acquaintances in these spaces may be more comfortable than those who feel excluded because of their ethnicity or race. Students at other universities have found that “Finding community can be a difficult task when sexual orientation, race and faith collide” (Poynter and Washington 2005:42).

York University prides itself on the diversity of its students. Much of the student activity on the York campus emerges through the active engagement of undergraduate and graduate students with the politics of their community, culture or group. Through protests, activism and educational awareness campaigns, students make knowledge more accessible to other students. TBLGAY the “official” gay and lesbian organization on campus prides itself on the queer activism that has been alive since the 1960s. Many LGBTQ students have said that they chose York University because of the queer representation, spaces and activities available to them. While many other universities provide

queer spaces for their LGBTQ students, York has been able to link these groups to already existing structures such as the Centre for Human Rights⁸⁶.

Clubs at York create niches for students, offering a sense of community away from home. While some groups make politics both here and abroad central to their organizations, others focus on building a cultural dialogue between members and across groups. Finding space for developing social relationships is always a problem for students and their organizations. Spiritual resources on campus also have a role to play in creating a meaningful home-away-from-home at York.

Spiritual Resources at the Secular University

Unlike other Canadian universities whose origins were religiously based,⁸⁷ York University had no affiliation with any religious groups and had no plans to develop religious resources on campus. According to the York University Act of 1959, York is a publicly funded secular university. There are no religious symbols in the university or in York mottos. Nevertheless, the Scott Religious Centre (SRC) opened in 1974 on the Keele campus to meet the spiritual needs of some York students. The plaque outside the chapel reads: “This chapel is dedicated to you for the expression of your faith, The W.P. Scott Family.” Only the occasional mislabelling of Scott Religious Centre as Scott Religious Chapel, used in the dedication, sets a Christian tone to the space.

The centre was designed as an open space where any faith could feel at home. Objects with symbolic or religious meaning are locked away and brought out only when a particular religious group needs them for a scheduled event. Walls are covered with dark stained wood. Large

⁸⁶ For more information about the Centre for Human Rights and its programs, please see the website: <http://rights.info.yorku.ca/>

⁸⁷ The University of Toronto’s Trinity College and University of Western Ontario both had affiliations with the Anglican Church.

octagonal windows refract the light down on the centre of the sanctuary. For services oriented towards a movable front table or altar, stackable gray plastic chairs with metal frames are arranged in rows, facing front; these chairs can be easily stored in a corner or in a closet. Surrounding this space is a hall with five small offices as well as a meditation room. Several Christian, Hindu and Muslim groups share these offices.

York has no institutionalized or official campus religious culture. Instead, it provides resources such as neutral space in the SRC that students can seek out and utilize. Students are also free to start a club with people who share the same religious values. The university does not collect data on the religious affiliation of students; however, it makes use of certain estimates based on Statistics Canada data. Using data from 2006, the university estimates that Catholics make up the largest group of students (34.9%), followed by other Christian groups (Protestants, Orthodox and other, 29.4%). Other affiliations include Jewish (5.8%), Muslim (4.8%), Hindu (3.6%), Buddhist (2.1%), and Sikh (2%). Seventeen percent of students have no religious affiliation, according to this method of identifying religious identity.

Catholic students make up the largest percentage of religiously affiliated students on campus and students who live at home continue to affiliate with their home parishes. The Catholic Chaplaincy at York is active on Facebook, using it to make announcements and schedule upcoming events. For example, Ash Wednesday is an important service for practicing Catholics, and the Catholic Chaplaincy provides a noon hour service for students. Ethnographic observations from one Ash Wednesday mass provide insights into how some students fit religion into their busy days:⁸⁸

Pictures are quickly hung on the walls of the Scott Religious Centre, including those of Mary and the Pope. Hymns from a songbook, numbered sequentially in a black plastic binder are set out on every other chair, along with a pamphlet about Lent.

⁸⁸ Laurie Baker attended the service described here and made extensive field notes about the service.

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One microphone stands in front of the female choir and male guitar player, with two speakers located at the head of the sanctuary opposite the entrance doors. Before the service starts, confession takes place on two closely set plastic chairs, with the priest and confessor sitting face forward. The priest makes the sign of the cross; they shake hands at the end, and another student approaches the priest for confession.

The chapel is packed, all seats filled, mostly with students from Asia and Latin America. The sermon explains that God created humans from the dust, and as creatures of the dust, we return to dust; therefore, we mark our foreheads with ash on Ash Wednesday. The priest explains the meaning of fasting during Lent, emphasizing that fasting in this context just means eating two smaller meals in the day and one at night and eating no meat on Wednesday or Friday. Nearly all students approach the altar to be marked with ashes in the shape of a cross on their foreheads and to receive communion.

Near the end of the service, one of the priests walks over to an Asian woman after she has taken holy sacrament and has carried the wafer in her hand back to her seat. He says, "You must eat it right away, not carry it back to your seat!" She seems surprised to be corrected but says she will eat it right away next time. An Asian man weeps quietly after the service and is comforted by the women with him. Everyone seems to understand when to chant, sing, kneel, sit and stand and what hand gestures (hands outstretched or raised up) are appropriate. As the mass ends, women wearing head scarves circle around the outside of the chapel, waiting for the Catholics and their sacred furniture to move out, so they can lay out their prayer rugs.

Muslim students from some traditions are required to pray five times a day, with three prayer times falling during normal school hours. The

Scott Religious Centre accommodates Muslim prayers for students who lay out prayer rugs in the centre before the call to prayer. If the centre is booked by another group and the times conflict, then rugs are arranged in the corridor outside the chapel. Women in head scarves enter by a separate door but pray in the same vicinity as the men. SRC is the largest space on campus for prayers, but it may be too crowded and is not always convenient; in that case, hallways and stairwells elsewhere in the university are used. The spaces adjacent to large windows in the library are popular because it is easy to face Mecca. There is a room available for prayers in the Steacie Science and Engineering Library. But time constraints mean that Muslim students may simply drop their coats on the floor, find a corner and pray in a hallway or wherever they are.⁸⁹

Most religious groups at York are registered as student clubs, with only a few having dedicated staff, including Hillel and the Catholic Chaplaincy. Some clubs are identified by ethnicity; for example, there are three Korean Christian groups. Others are identified by religion, such as Hillel and Campus Association of Baha'i Studies. Others are difficult to classify; for instance, Students Praying for Awakening & Revival on Campus. Seventh day Adventists have a presence at York as the Morningstar Christian Fellowship.

York's wealth of religious student organizations and religiously informed social justice organizations include clubs such as the Revolution Christian Social Justice Club that connects interested students with opportunities to serve in the Toronto and Greater Toronto Area.⁹⁰ However, religious groups and clubs form and close down as students join and leave York. For example, in 2007, Soka Gakkhai International Buddhist York was listed as a student club, but not a religious organization; it no longer exists as a student club at York.

⁸⁹ We would like to thank Dr. Tania Ahmad and her students who told us where they prayed on campus.

⁹⁰ For more information on the Revolution Christian Social Justice Club, please see the website: <https://yorku.collegiatelink.net/organization/RevolutionChristianSocialJusticeClub/about>

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A Buddhist student at York was distressed to find Buddhism left out of references and symbols representing world religions at the Scott Religious Centre; instead, students were directed to Buddhist meditation classes for stress reduction. The secularization of “mindfulness meditation” and its detachment from Buddhist practice has been occurring since the 1980s in North America. In some American schools, the practice has been incorporated into consciousness-based studies to enhance clarity of thinking and reduce stress (cf. Nata 2005). It is a disturbing trend to many practicing Buddhists who argue that one meditative practice has been taken out of its religious context.

Of the thirty or more religious organizations recognized by the Interfaith Council at York, more than half are Christian and include a wide range of orientations from the Apostolic Pentacostals of York University to Youth with a Mission. Members of Christian fellowships often compartmentalize their lives into people who they can and people who they cannot talk to about religion (cf. Freitas 2008). Many of the Christian groups connect directly with social justice issues. For example, the Student Christian Movement (SCM) is part of a youth-led international network of student collectives engaged in “radical spirituality and progressive social justice issues.” SCM is a welcoming, open and affirming queer positive group and has a long history of student activism since 1921. SCM was prominent in the sixties at the University of Toronto as a counter movement, but it never had much impact at York, perhaps because York makes social justice an institutional commitment rather than associating it with any religious ideology.⁹¹ Perhaps radicalism at University of Toronto was always a counter movement, while social activism was “built in” to York at many levels, including the curriculum.

The founders of York wanted the university to be secular, but they were sensitive to and anxious to avoid religious discrimination and anti-Semitism seen as endemic in the University of Toronto. From its

⁹¹ York graduate Bruce Douville (2011) examined the history of the SCM in relation to radical movements at the University of Toronto in the 1960s in his PhD History dissertation.

inception, York had no formal or informal restrictions on hiring practices. Horn argues that, “As a new university, York had no long-established appointment practices or traditions. What it did have was a need for a large number of qualified faculty. This not only permitted but imposed a greater degree of inclusiveness than prevailed in older Canadian universities” (2009:190). York “bucked the trend” in Canadian universities and had Jewish members on the Board of Governors and on the faculty (Horn 2009:188-9). The founders hoped that York would be appealing to Jewish students and faculty by offering a stimulating intellectual environment and a welcoming atmosphere.

Hillel is the foundation for Jewish life on campus. There are several Hillel staff members with offices in the Student Centre, including a Rabbi. Hillel on campus offers Jewish students a place to explore their Jewish identity. It provides Shabbat dinners, religious services and Israel advocacy. Students consider it a place to hang out on campus, or as one student explained, a place for “doing Jewish.”

Orthodox Jewish men wear a skullcap (a kippah or yarmulke) and modest dress identifies Orthodox Jewish women. Jewish students explain that they avoid non-kosher foods, especially meat, rather than attempting to keep kosher on campus. From 1971 until October 2008, York University did not schedule classes on the Jewish High Holidays of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. In 2009, the university discontinued the practice of not scheduling classes on the first and last days of the Jewish Passover in spring. A Jewish faculty member expressed some discomfort when he had to decide whether or not to teach on the High Holy Days in October, because in past years, the decision had been made for him when the university closed on those days. In 2012, exams were scheduled for Easter Monday, a public holiday. However, the university policy on religious accommodation allowed all students with religious commitments to reschedule their exams.

York does not do religion well. One might at least expect that a large, diverse student population would require a multi-faith or inter-faith university chaplaincy formally endorsed by the administration. In what

could be considered a gesture to the plasticity of York's relationship with the religious and political affiliations of its students, York is one of only two Canadian universities with student enrolment higher than 25,000 without an inter-faith or multi-faith chaplaincy. Instead, York has an Interfaith Council composed of representatives of several registered student clubs, as well as the few dedicated Hillel staff members and the Catholic Chaplaincy. The Interfaith Council runs the Scott Religious Centre and advises the university on religious affairs. York University has not yet resolved being a secular university and meeting the spiritual needs of its students.

Although York is religiously diverse, religion is considered a private matter, not the concern of a public university. Freitas (2008) examines another often private matter: the relation between sexual experimentation and spiritual formation on American college campuses. Her research exposes many of the tensions that exist between sex and religion among young people. Freitas found that students prefer to talk about sex than religion. She suggests that "In theory, religious diversity should enhance student dialogue and exchange about faith" (Freitas 2008:33). But in her study, this does not happen. Many students believed that anything faintly religious should be erased from campus life (Freitas 2008:36). At public non-denominational schools like York, Freitas found that 51 per cent of respondents considered themselves spiritual and religious; 38.3 per cent spiritual, not religious; and only 6.9 per cent considered themselves neither (Freitas 2008: 37). One student explained that dance provides his spirituality. A Hindu student found it hard to practice Hinduism and follow rituals to fast or to pray communally at her non-denominational university. She planned to return to religious practice after college, but she had a small altar in her shared residence room (Freitas 2008:32). Many students were spiritually unmoored and angry with their parents who had not raised them in a faith tradition (Freitas 2008:31).

Social Media and Networking

In Part Two, we suggested that York students are generally wired-in

digital natives who have grown up with computers and digital media, like most university students across the country—they are used to receiving information fast. They were “Born Digital” (cf. Palfrey and Gasser 2008). Their teachers may well be digital immigrants who have come to the new information technology later in life and may retain practices associated with books and paper, such as editing on hard copy and using discourse as a means of making sense of experience.⁹²

Elder-Jubelin (2009) engaged in a study of social networking at York. Most of his informants were on Facebook for an hour or less each day; one person averaged twenty times a day, while another said, “Whenever I have access to a computer.” But some students left Facebook open in the background while doing classwork; Facebook was completely integrated into their daily lives (Elder-Jubelin 2009:52). Generally, Elder-Jubelin’s informants used Facebook to make social plans, maintain social contacts and manage social relationships (2009:59). To his informants, “picking up the phone is scary” (2009:62).

Social networking is also used by the university to keep in touch with York alumni. In the alumni pamphlet distributed at graduation, it states, “If you’re a graduate, you’re already a member” of an online alumni community. One new graduate was asked how many friends she would stay in touch with after university. She was unsure because she would be leaving the country; however, she planned to keep in touch with all of them through Facebook. As an alumnus a Facebook user can continue to use their YorkU email address even after it has been terminated by the university to access their Facebook account. Facebook automatically marks the user as “York alum” on his or her profile.

York’s cultural clubs utilize social media in different ways. Many clubs use Facebook or other social networking sites to plan and publicize

⁹² Perhaps we need a new category for digital virgins who have not yet crossed the threshold to digital immigrant. I am not comfortable with computer technology and social media even though I use it constantly and I am dependent on it. (PVE) Fortunately, most of the collective members are true digital natives.

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their events. One club leader explained that there were 150 students in her club's Facebook group. She observed that many clubs at York began on Facebook and later became face-to-face clubs. Since many clubs do not have physical space of their own, their club activities revolve around Facebook. Events are advertised to the Facebook group, and photos of the completed activities are posted on the group's page after the event. Additionally clubs have a discussion "wall" where students can talk about issues relevant, and not too relevant, to the club. These sites are monitored regularly, and they connect students to their club community.

Facebook and other social networking sites allow for the creation of smaller peer groups within larger clubs. Text-messaging shrinks the campus into a manageable size. If one is unlikely to bump into a friend while walking from Vari Hall to York Lanes, text-messaging can ensure arrival at the same cafeteria at the same time. When time is short and classes are long, text-messaging aids in coordinating meet-ups. Since York is too large for face-to-face interaction, it operates as an imagined community of digitally-mobile students (Anderson [1983]2006).

Social networking sites also help students keep in touch with high school friends when they attend different colleges and universities. Students use text-messaging and social networking to check up on their friends and acquaintances and to distract them from schoolwork. One source of distraction that Facebook and other websites provide relates to courtship and dating. Several York students, for example, commented on a personal ad on Craig's List: "Who was the gorgeous Indian girl wearing pink pants who sat beside me on the York bus to Downsview?" For incoming students, computer-mediated communication is the new normal. Often more comfortable behind a screen, first-year anthropology students in 2013 have expressed anxiety over real-world face-to-face communication. Having grown up using technology, they shift anxiously in their classroom seats when offered group work or the obligation to speak in class. While many shy students find speaking in class and group work challenging, digital natives, shy or outgoing, find comfort in opportunities to interface

digitally.⁹³

York Online

How is York University presented on the web? York's ongoing attempts to cultivate not only a brand image, but also a self-identity for future and current students is built through the Yorku.ca website. The York website serves as an information gateway, a registration system, a news source, a marketing tool and a window into a changing institutional environment where systems and services are introduced, scaled back or simply removed from the site. York also maintains active social media engagement through Facebook and Twitter. York personnel often share important information through these pathways, like weather closures, campus emergencies or campus events.

York also tracks how their students use technology through issuing surveys to students. A survey of 4,111 students completed in 2008, and prepared by Computer and Network Services (CNS), now called University Information Technology (UIT), found that cell phones were owned by about 3,500 students polled and laptops were owned by about 3,250 students. These numbers would no doubt be much higher today if the survey were repeated.

Over the years, York has experimented with different online learning platforms (i.e. WebCT). The open-source system, Moodle, currently supports distance learning and online courses. Moodle offers tools and activities that attempt to encourage student interaction, through polls and quizzes, and communication through forums and chats. Although these activities and options exist, their use depends on the instructor's understanding and willingness to experiment with them.

⁹³ A student at the University of Toronto claimed discrimination when he lost participation marks for not coming to class. He explained that he was the only male in class and was shy around women, preferring to interact with them online. The Human Rights Tribunal dismissed his complaint for accommodation since it was his individual preference to avoid the women in his class and there was no evidence of his being disadvantaged or treated unequally because of his gender (Toronto Star, Feb. 5, 2014).

Clickers in the Classroom

In a snapshot “clicker” exercise⁹⁴ offered in a second-year anthropology course, we obtained a picture of how these students used communication technology on campus. Following written and oral informed consent, the students received clickers and viewed questions projected on a screen. Students answered the questions and saw the class responses on the screen.

Text-messaging was the first choice of 57 per cent of the respondents for communicating with their friends at York. Telephone conversations (56 per cent) and face-to-face conversations (46 per cent) were their second and third choices. The next set of questions explored their use of technologies from the time they awoke that day until around 2 p.m. when the clicker exercise took place in class. During that time period, over half the class received 1–10 text messages; 4 per cent had received between 51 to over 100 messages. Similarly, in that same time period, 47 per cent of the students sent between 1–10 messages and 4 per cent sent between 51 to over 100 messages; 59 per cent of students made from 1–10 phone calls, while 57 per cent received that number of calls. Around 40 per cent of students had no telephone communication that day, while 4 per cent of class members said they had no access to messaging, and 19 per cent had simply not messaged that day. In this class, 34 per cent owned a smart phone or a BlackBerry®.

Most of their messages concerned social relationships (51 per cent), while 37 per cent involved arranging meetings. School work was the concern of 7 per cent of messages; school work often included getting notes from other students when they missed classes. The number of people students interacted with was quite small; 71 per cent connected with just 1–5 people, their closest friends.

In this class, 78 per cent of students had lost access to their

⁹⁴ Clicker technology refers to the use of personal response systems distributed to students in classrooms or in research projects to obtain instant and public responses to questions.

communication devices while at York, either by losing them, forgetting them at home or experiencing a breakdown in the system. Among students, 56 per cent said they were devastated without their devices, but 10 per cent admitted to feeling relieved, a subject that deserves more examination.

In the classroom snapshot, Facebook was by far the most widely used social networking site; 87 per cent of the students used this site, although this fact is not surprising since Facebook is the most popular social networking site on the Internet. Facebook was created at Harvard University and expanded to more universities in 2005. Thus, its association with universities has been prominent since its inception. By 2006, membership was open to anyone.

While few people discussed privacy concerns with social networking following the clicker exercise, collective members found that there were horror stories about putting too much information on Facebook, sending emails too widely or to the wrong address, particularly concerning breakups and intimate messages, photos that “haunt you” and that you can never remove and the difficulties of “un-friending,” removing someone from your network.

The Student Body

The physical bodies of York students possess needs that must be met while at York. Eating, mating, exercising, healing and generally nurturing oneself and others are intertwined with academic work to enrich the lives of York students. Or not. On the food front, the story is mixed.

It is 9 a.m., and you grabbed a coffee at 6 a.m. near the bus stop before boarding a bus from Richmond Hill to York. You arrived late for your 8:30 a.m. class, and now you are hungry. You take a seat in the back of the lecture hall so that you can eat, take notes and listen to the lecture at the same time.

Some professors ask students not to eat in class; others ignore the

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nibbling.⁹⁵ Theatre, dance and other performance-oriented students often have classes all day, followed by rehearsals from 6 p.m. to 10 p.m.; this type of schedule leaves them no time to eat and barely any time to pick up a coffee. Students working in science labs may also be needed for long hours. They are not permitted to eat in the labs for a number of reasons including the presence of hazardous materials and the need to protect delicate equipment, as discussed in Part Two.

One of the problems at York is that most classes are three hours long, and there are no scheduled breaks for meals. This problem, combined with the large number of students who work part-time off campus and need to condense their class schedules into two or three days per week, means that mealtimes are short or, more likely, non-existent. As a result, students either go hungry, graze between classes or eat surreptitiously in class.

During the week after Thanksgiving, the backpacks of forty students in an 8:30 a.m. class in nutritional anthropology were examined and revealed the following portable edibles:⁹⁶

Backpack Buffet	
Granola and yogurt	Goldfish® Crackers
Oreo® WaferStix	Raisins
Tomato soup	Corn flakes
Crackers	Apple sauce
Muffin	Bran bar
Coffee Crisp®	Trail mix
Apple	Nectarine
Grapes	Baby carrots
Banana	Carrots
Energy drink	Bottled water
Coffee	Croissant

⁹⁵ While some professors ban food from the classroom, others are more concerned about laptops and smart phones.

⁹⁶ Informed consent was obtained from all students. These nutritional anthropology students probably had a more than average interest in food compared to the student body in general.

Tea	Granola bars
Fried rice	Fruit snacks
Smoothie made at home	Natural pistachio bar
Fruit cookies	Raisin bran muffin
Chocolates	Tuna wrap
Bagel with ham and cheese	Whole wheat bagel and cream cheese
Tupperware® container of chopped tomatoes, carrots, celery	Pasta from home
Pita sandwich with turkey, cheese, mustard and apple	Tortilla sandwich with veggie burger, tomato, organic tahini, coriander
Sandwiches (tuna, salami, cream cheese, peanut butter and jam, BLT [bacon, lettuce and tomato], turkey with red peppers and alfalfa sprouts)	Bag of soy nuts and unsalted soy chips

Advil®, gum, mints and Halls® cough drops completed the list of consumables in these backpacks. These mobile larders encouraged unstructured food events or snacks rather than meals. However, students who commuted long distances also brought with them meals from home on a regular basis. Most food events at York are probably unstructured snacks rather than structured meals.⁹⁷ The main problem for many students and faculty is scheduling classes without a lunch break. The lack of a common lunch hour at least means that not everyone seeks food at noon; the demand builds from 11 a.m. until 2 p.m. Faculty, too, need to plan their meals around class preparation

⁹⁷ Mary Douglas refers to meals and snacks as structured and unstructured food events and discusses how drinks are integrated into food events in her book, *Implicit Meanings* (1975).

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and teaching schedules that disrupt normal meal cycles. Faculty who purchased lunch on campus explained that they purchased food at 11:30 a.m. or after 2 p.m. to avoid long lineups. Faculty are often teaching from 11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. as well. The sounds of growling stomachs from both student and faculty can be heard as classes end at 2:30 p.m.

One collective member observed what she called the “lecture-banquet”:

At around 4 p.m. during a recent academic lecture, I watched the professor glancing at the food items on a rectangular seminar-room table setup, which sat 21 students. The professor repeatedly glanced at the bounty of foods present. One student had excused herself and returned with a hot, fragrant Indian dish and proceeded to eat it during the class while still participating. Another student was eating a sandwich. Yet another was eating an apple. Two granola bar wrappers were present on the table setup, and there were 13 beverage bottles of various kinds scattered among notebooks and papers.

The York Food System

Food systems are both intricate and intimate. York faces the problem of how to provide food for more than 60,000 people at all hours of the day and night. The solution is to offer a wide range of venues and food options. Feeding thousands of students, staff and faculty on a daily basis requires a complex food organization. The tasks are carried out by a number of different groups: the York University Development Corporation, which oversees all the vendors in York Lanes; the York University Student Centre, responsible for the vendors in the Student Centre; and the York University Food Services, which is responsible for the remaining food venues on campus. York University Food Services is often blamed for all food related problems at York, but they are not responsible for all food operations on campus. York University Food Services does not control or receive

any revenue from restaurants in York Lanes or the Student Centre. York University Food Services must pay particular attention to addressing structural problems concerning insurance and food safety. They have been successful in ensuring that there are no food poisoning outbreaks on campus.

Every food service location has a contract that goes out for bids. Aramark Canada has a contract to manage the food services at York. There are other vendors that are not administered by Aramark. These vendors include the Absinthe Pub and Coffee Shop, the former Grad Lounge, the Orange Snail and Country Style Kosher Deli.

York's exclusive 11-year contract with ©PepsiCo, Inc. ended in August 2011. The \$7.5 million contract provided funds for student organizations and other services. But this forced food vendors at York to sell only drinks that did not compete with the company's brands. Some schools refuse to make contracts with beverage companies in spite of the financial inducements. If the York community failed to purchase enough Pepsi products, then the contract would be extended without providing additional endowment funds. The director of York's Food Services explained that based on community feedback, they had no desire to explore another exclusive contract with Pepsi. Details of these public-private contracts are seldom disclosed. Excalibur attempted to obtain a copy of the contract in 2008, but the administration refused the request. Generally, students were not aware or concerned about the implications of the contract.⁹⁸

Near the Student Centre is a hot dog stand, one of several on campus. It has been there for many years, selling a variety of hot dogs and sausages, including halal, kosher and vegetarian varieties. The stand is closed only when York is closed for holidays and strikes. The sausage offerings are as ethnically diverse as the students on campus—German, Polish, Italian—and they range in price from \$2.75 to \$4.00. Students move past the stand, turn back as if they realized they were hungry, and take advantage of the easiest way to refuel on campus. On

⁹⁸ Even in a food studies class, I was unable to raise interest in the soft drink and candy vendors. (PVE)

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a cool November day, a number of students bought a hot dog or sausage to eat while waiting for the bus. Most of the students who stopped by that day were international students; all the female international students chose the chicken dog. That day, Adam, a recent immigrant from Turkey with degrees in journalism and engineering and the requisite food handling certificates, was busy cutting and grilling sausages, warming buns, taking orders, accepting cash and serving the food with a friendly smile and a quick “Enjoy.” He takes regular shifts at the stand at the Student Centre. He takes pride in the cleanliness of the York stand; it is cleaner than the hot dog stands he has worked at downtown. Fridays are slow days. In his spare time, Adam composed a song about selling hot dogs at York and wanted to record it for the ethnography.

All divisions of the food systems at York have tried to address the need for food diversity on campus, including the provision of vegetarian, halal and kosher food. The TEL Building restaurant offers certified halal meat. Kosher certification at the Country Style Kosher Deli is also stringent and the site is regularly inspected. Around 17 per cent of the people eating on campus are vegetarians (Morris et al. 2009:7). York Food Services has expanded the kinds of food offered as the student body diversified. One can get Chinese food in the TEL Building, Thai food in the Central Square cafeteria and York Lanes, West Indian food at the Orange Snail, Italian food at Michaelangelo’s and free trade coffee at Las Nubes© kiosks around campus. Given that students who are not on meal plans consumed most of the food on campus, York Food Services attempted to diversify the offerings to match the ethnic variety of students on campus. All food providers on campus must provide at least one vegetarian option; many also provide a vegan option. The Grad Lounge, Absinthe Pub, The Underground and Indian Flavours are identified by students as their favourite vegetarian restaurants on campus.

Students have not generally protested about the quality of food served on campus, only about choice constraints when on meal plans. From 1974 to 1992, York University issued scrip, a special purpose currency for buying food on campus. In 1992, the university began increasing

the number of campus food vendors that allowed students to charge their meal to a meal plan by swiping a prepaid electronic card. There were only a few private retailers on campus where one could not use the card. This card was replaced in 2006 with the YU card. Under the meal plan, a meal consists of cooked food plus a beverage. Confectionary or drinks purchased alone do not qualify as meals.

While students on meal plans may criticize the limited food options, York's food managers point out that there is a wide range of food available with over 40 food vendors on campus, including four that are "Eat Smart" certified. Comments about fast food and unhealthy eating options at York may reflect the high visibility and pungent aroma of fast food in the Student Centre, in contrast to the salad bars that offer a variety of healthier food options available in the cafeterias hidden in the colleges' basements.

York's website for Health Education and Promotion, a division of Student Community & Leadership Development, states that "Many students see fast food outlets and grab-and-go meals and are convinced that there is nothing healthy to eat on campus." In fact, York's various food vendors provide the food that most undergraduate students are used to eating and like to eat. In this sense, the food services are well adapted to the customers they serve.

Both York's food service managers and individual students are constrained by budgets and material conditions on campus, although a survey on food options at York indicated that in making food choices on campus, health was more important to consumers than price. The benchmark survey for university food services polled each location where students eat: results show that students are most concerned with the taste of food rather than its appearance, cost or nutritional value and that students are only "fairly satisfied" with the taste of food. Students were less satisfied with the number of vegetarian offerings available on campus (Morris et al. 2009).

Students have their favourite places to eat and spend time. The closing of Blueberry Hill in 2012 was a loss for many students. Ravi explained,

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The atmosphere was always jovial at Blueberry Hill restaurant in York Lanes. Students and faculty alike would enjoy all-day breakfast specials and would thoroughly enjoy the patio in the warmer months. Fellow classmates and other colleagues would gather there prior to and post lecture, theorizing, discussing important issues and, more importantly, socializing. This venue for social cohesion was loved and respected by most of the people I knew, and many familiar faces would find themselves there week by week. The staff treated students as family, and when I approached the owner to discuss the fact that it was being shut down after 20 years of being there, I was struck by his response. He conveyed to me that he has enjoyed his time thoroughly as he was watching generations grow up in his restaurant over the years. His desire to find a restaurant to open up close to the university speaks volumes to the notions of belonging and social cohesion. Many petitions were made in an attempt to save Blueberry Hill. These efforts ultimately failed.

Ravi and other Kroy Collective members viewed the closing of many popular shops in York Lanes as further evidence of the corporatization of the university, complaining that the new replacement shops had higher food prices.

In 2006, many York-trained food activists, worked for over a year to rewrite the University of Toronto's food service contracts, specifying that an increasing percentage of food purchased for use in the university's food service system had to be local and sustainable as certified by Local Food Plus (LFP), a new NGO. LFP brought food producers and commercial buyers together to create innovative and flexible partnerships to make this part of the food system more sustainable (cf. Levkoe 2011, Friedmann 2007).

Why was a similar partnership not possible at York, considering that both universities used the same contractor, Aramark Canada? Individual food administrators at York are supportive of local foods, but the complexity of the food system at York provided

insurmountable obstacles. At the time of the LFP initiative, the service contracts at York were not up for review and there was no fortuitous connection between a food activist and an administrator committed to the LFP vision as there was at the University of Toronto. As other commercial contractors begin to use LFP successfully, LFP may make its way to York.

Amina⁹⁹ has seen many changes in York's food system since she arrived from Guyana in the late 1980s. Originally coming to York to finish her degree, she took a part-time job at the university's food services and never left, eventually managing York's Food Services. She described how different the campus looked in the past, with its dirt paths linking the colleges. The York food system has a history that parallels the growth of the campus, although campus histories seldom consider anything as mundane as food. She recalled:

Early on there were huge kitchens and cafeterias in the dining halls of Complexes one and two. Now the only full cafeteria for the residences is in Stong. The old style cafeterias were not popular because students on meal plans felt they had no choice in places to eat or foods served. They didn't want to be told what they have to eat.

Amina noted that now, there is a greater variety of foods and meals available at York than there was thirty years ago. In the early years, Marriott Management Services ran the food services; it merged with Sodexo Canada but was replaced by Aramark Canada in August 2008. Although the transition between contractors was not hostile, York had a short changeover period to make the transition to Aramark. The changeover was more of an expansion, since Aramark was already operating a food service that students liked in the TEL Building during Sodexo's contract at York. Aramark also operated the Schulich food services, including the Schulich Executive Dining Room. The Sodexo staff members were retained during the transition to Aramark, and they are part of the same union that worked for Sodexo. Amina has

⁹⁹ We thank Amina Hussain and Anthony Barbisan for their interviews.

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seen many small, autonomous food vendors at York close down starting in the early 1990s and accelerating around 2000 because they were not able to sustain a profit.

Wendy worked as a cleaner in the Student Centre at York for 13 years and had wanted to continue working until she was 65 but could not because of leg problems. When her arthritis and swollen feet from diabetes made her unable to work some days, her boss sent her home with pay. She loved working in the Student Centre, the only place on campus that was not unionized. She cleaned the food area but was frustrated by the lack of good equipment available to them. “Too cheap,” she complained. Her bosses wanted her to scrub the floors by hand when there was efficient equipment was available to other cleaners on campus. She worked six days a week and was paid even when she was hurt on the job, but she was laid off during the strikes. “That place was like family; the workers always supported me.” When her grandbaby died at two months, the other cleaners collected over \$700 for her family. She recalls how the vendors complained about the high rent they had to pay at the Student Centre. The worker-owners at Jimmy the Greek and Subway® were particularly close friends, as well as the hot dog vendors outside the Centre. Wendy particularly enjoyed the food during Multicultural Week. She was not a fan of The Underground restaurant, which she said wasted food and never recycled or shared it with other food workers. The restaurant gave only a slight discount for food workers and cleaners, but other food vendors gave large discounts or free food for the cleaners.

In a class discussion on food at York, students in the class who were studying at Schulich business school explained that the food services at Schulich were of higher quality and more reasonable than other food vendors on campus. They explained, “The food has more eye appeal than the other places and it provides a better quality of food.” Other class members agreed, but some were surprised to learn that anyone could use the food services at the law school and the business school and were determined to test out the observation after class.¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ This discussion ensued during a class in nutritional anthropology in

Food and Multi-Tasking

Students face problems around finding places to eat and study at the same time due to class schedules. Libraries are for studying, not eating, although Scott Library has changed its food and drink policy to permit cold finger food and spill-proof drinks in its study areas but not hot food or meals. Restaurants, on the other hand, are for eating, not studying.

York's food service managers encourage the turnover of student patrons because the vendors need space for the next paying customer. However, students will nurse a cup of coffee as long as possible to keep accessing the study space. Computers affect dining as well as studying. Students like to eat where there are outlets to recharge computers, gravitating to tables or benches close to wall outlets.

For others, the "grab food and go" model for eating at York may not be different from the "grab food and go" model of eating at home. That is, students may not have grown up with communal dining experiences at home.¹⁰¹ More often, commuting students graze at York and maintain traditional family meal patterns on weekends at home. One collective member reported, "I have met various students who have their parents living very close to campus, and once a week their parents go grocery shopping for them or give them pre-prepared homemade food for the week. They only graze at York."

When students bring food from home in the form of ready-to-eat dishes or leftovers from homemade meals, they need to find a way to heat it on campus. On one busy afternoon, a long lineup of students waited to use the communal microwave in the Student Centre. Many

March 2010 and led to many speculations about why business students and law students should have access to better food at better prices than other York students.

¹⁰¹ It is also possible that those idealized family meals may not hold appealing memories. For some, eating together may be a source of tension and pain rather than pleasure. However, some students of Italian heritage stressed the importance and pleasure of family meals, particularly on Sundays.

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students complained that the microwave was not always respected as communal equipment for heating food; students sometimes cooked their food for several minutes instead of quickly warming it up. Students would also heat drinks, commercially prepared pre-packaged meals and homemade meals in the microwave.

Since most of York's undergraduate students live at home with their parents or other relatives, these students are "pre-fed" before coming to campus and arrive back home in time for meals. These invisible meals are another strategy for staying fed at York. As one student explained, "The best food at York, or indeed the better quality food, is literally always in students' stomachs or else waiting at the table upon arriving home from campus."

Non-commuter schools have simpler food systems than York's and more traditional meal plan arrangements for their students. York's commuter students can prepay meals on their YU card meal plan in the form of a Convenience Plan for \$1600. If these students purchase a \$2500 meal plan, their food purchases are exempt from harmonized sales tax (with the use of a tax exemption sticker), saving them \$325. When the minimum meal plan was \$2000, it was the least expensive meal plan among comparable institutions, and at \$2500 for residence students, the meal plan is still comparatively cheap.

Hunger and Food

Many students must trade healthy meals for low-cost meals. Students consider Berries and Blooms to be one of the healthiest places to eat on campus, where students can buy various healthy but expensive pre-made salads, fruits and vegetables. Food lines at the Student Centre and York Lanes indicate that there is a much higher demand for food that is inexpensive, no matter what that food is, where it comes from or how it tastes. During York's 50th anniversary celebrations, at least one hot dog vendor was offering deeply discounted food. The line for this vendor was very long, indicating the important role of price in food choices made by York students. One student in the hot dog line said that \$7 was too much to pay for a meal at the vendors in York

Lanes.

The campus food bank, Food4Thought, receives its food from the North York Harvest Food Bank, in addition to donations from students and staff during food drives run by the United Way. Located on the third floor of the Student Centre, Food4Thought addresses the needs of students who face rising costs in rent, tuition and food and who cannot make ends meet. Random acts of kindness at York are few and far between. These acts seldom involve food. One student recalled the time that a first year student paid for his pizza slice. The young women believed that her act of kindness would come back to her at some future date.

What happens to the leftover food and waste of York's vendors? Recall that Wendy who cleaned the Student Centre spoke of the vendors who gave the custodial staff leftover food that could not be sold but that was still edible and complained of the larger restaurants that let too much food go to waste. A colleague from an American school spoke about eating leftovers, food that people had not eaten and that was intended to be discarded, at his college cafeteria. He eats these leftovers as a statement about waste and as a way to push the boundaries of the edible and inedible.

Students with limited financial resources have strategies for surviving and thriving at York. These include searching online for special York lectures that serve refreshments before or after the event. Students prefer events that serve food after the speaker finishes because they can often nibble before the audience emerges from the lecture hall and they are never trapped into attending the lecture. A colleague planned a cheese and fruit buffet costing around \$300 to celebrate the opening of an art installation. Students learned where and when the food would be delivered, and the food was devoured before the welcome speeches were over. Sentiments like "I have bread in my room. You get cheese cubes and meat" demonstrate the strategic use of free food resources on campus.

Home Cooking/Cooking at Home

Students cannot cook in residence unless they are in one of the suites equipped with a small kitchen. Small compact fridges are allowed in residence rooms, but the use of microwaves and other cooking appliances is not permitted. The cooking appliances pose a fire hazard that can overload the power circuits. Students who live in a suite style residence with access to a kitchen can bring smaller cooking appliances to use in the common kitchen as long as they follow the fire safety regulations. Residence students are advised that they have the flexibility to purchase their meals at almost all food outlets on campus. Students can choose from Asian, vegetarian and fast food. Standard meals include salads, soups and sandwiches to full “homestyle” dinners to fast food options such as hamburgers, chicken, pizza and more. Student pubs also offer meals and non-alcoholic beverages.¹⁰²

York is a closed food system. It is challenging to bring food from the outside in to York, whether students need groceries to cook meals or faculty need to arrange a celebratory dinner. York food outlets have little competition within easy walking distance. There are no easily accessible grocery stores near York to serve the many thousands of people whose bodies need meals each day. A York website lists grocery stores at Jane and Finch as an option for students’ food purchases, as well as grocery stores at Yonge and Steeles, and Bathurst

¹⁰² For more information on York’s mealplan, please visiting the following website: <http://www.yorku.ca/stuhouse/undergrad/mealplan.htm>. York advertises that residents can purchase their meals at close to 40 campus food outlets that provide plenty of healthy food choices including traditional cafeterias, independent restaurants offering homestyle cooking and national chains. Whether one prefers vegetarian dishes, international flavours, kosher or halal meals or simply bagels, burgers and pizza, York has it all. For a full listing of campus restaurants and for information about the “Eat Smart” program, visit these websites: <http://www.yorku.ca/foodservices/locations/index.html> http://www.yorku.ca/sclد/healthد/healthtopics/healthy_eating.html. These sites explain how to eat healthy on campus, listing which vendors are “Eat Smart” certified.

and Steeles. On one cold day, a student holding several heavy grocery bags was clearly distressed that an express bus, which he thought would stop close to him, passed him by. As a pedestrian at an intersection dominated by cars, he began the long walk to get his groceries back to York.

International students face problems when it comes to food. Most of them need to change their diets completely when they come to York, since they cannot find the foods that they would normally eat in their home country on or near campus, and must adjust their diets to what is available in Canada. Students complained that they have gained weight since coming to Canada due to the lack of freshly prepared dishes and fresh fruits and vegetables. International students particularly enjoyed the food fair during Multicultural Week. One graduate student from the Philippines grew up eating Spanish-Filipino fusion food and tried to prepare his own food during his first semester at York but soon gave up. He explained: "I always envisioned cooking as a social activity, which means that I felt a sense of nostalgia and isolation because I could not cook for myself. As my Filipino grandmother used to say, 'Food is for all; you don't cook for yourself alone'".

How does food enhance community at York when food can so easily become irrelevant to student life? No one has time for it. Although a material condition of life, eating at York is easily put off, ignored and done thoughtlessly. Unlike French or Italian universities where there would be riots if classes were scheduled during lunch hour or if the quality of food deteriorated, York students mildly complain about food; they would rather complain about more important things like book prices, bus lines or professors. When food is important to the institution and to individuals, then people will fight for what they want and need. Students at York are either relatively satisfied with food availability or its availability is not all that important to them. More ethnographic work is needed to find the balance between these two positions.

Taking food seriously does not just happen; we are all socialized into our food traditions in childhood, and the habits will outlast a few years

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of campus food experiences. But consider French and other European child care centres that serve toddlers three course gourmet meals; the children learn to value mealtimes as special, to differentiate flavours and to develop an appreciation for different tastes. If York students cannot tell the difference in taste between a pizza made by ©Pizza Pizza and one made by Michaelangelo's, then they will not take the time to walk to the Atkinson College building and wait five minutes until a fresh pizza comes out of the oven at Michaelangelo's, even if the prices are similar.

Commensal Drinking

Coffee is an important part of everyday socializing on campus. With the introduction of Le Prep® and Starbucks™ on campus, students talk about coffee cups, places and beverages almost like clothing brands. Social cues like, "I'm a student! I can't afford Starbucks™!" and "As a Fine Arts student, it would be social suicide not to drink Starbucks™!" and "I can take you out for a coffee; Timmies is only \$1.34". Even with all the options for coffee at York, ©Tim Hortons is probably the most popular food franchise in the university. These comments speak to the ways students interact with each another; where they drink coffee hints at how they socially construct and label the world around them.

Inclusion and exclusion are part of the commensal pattern in pubs and coffee shops on campus. According to coffee lovers, only Second Cup™ offers a homey place where students can sit in comfortable chairs while listening to relaxing music, people-watch, and do whatever else people do in a coffee shop while drinking coffee. Coffee prices at Second Cup™ range from \$1.75 for a small cup to \$2.35 for a large cup. Many students have York mugs or fill other insulated mugs at their favourite shop.

Las Nubes© provides fair trade organic coffee for students. It has a special relationship to York as the Costa Rican rainforest where the coffee is grown was donated to the Faculty of Environmental Studies in 1998. York works with farmers' co-operatives to promote

ecologically sound coffee production and processing. The sustainable, free trade coffee appeals to many students who are willing to pay more for coffee from Las Nubes© than for ©Tim Hortons.¹⁰³ Las Nubes© is available at the Osgoode Hall Law School cafeteria, Central Square cafeteria, Booster Juice kiosk near Curtis Lecture Hall and the HNES building lobby where the Las Nubes© Student Association sets up a table. However, Las Nubes© coffee is not well-publicized. Students noted that Treats, one of the recently closed eateries in York Lanes, carried the fair trade coffee, but students have to be aware of the option and ask for it, because the coffee is located behind the counter.

Thursdays are pub nights at York. For some, drinking alcohol plays an important role in commensality on campus; where you drink, what you drink, and with whom you drink are important. Non-drinkers and underage students feel cut off from this important site of campus socializing. A few Muslim students who do not drink alcohol will occasionally go to pub night to chill, hang out and eat free peanuts. Understanding pub culture at York requires examining the over-consumption of alcohol, what some students call “therapeutic drinking.” Binge drinking on American and Canadian college campuses is a serious problem and a form of addiction. Drunkorexia is a new term that refers to the combination of alcohol abuse and disordered eating. Often women will starve themselves all day or binge and purge in order to offset the calories of the alcohol they consume at pub night. Some bulimics use alcohol to induce vomiting; others, more often women, drink alcohol to excess on an empty stomach. In a study based on a sample of York University students, researchers found that alcohol-related risk behaviours such as having unprotected sex, and seeking treatment for alcohol overdose was associated with restrained eating rather than emotional eating or eating in response to food-related stimuli, regardless of hunger (Sieukaran and Sawana 2012). Although the numbers were small, they suggest the need for more attention to consider the relation between disordered eating and alcohol use.

¹⁰³ The price of Las Nubes© coffee as of January 2014 (small, \$1.85; medium, \$2.04; large, \$2.25) is close to the cost of coffee at Second Cup™ (small, \$1.75; medium, \$2.05; large, \$2.35).

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When a professor at an American university taught a class about alcohol use, she assigned students the task of observing and describing a college party when sober. Most of her students had never attended a party when not intoxicated nor witnessed drunken college parties when sober. From her students, she learned that drinking and sexuality are so intertwined that many students admit never participating in a sober sexual moment (Chrzan 2013).¹⁰⁴

Absinthe, better known as the Ab, is the only student owned and operated pub on campus. The pride of Winters College, this pub has survived and thrived, while other student pubs did not. The closing of Blueberry Hill restaurant in York Lanes in 2012, one of the students' favourite drinking spots, increased the popularity of the Ab. There are usually long lines after 10 p.m. to get into the Ab. Some attribute the success of the Ab to the unique college culture at Winters College, others to the well organized group that runs the pub. A regular patron attributes its success to the fact that students are taught during Frosh Week not to use fake identification because if they do and get caught, then the Ab would be shut down and "everyone would hate them."¹⁰⁵ Since 2005, Winters College students have been taught to sing Stan Rogers' "Barrett's Privateers" during orientation week. The song plays a special role in the Ab culture. Just before midnight on pub night, the "Ab rats" (regulars of the Absinthe Pub) fill their glasses with beer and prepare to sing "Barrett's Privateers" at midnight. Students insist the

¹⁰⁴ While writing this paragraph, I felt critical of students' stories about drinking at York. But then I remembered my own experience in an American graduate school course where the professor announced that half the class would fail and most of the grade was based on a single paper based on the analysis of a museum collection that I could only have access to for one day. I worked without a break and without eating from the minute the museum opened until the minute it closed at night. After a full day in a dusty, dry museum, I drank gallons of tasty lemonade at a relaxing party. In my thirsty, dehydrated, tense and hungry state, I did not notice that it was mostly lemon juice, sugar and gin, and I soon passed out. I passed the course, but I have never consumed gin since. (PVE)

¹⁰⁵ Thanks to Katie Alguire who supplied information about this weekly ritual. "Barrett's Privateers" is a modern drinking song written by Canadian musician Stan Rogers in the style of a sea shanty. It has become the unofficial anthem of the Canadian navy and several colleges.

loud singing releases tension and encourages participants to lose their inhibitions. With the passing of each graduating class, pieces of Yorklore such as this may disappear. But new generations of students will create new rituals, and some of them will no doubt take place in pubs. These collective rituals also link to hook-up cultures on campus.

Courtship and Classes

Courtships were seldom explored in the early ethnographies on American universities. Becker's 1968 study of the University of Kansas found that students organized their college experience around academic work, campus organizations and activities and personal relationships that included friendships and courtships (1968:2-3). "For women, college dating is not a rehearsal but the real thing" (1968:12). That is, women expected to meet the man they will marry while they are at college. This fifties perspective sounds strikingly anachronistic today. However, personal relationships are very important to university students and can have a dramatic effect on their lives. York students are no exception to this generalization. Same sex unions, premarital sex, living together and abstinence all present special challenges for students at York.

In *My Freshman Year*, Nathan (2006:99) argues that academic culture is at odds with and tangential to campus culture. Based on her analysis of conversations overheard in a mini-study asking what students talk about in residences late at night, she complains about how little academic and intellectual topics influence campus life. But she found that relationships are always an important topic of conversation, particularly for women (2006:99-100).¹⁰⁶

Other researchers have exposed a culture of rampant sex on American campuses. Positive student stories of "pleasurable sex, self-approval and happiness with past experiences" were rare (Freitas 2008:13). According to American Health Statistics (2005), 85 per cent of men

¹⁰⁶ While I was walking on campus, a male student approached me, head bent; he said on his cell phone in an agonized voice, "She won't forgive me for not saying 'Hi.' What do I do now?" (PVE)

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and 81 per cent of women aged 15–44 had sexual intercourse for the first time by ages 20–21 (Freitas 2008:255). Like York students, these students are “struggling to make meaning of their messy embodied lives” (Freitas 2008:ix). Women in particular regretted the lack of romance in their lives, even if they themselves participated in the hook up culture. Freitas explains that friends with benefits is regularly hooking up with a friend for sex, with no expectation that the friendship will develop into a romantic, committed relationship (2008:134). As one man in her study admitted, “I don’t know how to date without sex anymore” (2008: xiv).

“I’m uncomfortable walking in the stairwells in Vari and Ross. There are always people making out,” complained one graduate student who carefully avoided looking at the wall indents around the second floor of Vari Hall where “there are always people fooling around.” The platforms at the top of the stairwells are ideally situated because they are out of the way, yet positioned so that anyone approaching can be heard in time to “cover up.”

Several students shared some of their experiences with relationships on campus.¹⁰⁷ These stories are generally more positive than the stories from the American college research and reflect more problems around parental disapproval of dating and partner choice.

Time and space structure how relationships progress at York. Antonella described how she met her ex-boyfriend: “We were friends for about two years before we started dating.” They saw each other a lot because they had many of the same friends. She said, “At first I didn’t like him, but he just started doing everything right; so, shortly after, I began to develop feelings for him.” Antonella explained that when she first met Chris he was completing his BA at York, but when they actually “made it official,” he was a master’s student and she was an undergraduate. Both Antonella and Chris commuted to York on a daily basis. He was from Brampton, and she lived in Woodbridge.

¹⁰⁷ Many of these interviews were done by Monica Silva while she was a RAY (Research at York) student assistant as well as a member of the Kroy Collective.

Antonella described how she would make arrangements to meet Chris before and after classes. She gave an example:

Tuesdays were really good; we would always meet in Vari Hall around 6 p.m. If we were going to meet after a long day of school, usually we'd just want to talk and catch up, so we'd usually hang out in Vari Hall near the elevators on the main floor or head to the Student Centre.

Antonella explained that although they were both in school, they did not really plan their schedules around each other. "He had more flexibility with his program so he was usually the one who could change his schedule around. If he wanted to see me he could have." Antonella also said that because they had mutual friends, friend time also meant "date" time for them. Antonella remembered when her friends first saw her and Chris holding hands, and they wanted to know "what happened." When their friends knew about their relationship, this made them feel that they were now "official".

According to George, he did not have "girlfriends" at York, except one girlfriend who lasted only three months. To George, as with other male students interviewed, "hook ups" are not considered dating. He explained that he had met his girlfriend when he was a frosh boss for one of York's colleges and his girlfriend was a frosh. "We would hang out in her room or mine, but usually it was hers because she had a single room without a roommate." He explained that when visiting her residence room, he was required to sign in for the night or day. Sleeping over was never really a problem in the residences. He said, "They just wanted to know who was there." If for some reason she came to his room to hang out with him, his roommate followed the "put-your-earphones-on-and-turn-around rule."¹⁰⁸

George explained that dating at York is very casual and hook ups are

¹⁰⁸ The interviewer was shocked and asked, "Isn't that awkward? Don't the roommates mind?" He dismissed the potential embarrassment and said, "The girls we brought over really weren't concerned with stuff like that."

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common:

Most people just want to have fun, nothing serious. However, you have to be careful because part of dating someone who lives at York is that they probably know a lot of people, and most likely you have already slept with one of her friends. Girls know other girls, and girls talk . . . blah blah blah, and George gets in trouble.

George clearly had been busted in the past! He saw that as a problem, and although there were many girls available, one had to be very careful. “One of the great things about living away from home is that you can spend more intimate time with a girl. You don’t have your parents nagging you about who she is, what time you got home, et cetera.” He did not like to date commuters. “. . . their parents are so up tight!” Although he did not have to follow any rules, these girls had to return home to their parents. But it did provide the opportunity for them to do things in places that maybe they should not have been. “Like sometimes we just couldn’t go back to my room because it was being used, and well you know...” In those cases, he found his way to the top of the Ross Building, a location that was always popular with George and the ladies. “No one is really ever up there, so it worked well!” George had rules for his one-night stands: “First, never speak of it again. Second, if by some chance you stayed over the night, which is a big no-no, tell her the next morning that you have work and leave!”

Like George, many of Frietas’ informants separated females they would date from females with whom they would hook up. Like George, these women were not looking for a long-term relationship with emotional and time commitments, rather some fun for the evening. Students distinguished these relationships from friends with benefits.

Sally met her current boyfriend in high school. They had known each other since grade 9 and began dating in grade 12. Her decision to come to York was a “no-brainer” since her father worked at York and she would not have to pay tuition. Her boyfriend Daniel, on the other

hand, had planned on going to Concordia in Montreal; however, the thought of being apart from Sally made him reconsider York University.

Both Sally and Daniel moved into residence their first year; Daniel moved into Winters College and Sally into Vanier. During their first year at York, the couple did not have a say in whether their timetables were compatible. Due to their different programs, they usually would see each other only after the school day was over. Although they both lived on campus, they still experienced difficulties spending “quality” time together. Since they were both busy with school work, most of the quality time that the couple spent together was over food and studying.

In their third year of university, the couple decided that they would move into a nearby apartment building within walking distance of York. Sally described how the move was a mutual decision to leave campus. Although moving in with another couple was sometimes stressful, they quickly adjusted to their new home. One of the reasons for the move was that there was literally no food she could eat on campus without getting sick, and she wanted to cook her own food. Another issue was the problem of finding “alone” time at York.

One might think that living near campus would provide the couple with all the alone time they needed, since they were just a two minute walk away from their rooms. Not so. Sally explained how “dating” was sometimes impossible. For example, when they were back at the apartment, there were always people there. If she and Daniel ever closed their door, there was always someone knocking and asking “Whatcha doing?” or sometimes someone would walk right into the room. Even going out to dinner was not a solo project because they often felt obliged to invite their roommates. Therefore, dinners quickly became “double dates.” Sometimes the only way to be alone was to say, “No, you can’t come!” For the most part, her roommates understood that every couple needed their privacy. The general rule she had among her friends was that “if the door is closed don’t knock! . . . meaning it is closed for a reason; get the hint and get lost!” When she was living in residence, there was the “sock on the door or tape on

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the lock trick.” For example, if you were with your boyfriend or girlfriend and you did not want your roommate to come back into the room, you would put a sock on the doorknob or a piece of tape on the lock, and when your roommate came back, he or she would know that the room was being used and not to interrupt. Sally recalled that one time she forgot to take the tape off the lock and her roommate waited outside until 4 a.m. She preferred taping the lock because it was next to invisible and not as obvious as a sock.

Sally reported that one of her happiest moments at York was watching Daniel graduate and that it was even more special because they went through convocation together. “Sometimes it was all tears, but because we lived together, we could be there for each other. It’s hard to say if we would have stayed together and continued dating if we didn’t live together.”

Sally described witnessing York couple behaviour:

One time in Scott Library, a guy came in with a picnic basket and met up with his girlfriend in the quiet study area on the fourth floor. They started feeding each other and making out; it was so awkward, and everyone was watching, but they didn’t seem to care.

When she was living in residence, she remembered going into the bathroom to take a shower and hearing a couple having sex in the next shower stall.

Students in relationships where one partner is not a York student face more challenges. Samantha, a young music major at York, recalled her first date with Steven: “We started dating in August, right before school started, and I remember that date because all our friends went to the beach. We got drunk and made out, a bad mistake.” Before long, they were a couple. At this point, she already knew she was going to York and was going to live on campus. Steven, on the other hand, was staying at home to complete one more year of high school. Samantha remembered asking him, “What’s going to happen to us

when I go to school?” They continued to date despite the difficulties. Samantha explained, “We weren’t anything serious, so I wasn’t really worried. We talked on the phone when I wasn’t in class, and I would see him on weekends when I would go home, and sometimes he even spent the night at York with me.” She explained that in her college residence, both roommates had to sign a contract that stated whether they were comfortable with their roommate having people stay over in their dorm. “You could have people over whenever. I never really had to ask my roommate. You just couldn’t do stuff in your roommate’s bed; that’s gross!” Samantha laughed and then explained that her roommate was “a very heavy sleeper,” and so sometimes “alone” time actually meant that there was someone else in the room.

Samantha is now in her second year at York but is living at home. “I only live about 25 minutes away, so it won’t be that long of a commute. It gives me a chance to save money and also to be close to Steven, the biggest advantage of living at home.” Samantha admitted that there were difficulties in having a relationship while being a student. “Going into first year, I thought because I wasn’t living at home that I would have all the freedom in the world to see Steven. I just forgot that even though I had freedom, neither of us drove, and we had very different lives.” Seeing Steven was sometimes such a problem that during the first few months at York, she did not think they would last, and she started looking for someone else. She explained, “I’d go out as if I were single. I mean at pub nights and stuff. I wouldn’t act as if I had a boyfriend. Right now we are pretty awesome.”

One of her most memorable moments of being a couple at York was attending her college’s formal dance:

He was so cute; he came all dressed up. It reminded me of my high school prom. It was very special to me because he didn’t actually go to our high school prom. I think it was special for him too because it was his first time doing the whole prom thing.

Her memories included the risky moment when she “made out” in the

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men's washroom at the formal dance. She mused that "Living apart makes you do things."

Kyra was 18 when she came to York. She explained that she never really had a serious boyfriend before and although she was excited to meet new people at York, dating was not high on her agenda. When she met Damian, she did not think their relationship would go anywhere. Kyra and Damian met one day after a class; he was leaving his kinesiology class, and she was getting ready for her natural science class. After exchanging a couple of words, nothing happened, and she quickly forgot about Damian. It was not until a close friend arranged a double date that she saw him again. They had lunch together, and they instantly connected. Kyra describes how it was unbelievable that their schedules were very similar that year. Having the same class breaks allowed them to grab food together and even hang out in the library together.

What first began as a random encounter eventually became a three year relationship. Kyra explained that because of some family problems on her end, most of the time she spent with Damian was at York. He lived in Scarborough, and she lived in Brampton; so, York was their "ground zero," the halfway point between their two worlds.¹⁰⁹

Because they both commuted to York, they tried to make York feel more like home and more like a hang out spot. Kyra explained that they spent a lot of time eating together. Damian was always hungry, so they spent a lot of time in the college cafeteria. It was one of their favourite spots to grab food because the dining room was usually quiet. There they could eat but still be "lovey-dovey" without having others stare them down. Also, there was seldom a student looking over their shoulders, waiting for their table. If they wanted to just sit

¹⁰⁹ John and I met in the anthropology program at the University of Toronto. In our last year, we both had small apartments near campus. When we became engaged, we each returned to our respective homes in Don Mills and Etobicoke to save money. University of Toronto became our "ground zero," the halfway point between our suburban homes. (PVE)

down and watch television, they would usually hang out in the student lounge in Bethune College with a large screen television and a pool table. Kyra reported how they often headed down there after eating or sometimes they would bring food and watch television between classes.

Damian would always walk her to class, while she would sit in his classes if she were not in classes herself. Even though they did not talk in lecture and it was her time off from classes, any time she spent with him was worth it. They spent most of their time together walking to places—to class, to eat, to find somewhere to be alone; they felt like they were always walking.

During the three years of their relationship, Damian was not allowed to come over to her house, and they had to keep their relationship a secret from her parents.¹¹⁰ For that reason, Kyra arranged her classes around his school and track schedule. This required working out their schedules together in the summer and sometimes skipping classes to see each other. She speculated that if they lived close by or on campus, they could have separated “dating time” from “school time.” For them, the only opportunity for both was while they were at York. She recalled that Damian complained that there was never anywhere to go and be alone: “We had to be creative, and sometimes we would use school property in unintended ways.” Kyra felt that one of the most “fun things” about being a couple at York was finding places to be alone without getting caught. It was always an adventure and such a rush. Their locations included the bathroom in Steacie Library, the college bathroom for individuals with handicaps, and even outside in the back fields. She recalled,

Now that we are broken up, everywhere I look, I still see him, everywhere; it’s like in every building, I can remember us walking through, or every corner I

¹¹⁰ Secret dating was commonly mentioned either because parents would not approve of dating in general or of the person chosen to date. York provides an atmosphere where dating and friendships often cross ethnic and religious lines, and that was mentioned as a serious problem for many students.

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expect to hear him laughing. It is a little sad, but we made great memories here.

Not all relationships that begin at York are short-term hook ups. But York's demographics make hook ups more likely, according to one economist (Adshade 2013). Few universities today have more male than female undergraduates. Currently in the Faculty of Liberal Arts and Professional Studies (LAPS) for example, the ratio is 43/57, male to female students. Data from 2006 reveals that university wide, the ratio is 40/60, male to female students. A ratio of more females than males gives males the advantage and encourages more casual hook ups than serious dating. On a campus with more men than women, women's preferences would drive the market and that would encourage more traditional dating.

It would be difficult to calculate the number of marriages resulting from meetings at York, but the number would be substantial (among both students and staff). Both York alumni, Dagmara and Sony shared the story of how they met. In their words:

We first met in Dagmara's second year at York and Sony's third year in the genetics course of the BSc program with a major in biology. We only shared the genetics course together. Dagmara had lost her lab partner from the first term, and we decided to work together for the rest of the year. Soon we were meeting after classes to discuss lab results, but we really spent more time just getting to know each other. We learned that we came from totally different backgrounds. Dagmara came to Canada from Poland at the age of seven. Sony came to Canada from Syria at the age of 18 and was lucky enough to get accepted to York that same year. Dagmara loved Sony's stories from Syria and how with the help of the Jewish community in Toronto, he was able to get out of Syria and settle in Canada. Our favourite places to meet on campus were the Atkinson College coffee shop (famous for their vegetarian chili) and the Steacie Library.

At the time of our meeting, Dagmara was in a relationship so our friendship could not go further. The following September, we met again, Sony in his last year of his BSc, while Dagmara still had another year to complete. Dagmara had broken off with her previous boyfriend and our friendship grew. We began going dancing together on weekends. One special occasion, we drove to the country with some friends to go line dancing in a country bar that was very popular at the time. Sony and Dagmara took lessons together and then danced the whole night away, even though Sony hated country music. At that moment we knew it was getting more serious. We began to see more of each other. Funny how after we got married Sony would not take dancing lessons anymore. The things we do for love!

Sony started a master's program the following year. Dagmara followed after him, starting a master's in the same laboratory and working on biological clocks. Well, our personal clocks started ticking, and one year later we decided to get married. Soon after, Dagmara was pregnant with our first child, and Sony decided to start his own business in the golf industry in order to be able to support a family. Both Dagmara and Sony completed their master's at York in the same field although somewhat delayed due to the marriage and the new business. Later, Dagmara went back to York, after having their second child, to get her degree in education. She is currently a teacher with the York Region District school board. Thanks to York University for bringing two people of very different backgrounds together, and we are still living happily after 12 years of marriage and two children; we wouldn't change a thing.

Faculty and student relationships may develop on campus, particularly when ages are close. When the attraction is great and when faculty and students live in "interconnected worlds," as in a theatre or jazz music

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program, the couple must learn to be discrete.¹¹¹

Faculty members report that class discussions about sexual orientation and alternative sexualities may give rise to spontaneous discoveries of sexual compatibility among students while they are in classrooms, leaving some faculty and students uncomfortable. Gay, lesbian and bisexual students at York participate in analogous but less visible courtship patterns compared to their heteronormative peers. How do LGBTQ students at York find each other and navigate the heterosexual place that is York University? As one gay graduate student explained,

Being in university makes you want to explore and have the same experiences as your peers, but having a socially labelled queer body makes it nearly impossible to have gay relationships let alone friends. Navigating the gay terrain at York was a hard journey that no one prepares you for. After meeting a few gay and lesbian friends through courses that I took in the Sexuality Studies Program, I found this environment easier to network and mingle with other queer academics.

Some gay students make use of a phone application called Grindr. Grindr works on a GPS system that allows someone to see the profiles of “gay men” that are located relatively close to the phone, and they could also see you. This application removed some of the guesswork from trying to figure out if someone might be interested in you. With a slide and click on an iPhone, a student could be connected with other male students at York who identify as gay, bisexual, transgendered, transsexual or even straight men who are curious.

The application presented some anxiety-producing problems:

¹¹¹ York University’s policy on close personal relations between instructors and students does not legislate or make the relationship illegal, but it considers them unprofessional and unethical and has sexual harassment rules in place to protect participants from the abuse of power (Maclean’s Mar 11, 2008).

One friend asked me: “What is the gay etiquette on Grindr? Do I message him? Does he message me? Is it okay not to have a display picture? There are just so many gay rules now that this is a new level of I have no idea what I am doing!” Another friend furthered these sentiments by saying the gay community is already so small and while Grindr makes it easier to screen potential candidates for a relationship or sex, it makes our community much more connected, all knowing and too personal . . . and how you could not talk or go on dates with people your friends knew. It was seen as gay social suicide or “friendship-incest.”

These applications make it “simple” for men wanting encounters, dates, friends or “buddies” to find each other faster and easier. Now what happens when you find someone on these applications, what is the etiquette? When do you delete these applications? What happens when you find the person you like on one of these applications? Have these applications created more anxieties than solutions? Probably . . . maybe. I have asked myself many of these questions and have talked to many of my close circle of friends, asking for advice on what this one gay man should do! With so many ways to interact, so much more uncertainty and surveillance, how does one simply be in a relationship or attempt to make one? I have spent more time being in a relationship with my applications, making sure the photo is just right; the descriptions of myself are detailed, yet not too detailed (we cannot be too available) and using academic sounding terminology yet watering it down because we cannot come off as cocky, than being in an actual relationship. The biggest anxiety comes from selecting certain categories for yourself, so all the other wonderful men who “stumble” onto your profile know how to rate you, judge you and make the best informed decision; so click wisely!

While there were many problems with the application, many students

felt that it made it easier to find dates or one-night stands, since there were no outlets on campus to do so. Queer sexual practices and queer sexuality were allowed to emerge, and even “grind” up against heterosocial places and sexualities at York.¹¹²

These stories provide a glimpse of the kind of personal relationships that students negotiate at York. York students create time and space for these personal encounters or to “hook up” with friends, as they move through their programs.

Parenting at York University

Not all sexual encounters become relationships, but some sexual encounters result in pregnancies that enrich yet complicate the lives of York students. Because York has many mature and part-time students and because there are day care facilities on campus, children are often a part of the York community. But few York stories explore the complexities of parenting for York students. Student fathers may share similar responsibilities with student mothers; their parenting duties are usually less visible at York. It is often more difficult for female students to integrate their reproductive lives with their academic lives. The disjuncture between the asexualized professional body image for women at work and the visibility of the pregnant or nursing mother is particularly difficult for some women to negotiate.¹¹³

¹¹² Not all shared activities become clubs. There are no bondage and discipline, domination and submission, sadism and masochism groups at York, or at most other Canadian universities, in spite of the fact that many students are open to alternative sexualities (Maronese 2010:16).

¹¹³ As a faculty member with a research and advocacy interest in breastfeeding, I have had occasion to deal with student mothers in tears when their child care plans fell through and they needed to care for a breastfeeding infant on campus. All were very conscious of the fact that the infant was disruptive to them as well as to their colleagues, but most were confident enough to put their infants first and deal with the short-term practicalities of parenting an infant at York. A few were devastated by the hostility directed towards them, particularly by those in positions of authority. Some people expressed discomfort, disgust or anger at the sight of a student or mother breastfeeding in campus space. (PVE)

Efforts to make York a mother-friendly workplace in the 1990s included trying to identify comfortable places for women to breastfeed their infants on campus. Some initiatives were quite simple, such as arranging diaper pickup with the regular garbage, getting access to a refrigerator for expressed human milk and providing a comfortable chair. Unfortunately, women's washrooms were still the most common place for these services.¹¹⁴ Insurance and liability problems around borrowing or renting electric breast pumps proved more difficult to solve, but the interest to assist York mothers was there.

At York, the Graduate Students' Association (GSA) makes their offices available to breastfeeding graduate students who would otherwise feel reticent to breastfeed in common areas. In contrast, other universities have worked to provide a nursing room for both staff and students. At the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, a school with a long history of support for women's health issues, the nursing mother's room is located in the library.¹¹⁵ Anyone needing to use the room obtains the key from the checkout desk. The room contains an electric hospital-grade breast pump, comfortable chairs, hand sanitizers and wet wipes. The facility is used by faculty, staff and students. The human resources department at Duke University provides 12 stations for breastfeeding or pumping, with access through a specially programmed card. An electric breast pump is available for mothers, and users bring their own attachments and arrange their own refrigeration.¹¹⁶

Americans have no federally mandated maternity entitlements that could help students, staff or faculty. Although Canada has better

¹¹⁴ Attempts to have a change table installed in a women's washroom in Vari Hall were recently (2012) met with resistance from facility administrators despite requests from the chair of my department. The sentiment from administrators was that if one change table was installed, every washroom would need one, thus presenting a financial burden. (LB)

¹¹⁵ For more information about the University of North Carolina at Greensboro's lactation facilities, please see the website: https://library.uncg.edu/spaces/lactation_room.aspx

¹¹⁶ For more information about Duke's lactation facilities, please see the website: www.hr.duke.edu/lactation.

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maternity policies, such as the right to take unpaid time off work, other cycles constrain students—the availability and start dates of required courses, deadlines for grants, and funding cycles—by determining how and when students take their maternity leaves.¹¹⁷

Collective members have heard of numerous instances of exceptional support given to young student-parents who strived to stay in school to finish a degree. Some support came from compassionate teachers; other support came from sports team members and residence mates. One alumna explained her decision to stay in school after she became pregnant in her fourth year. This was a challenge because her daughter was born in March and she wanted to finish her term. A student athlete, she never felt stigmatized by her teammates who helped her play sports during her pregnancy when she could. She even won an athletic award the year she was pregnant. She managed to pass all her courses. In fact, she handed in one term paper the week after it was due (but before the baby was due!) and wrote another paper when she was in hospital for the birth. She took and passed all her final exams two weeks after her baby was born. She had to accept welfare that first summer in order to get subsidized day care for her daughter while she finished her last year of study. There was a two to three year waiting list for day care places at York, but she found a good home care program close to campus. She breastfed her baby that spring and summer but found she could not pump when classes started. Friends and fellow athletes helped her through that year, and her daughter became a “Founders baby.” Her last year at York was a blur of classes, sleeping, and practice teaching, all with a baby in tow.

Faculty are able to more easily care for an infant and breastfeed or pump their milk when they have private offices, compared to staff and

¹¹⁷ When I had my daughter, I held an Ontario Graduate Scholarship (OGS). I was informed by OGS that if I deferred my award for more than one term, regardless of the fact that I just had a child, I could potentially forfeit my award. I did receive one-term worth of pay from our union, CUPE 3903, as a form of maternity benefit. As a result, I officially took one term “off” after the birth of my daughter due to my inability to qualify for provincial benefits as a graduate student with limited accumulated work hours. (LB)

students who work in more open spaces. Several long-term staff members were quite realistic about combining parenting and working at York. Even with day care on campus, many women on the York staff say they shifted between “more or less taxing jobs” at York depending on the age of their children. They negotiated the fit between the most taxing jobs at York and the most taxing family times. For some, these were the teen years, for others, the preschool years.

York has two non-profit, co-operative day care centres on campus. The York University Co-op Daycare has been serving the Keele campus for over 32 years. It is fully licensed for 119 children, from infants to children aged 10. The staff cares for children from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., Monday to Friday. Government subsidies are available to those who qualify. Day care costs range from \$45 for preschool children to almost \$60 a day for infants; care is only offered on a full-time basis.

The Lee Wiggins Childcare Centre, which began as the York University Student Centre Childcare, is located in the Keele campus Student Centre. The Centre offers part- or full-time care for 25 infants and children. It began operations in 1991 through the collaborative efforts of the York University Childcare Committee, an organization of various campus student groups, the Student Centre Committee, the bargaining efforts of CUPE Local 3903 (formerly CUEW/SCITTE Local 3), and York University administration. The Student Centre provides space at no cost to the Centre. Members of CUPE Local 3903, the union representing teaching, graduate and research assistants and contract faculty, are eligible for a fee subsidy for childcare at Lee Wiggins. Spots are limited for full-time care and the cost is around \$1,025 per semester. Part-time care is flexible, offered in time-blocks (i.e. 10:30 a.m.–3:30 p.m.), and based on the needs and schedules of parents. There are often waiting lists for both facilities for full-time care and some student-parents found the costs were prohibitive.

Ryan, graduate student father, relates his experiences,

I think if most people were asked to imagine a typical PhD student, they would describe a relatively

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young, single, childless person from a middle class or elite upbringing who is willing and able to move anywhere for a short-term opportunity on a moment's notice. the closer you fit this description, the easier it is to succeed . . . As a first-generation university student and a father who lives with my child half of the time, my personal life demands more of me than the typical PhD student, and so I probably need to work harder to meet the same standard as others. But I also think it's important to recognize that despite the struggles we all face, being a graduate student is still an immensely privileged position to be in relative to the ways most people have to live (locally and especially globally). And so I don't like to speak as if professional scholars face insurmountable systemic barriers, no matter how overworked and underpaid some of us are.

I've only ever studied at York so I don't have much to compare it to, but my intuition is that, culturally, it is a more welcoming place for a working class parent to pursue graduate studies than a lot of other universities would be. For the most part my supervisors and peers have been supportive and understanding of the extra demands on my time, and I've managed to do well thanks to their support and my own work ethic. I am also grateful that our union covered 40% of my childcare fees at York's Lee Wiggins Centre before I became eligible for a municipal subsidy—it would have been even more difficult to stay in graduate school without CUPE 3903.

There have been many student-initiated efforts to support parenting at York, such as the registered club Student Association for Single Parents (SASP) that won the 2010 club of the year award. In the spring of 2009, graduate student mothers discussed the need for a support group at York. Below are some of the email responses and comments received from students when they contemplated the need for such a support group among graduate students:

When I took a withdrawal in good standing three and a half years ago, my son was six months old and my daughter was two-and-a-half years old. I had been living on three hours of sleep, night after night for months. I was miserable. I had no support and I felt like no one else on campus could possibly understand what it was like to be trying to do all that I was doing! I would really benefit from the support of other moms, especially if I return to the program this fall.

I often feel quite isolated and cut-off from the academic environment now that I am finished course work and I am currently not teaching.

I'm a York grad student juggling motherhood and a PhD. I must say I've never had much contact with other student-moms in my situation, so it would be great to hear about those going through the same sort of experience.

I would love to get to know others [students] who are working their way through grad school while raising kids. Mine are nine and six-and-a-half. They hate it when I am gone so long. Such guilt!!

I'm a single mom with a nine year old son. . . . I don't know about you, but I have been feeling like an archaic ogre in comparison to my younger and childless peers. What a wonderful idea to form a "mother's group," where we could potentially support each other emotionally and develop new friendships!"

What a fabulous idea! Sometimes I think I am the only grad student who is a mother. I would love to talk to other moms and the strategies they used to get through grad school (I just finished my data collection and have learned lots of strategies on how to do your data collection while caring for children, which I would love to share!).

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The tensions between academic work culture and mothering are revealed in the comments around guilt, sleep deprivation and isolation. Few students link their parenting experiences directly to their graduate degrees; however, there are exceptions. The stories by the following two doctoral students, Carol and Annie, reveal the complexity of mothering and studying at York. Both build on ideas from feminist political economy and combine the perspectives of student, teacher and mother. Both also reveal the divide between the policies supporting women faculty, staff and students, such as maternity entitlements guaranteed by law and collective agreements, and the realities of fixed deadlines for grants or expected tenure-track progress that may interfere with the timing of maternity leaves. Both used their experience as student-mothers in their PhD research.

Carol found it difficult coordinate her graduate schedule with the rules for subsidized day care and found that she had to bring her infant to York with her. She wrote:

I arrived at York in August of 2007 with my five-year-old son. I was five months pregnant at the time and planned to complete all of my coursework and teaching as much as I possibly could in the first year. I remembered how much my oldest son had slept as a baby and hoped my new baby would do the same, allowing me to teach, read, mark and write papers for my own classes. . . . Some professors and most students at York were extremely supportive when I brought my infant to campus with me. I used the women's studies grad room in Founders as a sit-down-and-rest, breastfeeding and changing area, during the first few months. There is also a beautiful painting in the meeting room of the women's studies department, which just roars, "Women with Babies and Children are Welcome Here!" I always found it to be reassuring to be in a place that was visually reflective of the reality that I often had a baby strapped on me.

On the days that I brought my infant to York, I had to drop off marked exams, hand in papers, attend

classes and so forth. The only problem was negotiating the TTC with a luggage bag on wheels filled with marked exams, a baby in a sling, and a backpack with diapers, clothes and a small manual breast pump as I still had to pump every day in order have a supply for the days he attended day care. It was easier for me to use the manual pump, as the hospital-grade pumps were both heavy to cart around on the TTC with a baby in sling and extremely expensive to rent. I never did find a subsidy program for the pump. Every place I contacted required a major credit card, which, as a single parent and perpetual university student, I do not have.¹¹⁸ However, the manual pump worked great with the baby on one breast, the pump on the other and was convenient to use in public as I could just slip it under my shirt with one hand, no problem, as long as I had a place to sit down and some elbow room. Breastfeeding on the always packed TTC and negotiating the transfer from the Downsview subway to the 196 express bus to York—where no one ever gave up their seat to me even when I was pregnant, I almost always had to stand—was a complete nightmare. This was my first impression of people in Toronto, and I have to say it was not a good one! The commute to York is built for single able-bodied students with a light backpack. It is not meant for people with course packs and exams in tow nor with babies in strollers or slings as well as the course packs and exams!

I brought my infant to York the first two weeks I TA'd in January as I had not purchased the manual pump nor had I figured out that pumping on one side while he nursed on the other was a pretty convenient option. He nursed the whole time I TA'd my first tutorial and was quite happy until near the

¹¹⁸ Many insurance programs will cover the cost of preterm infant formula but not the rent or purchase of a breast pump to express milk for a premature infant. Advocacy groups have been working to solve this problem. (PVE)

end of the tutorial as he was tired and became irritated by the bright fluorescent lights or perhaps something else. The chairs are very difficult to breastfeed in; they are not very comfortable and the TEL Building did not have a change table in any of the washrooms at that time, so I had to spread a blanket on the tiled floor of the washroom. We also attended the lecture, most of which he slept through, waking up to nurse some and cry a little bit, but overall it went well and the students, all 120 of them, were extremely supportive and did not complain to the course instructor afterwards. The late night tutorial went well; it started at 9 p.m. and he slept through almost all of it. However, the 10 p.m. to 11 p.m. TTC bus ride and then subway trip back downtown was a completely different story. The commute is very busy in the evening with everyone trying to leave campus at the same time. The buses are packed, and I was actually glad I had the sling instead of the stroller. But I had to stand the whole way to the Downsview subway and it was impossible to breastfeed or even breathe properly as the bus was packed so full.

I negotiated the loan of a car in early February, which made my life a whole lot easier: less commute time, which meant more bonding and breastfeeding time and less pumping to do. Also, this made it much easier to bring my infant to campus. Although, it would be nice to have some “baby-friendly” parking spaces close to the middle of campus like they do at some major shopping malls and grocery stores. My favourite time to be on campus is graduation, as there are so many babies and children on campus to see their family members who are graduating. It is very encouraging and reassuring to see that I’m not the only one negotiating family and academia and that it is possible to be successful in academia while parenting.

Annie was equally reflective of how parenting, breastfeeding and

academic work were connected. At the time, she was probably more financially secure than Carol, because of her husband's employment. But she lived two hours from York and still had similar child care challenges. Annie recalled,

It never really occurred to me that I would be starting a PhD program and be pregnant at the same time. Having little knowledge of how grad school works or even knowing what kind of people go to grad school (Do women in grad school ever have babies?), I had no idea what I was in for. But I really didn't care because I felt that whatever the case may be, my decision to become a mother at the age of 24 was more important, and I knew enough about equity legislation to know that the university would not deny me maternity leave, so everything else would just have to work itself out. . . .

I had decided to take a full 12-month maternity leave despite the fact that I was not eligible for maternity benefits through the federal government and that the funding from CUPE only lasted four months. I never really considered doing it any other way. I was looking forward to spending a full year getting to know my baby and learning about how to be a mother. I knew it was more than enough "work" to keep me busy and didn't think I wanted to sacrifice any part of the experience by trying to combine mothering with academic work. These two aspects of my life—mothering—domesticity and academia—did not seem compatible to me at the time, so I made no effort to combine them.

From the moment my son was born, I was struck by an overwhelming feeling that I had to have another baby. I never questioned the feeling, and my husband and I talked it over and figured that my getting pregnant once our son turned one year old was reasonable. . . . When I got pregnant for the second time, I had not really started back into academic work because I could not secure child care

arrangements for my son and I couldn't afford to pay for childcare either until he was 16 months old. Although, technically, I was registered as a full-time student in May, I never really did any academic work until September when I started a TA job. My son started full-time day care in October, and it was only at that point when my two worlds began to collide. Weaning and returning to academic work coincided but not in a causal way.

My second son was born in late March, which was very close to the end of the academic year. Early on in my pregnancy, I decided that it only made sense to finish the TA job I was doing and then take maternity leave after the contract was over. What this meant was that I missed the last tutorial. But the other TAs agreed to allow a few of my students to come to each of their tutorials. And I did not invigilate the final exam. After his birth, I drove to the university with my husband and two kids and picked up my students' essays and final exams and took them home to grade. I had two weeks to complete all the grading. My son was about two or three weeks old at the time and spent most of the time sleeping in my arms or in a swing while I worked.

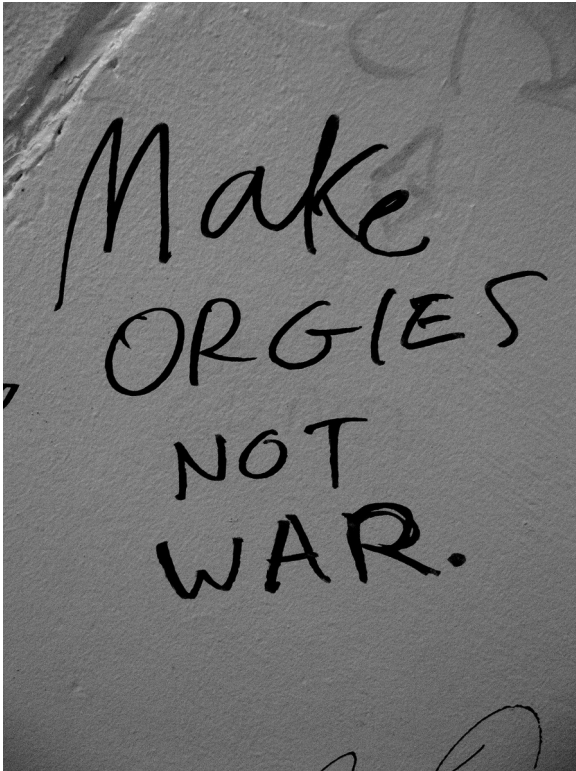
My maternity leave officially started in May, six weeks after my son was born. This delayed start to my maternity leave, which I was told was not a problem by the CUPE representative I discussed my situation with, combined with the CUPE strike of 2008-09 which delayed the start of the summer term until June, meant that I got to stay home with my second son full-time until he was nearly 15 months old. I took a TA job for the summer, which meant cramming a full year course into six weeks of full-time instruction, so I needed to find someone to watch over my little one while I returned to a very unusual work schedule.

When both children started attending the same day care, I went back to work on my PhD. Since returning to academic work, I have had trouble balancing the demands of my personal and “work” life. Kids are demanding; they consume all of my time. School work is demanding, and if I didn’t have kids, it would probably consume all of my time too. Now, I have two very demanding aspects in my life to negotiate, and, I think in the grand scheme of things, the challenge, although frustrating at times and very exhausting, keeps me balanced and, thus, makes it easier to focus on one or the other. My boys are now in full-time day care; otherwise, I would never be able to manage these two competing aspects of my life.

Both stories demonstrate how difficult it is to reconcile biological cycles and academic cycles. Fortunately, there are supports available; CUPE helps, there are supportive clubs and the administration can be flexible. Many parents—both undergraduate and graduate students—graduate with children in tow.

Part Three: Campus Culture

Part Four: Beyond the Ivory Tower





...from classroom to action...
Vari Hall



...sea of protestors before the restructuring of Varil Hall...



...student groups align themselves with student debt protest...

Vari Hall



...end poverty...

Vari Hall



...the information desk...
Vari Hall

Event 4: Student Day of Action: Tuition Freeze Protest

November 5, 2008, dawns bright and clear—a perfect day for a protest march. With the Obama victory in the American election the previous night and the threat of a CUPE strike the next day, the well-organized protest against rising tuition fees taps into a broadly appealing “power to the people” rhetoric. CUPE representatives try to link the looming strike of teaching assistants and course directors to the issue of tuition fees, shouting that the university refuses to negotiate with them and refuses to guarantee salaries and benefits indexed to inflation. “We do not want a strike,” the graduate students shout to the large body of excited undergraduate protestors. “We want to go back to what we do best—teaching you.” Cheers echo all around Vari Hall, but the undergraduates murmur their distress at the possibility of facing a strike near the end of their fall term.

“Drop Fees” signs printed in French and English wave overhead; more hand-painted signs and banners arrive from the York Mature Students’ Association, the International Students’ Association and the South Asian Alliance at York. The signs “Education is a right” and “Drop fees, not bombs” are paraded around inside Vari Hall and outside, where buses wait to bring student protesters to Queen’s Park for a co-ordinated province-wide protest. One group of students reclaims huge phoenix bird puppets used in earlier demonstrations. They find the puppets stored in a closet somewhere on campus. Eventually, the phoenixes rise again in their bright plumage, attracting the hoped for media attention.

Speakers call for the university president to intervene and support their demands. Their chants—“We are the campus” and “Brothers, sisters, comrades”—draw attention to the language of past protests of the sixties and seventies. At one point, security officers ask the students to sit. The requests are largely ignored. The protestors chant, “We shall not be moved.” But eventually, students move out of Vari Hall in a semi-orderly fashion, waiting for the buses to bring them downtown.

Part Four: Beyond the Ivory Tower

York Security Services personnel are present and attentive but non-obtrusive. The student marshals “know the rules” and ensure that the group of five hundred or more students follow the rules to the letter. For example, about twenty buses have been ordered, but only one bus can be loaded at a time. Loading the buses going to Queen’s Park is a long, slow process. But the sunny weather, the energetic and skilled drummers and other musicians, and, for the most part, the festive atmosphere dispels frustration. Once again, Vari Hall is transformed from a space facilitating transit to a space of enthusiastic protest.

The ironies are striking—students sporting designer sunglasses and handbags protest the rising cost of tuition. Ontario students pay the highest tuition fees in Canada, according to the Canadian Federation of Students. In 2011, tuition fees were on the rise in Canada; Canadian students had to pay on average \$6,640. York tuition fees were \$5,344, plus compulsory ancillary fees of \$1,053, for a total of \$6,397 (Maclean’s Nov. 7, 2011:162).

Not all indebted students are involved in the protest. One student is \$30,000 in debt, but she does not consider herself poor. As students walk through the protest, participants attempt to draw more students into the action, but they are not always successful. One student explains:

Last week I noticed very persistent, articulate and visible activity in the Vari Hall and the Student Centre walkways by YFS representatives attempting to get students to involve themselves in advocating for lower tuition. I was accosted three times in the space of just a few minutes. One person boldly continued to walk with me at a brisk pace as I explained that I did not have time to stop; another, when told that I had already accepted and read a flyer from another person, made a facial and vocal expression that spoke of personal disappointment with my rejection but genuine enthusiasm for the continuation of his quest.

Following the rally and march to protest tuition costs, the university

administration supports the efforts of students who participated by making academic accommodations for the protestors who missed classes. Faculty are asked to provide reasonable alternative access to materials covered during the protest, and to extend deadlines for assignments. The university senate endorses the students' requests, calling upon the provincial and federal governments to increase public funding for post-secondary education and to enact policies that will increase equitable access to affordable, high quality education at colleges and universities throughout Canada.

The York University tuition protests, and generally other protests, may be related to course content. For example, a course on the arts and social change in the Faculty of Environmental Studies uses the opportunity of the protest to draw students to its course presentations that involve dancing in the centre of Vari Hall.

Sometimes faculty become directly involved in the organization of demonstrations at York. Their active involvement helps to frame the relationship between scholarship, activism and social justice. Students recall other imaginative protests including the megaphone choir in 2004 to protest the student expelled for using a megaphone in Vari Hall during a rally to denounce the inauguration of George Bush (cf. Hoolboom 2013). During this demonstration, five students were hospitalized after the Toronto Police Service was called in to respond to the growing demonstration of over 500 students. Disturbed over the expulsion, John Greyson's Megaphone Choir presented "Motet for Amplified Voices".¹¹⁹ Now Magazine's Mike Smith recounts the presence of the choir:

The most fascinating event of the day is the Megaphone Choir. Huge yellow megaphones made from poster board are handed out along with a sheet of quotes from various radical intellectuals. A professor blasts a single clear note through a saxophone, and students are asked to read any quote through their faux mikes at the same pitch (Smith

¹¹⁹ For more information on the "Motet for Amplified Voices, please see the website: <http://www.yorku.ca/robb/motet/>

2005).

Smith recognizes the irony of student demonstrations being heavily monitored in Vari Hall, noting that it was Vari's architects who described its purpose: "In Vari Hall, learning is not confined to lecture halls. It spills out into stairways, corridors, under stairs, wherever students can gather informally and spontaneously to discuss and debate" (Smith 2005). The 2011 redesign of Vari Hall described in Part One has seen the space transformed with the addition of a central information desk for use by various arms of York administration. Some have suggested that this transformation is intended to change the nature of the protests and demonstrations that can happen there. Others have argued that the addition of the information desk and sitting areas emerged from a 2009 task-force report on Student Life, Learning and Community struck by President Shoukri after a series of open confrontations between student groups on campus (York University 2009). Regardless of the intentions, the modifications to Vari Hall have not lessened the ability of students to organize and use the space to share their ideas, beliefs and views.¹²⁰

Although "protests" may not always be permitted at certain times in Vari, "performance arts" are more acceptable. Students and faculty claim freedom of artistic expression to get around rules about political protests. On the day of the tuition protest, tensions were light, and the protest was a chance moment before the season of discontent that soon followed—including political confrontations and the strike of

¹²⁰ Michael Horn, long-standing York faculty member and York historian suggests that the view of York as a hotbed of protest is largely a media construction originating from outside the university. He argues that "York is [not any] more or less activist or confrontational than any other university in Ontario." He also suggests that "the mass of students [at York] are unengaged or virtually unengaged" (O'Toole 2012). Horn's understanding of York contrasts with other representations of York, such as "Scott Johnston, philosophy of education professor at Queen's University, [who] says York has 'self-consciously' maintained a social-justice agenda since its inception more than five decades ago—one that, as part of its 'historical and cultural self-understanding,' is unlikely to abate" (O'Toole 2012).

2008–09.

October 7, 2013, strange music floats up to the balconies of the second floor of Vari Hall near the anthropology department. It is difficult to make sense of the sounds that rolled over, interrupted and overlapped each other. For a moment, one sentence stands out. “[Michael] Ondaatje said that writers travel around the world to dangerous places, and as artists, we have a special responsibility to protest when human rights are violated.” These words, along with other texts written on a sheet of paper are distributed to the assembled students and faculty, who sing them into their paper megaphones with “Free John and Tarek” inscribed on each side. The libretto is performed to protest John Greyson¹²¹ and Tarek Loubani’s arrest in Egypt in August 2013.¹²²

No longer able to claim the centre of Vari Hall now occupied by the York information kiosk, the faculty and students who participate in the megaphone choir gather to one side of the hall, while students push by them to take their business to the information kiosk. “Do you know what this is all about?” asks a student who was trying to reach the information kiosk. A political science student answers regretfully, “I should have known about this; I should have been here to help.”

¹²¹ In the foreword to a book dedicated to Greyson’s work, Ruby writes of his commitment to “life lived in opposition to injustice,” where he “held fast” to some causes such as gay liberation and AIDS activism and “moved on” to apartheid and Palestinian self-determination (2012:xv). York University hires people who take social justice seriously. These individuals take that perspective into their classrooms and interact with students who come to York aware of that perspective and who view it as the strength of the institution.

¹²² To watch the Facebook video, please consult the following website : <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?v=10200329518832323>. See posters here: <http://tarekandjohn.com/see-our-support/>. Since their release, Greyson and Loubani have continued to support the rights of detained refugees in Canada, bridging their experience with those of other domestic detainees.

Advocacy and Activism at York

York has a reputation as an activist university. However, social justice does not always involve protests. Advocacy action is a significant part of student life at York and has been since York's inception. In the 60s, student activism was rampant across North American universities. By the 1970s and 1980s observers were "revolted by student unrest" at York (Axelrod 1986:55). Throughout York's history individuals and groups have advocated on campus for causes related to university life; they advocate on campus for things off campus, particularly in the Jane-Finch community; and they advocate on campus for causes far from campus, in places like Ethiopia, Haiti, Somalia, Israel, Burma, Sri Lanka and Palestine. As such, there is often continuity between what is taught in classes and activism outside of classes. Some of those continuities and interconnections produce confrontations; others produce dialogue and meaningful exchanges.

The tuition protest shows the interaction between social justice teachings, administrative advocacy, worker advocacy, and individual and group advocacy. All play a part in creating a climate where students are expected to learn inside and outside the classroom and to apply those lessons in their communities and beyond. Frietas describes American colleges of having a "thick wall between classrooms and everything else" (2008:224). However, this is not so at York, where what happens inside the classroom often seeps out into public space and what is outside seeps into the classroom. But activism in universities is nothing new. Universities are full of "do-gooders who want to change the world" (cf. Tsui 2000: 432). Modelled after the Scottish colleges that taught moral sciences, older universities encouraged students to see that the privilege of an education produced a duty to serve society and to lead lives worthy of their alma mater (cf. Fallis 2007).

Student activists at York complain that it is hard to work with the administration to obtain permission for tabling and rallies because the bureaucracy is very complex and because of the administration's overriding concern for student safety. Students report that many

university officials, particularly those who graduated from York, want to help students, but these officials find their hands tied by bureaucratic rules. For example, it is difficult to bring food from off campus into campus for celebrations or fundraising because the items must be prepared in commercial kitchens or premises that have evidence of public health inspections, and all ingredients must be listed on the label if it is for sale on campus. These regulations make bake sales and the food fair for Multicultural Week challenging for students.

Personal networks at York often can help students avoid the rigid bureaucracy. During the planning process for a graduate student conference, an assistant for the graduate program used her networks to negotiate the room booking system and other scheduling systems to which students do not have easy access.

But some events can also take shape quickly at York. For example, a graduate student who was concerned that York was not doing enough to acknowledge World AIDS Day designed a red AIDS ribbon graphic and arranged to have the media department rotate it among other images on the York University Internet home page. She managed to develop the concept and convince media staff of the event's importance all within three days, and the symbol remained on the York home page for a week, drawing attention to local and international AIDS work. Another example, the SexGen Committee, a group that advises on policy related to sexual and gender diversity at York advocated on behalf of transgendered students who felt uncomfortable using communal sex-segregated washrooms. They benefitted from the renovations that provided over 70 accessible gender neutral washroom on campus. Find the right people, ideally a staff member who attended York, and things get accomplished in short order.

Linking Classrooms, Global Politics and Social Justice

Many of the protests at York have emerged out of the critical thinking encouraged by classroom course content. In addition, ideas are

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brought in from the outside and from the generation who saw their parents demonstrate to make significant social changes. York provides the opportunity and space for protest, and each new generation of students brings the fervour. The continuity across the generations comes from the teaching faculty. Many courses involve students in issues of social justice that do not involve protests but do involve praxis, intentional practical actions that take what is learned in the classroom and apply that knowledge outside the classroom and the university.

While the public media may see only the sit-ins and protests at York, many instances of change are generated through academic outreach—when the lessons of the classroom spill into advocacy for the broader university community. Professors from the Business and Society program helped to connect Wearfair, an organization that provides certified fair trade products, and the York bookstore director to provide reasonably priced fair trade T-shirts made of organic cotton to sell in the bookstore (Yfile, Mar. 18, 2011). Other initiatives from the Business and Society program have been less successful. Although students have requested more food options on campus, there have been many barriers, both bureaucratic and financial, to setting up a co-operative café on campus. In the end, the complexity of York's food system with its multiple contractors defeated the project.

Every year, a course on feminist activism offers students course credit for developing and participating in an activity that raises awareness about the problem of gender violence and encourages the community to participate in solving the problem. In spite of the extra work involved, the students accept the challenge, producing a panel discussion, film night or an educational but entertaining variety show. Each year, the students raise money and donate it to an organization chosen by the students that helps women who have been victims of violence.¹²³

¹²³ Lisa Rosenberg has taught this course for many years after completing her PhD in Women's Studies at York on a topic related to feminist activism.

In early 2011, during a campus safety information session at Osgoode Hall Law School, a Toronto Police Service officer asserted that to be safe, women should not dress like “sluts” (Kwan 2011). The subsequent response from York students and faculty was swift and effective in drawing attention to widespread assumptions about rape, emphasizing that being sexually assaulted has nothing to do with women’s dress and that blaming the victim is an ignorant allegation. One activist stated, “It’s not about one bad apple cop . . . It’s about an institution that is permeated with these kinds of notions and beliefs” (Thomas 2011). York students and alumna teamed up with other feminist activists to organize what came to be known as the slut walk. Using social media, the women planned the walk to start from Queen’s Park on April 3, 2011, and to end in front of the Toronto Police Service headquarters at Yonge and College Street (Millar 2011). In reporting on the slut walk, journalist Margaret Wentz argued that this is what occurs when graduate students have nothing better to do, explaining that “The attitude that rape victims bring it on themselves has largely (though not entirely) disappeared from mainstream society” (Wentz 2011), dismissing the reasons the protest occurred in the first place. The slut walk soon spread to major cities throughout the world. The formation and spread of the slut walk illustrates another way that York students and faculty engage not only in critique but also foster an active engagement in the world. This orientation of active engagement has the potential to create bonds between communities inside and outside York.

What begins in classrooms spreads easily from York. Some lessons never end. Seeds are planted every day in classrooms, labs and studios at York. One flourishing fertile garden is the Milkwood Collective, formed after an evening course at York, Foundations of Creative Imagination, taught by Austin Clarkson. The course was designed to activate the deep structures of the creative process. With its interdisciplinary arts focus, the course has been offered since 1984 and has attracted a wide range of students, mostly in the arts. Following the course offered in 1995, the class members wanted to continue studying together rather than end their close relationship, and formed a collective to continue what began in the classroom. The sense of

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community that developed in the course was formally reborn in the Milkwood Collective in 2000. The current members include art therapists, artists, writers and teachers. By 2005, they were bringing art into the community, inspiring children from neighbouring schools to discover their creative imaginations. Their programs focus on exploring creativity in depth (ECD) in local schools. They teach students and teachers how to develop a greater understanding of the creative process; along the way, they transform children's sense of self and identity. After taking the ECD workshop, one grade 5 girl explained: "My imagination can go wild, and it's not the same as anyone else's" (Clarkson 2009:5). According to Clarkson, York's classrooms and laboratories develop critical attitudes, while studios are creative spaces for exercise of the imagination (2005:2).¹²⁴

Several anthropologists have played an integral part in the development of a course in Public Anthropology. This course connects York students to an online student community across North America. The coursework showcases the ability of York students to learn effective writing skills while being active global citizens able to participate in the broader world outside their university.

One student whose op-ed piece won in the 2009 Public Anthropology Competition linked the issue of broken promises to the Yanomami, an indigenous group living in the Brazilian Amazon, to the broken promise given to students about the tuition freeze in Ontario. Jason Baryluk wrote:

In the 2003 Ontario provincial election I can still remember Dalton McGuinty's caring words to the post-secondary students of the province. Mr. McGuinty declared that the students of this great province would all bask in a tuition freeze that would save them from debt. The election came and

¹²⁴ Future research should follow the routes and paths back to York to see if any of these children who participated in the ECD workshops studied at York. Interestingly, York's dance students teach dance to seniors throughout the GTA as a form of health promotion and cardiovascular fitness.

went and, as we all know, so did the promises now premier McGuinty had made.

The tuition freeze had melted within two years, and by 2009, Ontario was looking at the highest tuition fees in Canada. As a student, I found this quite frustrating, and as an Ontarian, even more so considering this is just one of many promises neglected.

As students, it is not hard for us to recognize other groups or people even on an international level who have had institutions disregard their promises to them. The Yanomami people of South America are one such group and action needs to be taken.

More recently, students taking Public Anthropology have been given assignments to check the entries in Wikipedia for accuracy and completeness and to add materials that reflect anthropological content. Through this assignment, students learn to apply what they learn in the classroom to problems of inequality and injustice. For example, one student added a new entry about the Yuquot whaler's shrine, a First Nations prayer house filled with carvings and human skulls now residing in the American Museum of Natural History but soon to be repatriated to the Yuquot.¹²⁵ Another student produced a Wikipedia entry on HIV and breastfeeding, a complex subject that was not covered adequately in the original entry.

Global actions inspire new academic initiatives. The classroom is one of many routes to activism at York. For example, movements of refugees in the 1970s and 1980s encouraged some faculty members to assist with the resettlement of refugees in Canada and to advocate for changes in refugee policy. York's Centre for Refugee Studies was founded by Howard Adelman in 1988 as a successor to the Refugee Documentation Project, which he started in 1981. The Centre runs refugee related conferences and workshops and publishes *Refuge*, a

¹²⁵ The whaler's shrine was removed by Franz Boas, the founding father of American anthropology.

journal about refugee issues. Only the second of its kind in the world when it was founded, the Centre includes interdisciplinary and collaborative approaches to research on refugees. It encourages public discussion of policy related to refugees and migration, in addition to teaching York students.

On occasion, teachings at York extend far from the university and make their way back to York. In 2011, a project on borderless education and intercultural learning for refugees, offered an online York geography course in the refugee camps on the Thailand–Burma border. York students interacted with a selection of refugee students in the border camps. Bringing post-secondary education to refugee camps in Kenya is the focus of a related York-led project called Borderless Higher Education for Refugees (BHER). Its aim is to study the best way to provide higher education to refugee youth using portable formats such as online courses. The BHER project also offers on-site and online courses through its network of partnered organizations. The emphasis of BHER is on generating capacity, teaching refugee students to teach others and providing the qualifications and course background to do so. In 2013, in the Dadaad refugee camps of Kenya, 187 refugees began studying towards taking university courses in the camp. Refugees who take university courses and have some tertiary qualifications may be able to apply for resettlement and can make interuniversity transfers easier. These initiatives also acquaint students with the rigours of formal higher education before leaving the camps.¹²⁶

Homeless youth, like refugees, only rarely benefit directly from the university. Stephen Gaetz worked in the homeless sector and for the city of Toronto before joining the education faculty at York. In 2007, he founded the Homeless Hub to link a network of researchers around Canada and the world working on homeless issues. There are a number of estimates of the homeless population in Toronto, ranging from over 400 living on the streets to over 5,000 homeless or at risk of homelessness. One starting point for addressing the problem has been

¹²⁶ For more information on the BHER project, please see the website: <http://crs.yorku.ca/bher>.

a definition and typology of homelessness: “Homelessness describes the situation of an individual or family without stable, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means and ability of acquiring it. It is the result of systemic or societal barriers, a lack of affordable and appropriate housing, the individual/household’s financial, mental, cognitive, behavioural or physical challenges, and/or racism and discrimination. Most people do not choose to be homeless, and the experience is generally negative, unpleasant, stressful and distressing. The definition includes a typology of homelessness, from unsheltered, emergency sheltered, provisionally sheltered, to at risk for homelessness.” (Canadian Homelessness Research Network 2012).

Community Action

The York University–TD Community Engagement Centre is a Jane-Finch community resource centre in Yorkgate Mall. It houses a number of community services, such as legal aid and homework programs. It is a teaching, research and resource centre formed to foster partnerships between the community and York University. The Centre also houses educational initiatives such as community-based learning that provides York students with hands-on volunteer experience that is relevant to their course curricula. It also supports research collaborations between community organizations and faculty members who share a commitment to building strong neighbourhoods. The Centre is guided by, and accountable to, an Advisory Council of community leaders and faculty members. One purpose of the Centre is to enable the reduction or elimination of perceived and actual barriers to post-secondary education by providing access to academic resources (such as libraries and student mentors) and making the path to university an easier one.

The Centre gathers together initiatives that have been ongoing for years, such as the Bridging Program for Women, which was founded in 1981. It offers women who have been out of school for many years or who lack traditional academic credentials the opportunity to upgrade their skills and succeed in university. Other related programs such as the Bridging Program for Internationally Educated

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Professionals help immigrant women establish their credentials and gain Canadian work experience.

York's Faculty of Education has a long history of reaching out to schools in the neighbourhood of the university. High school students benefit from mentoring programs such as the Advanced Credit Experience that admits interested grade 11 students to take a university course at York.

Black Creek community farm, a 6 acre farm at Jane Street and Steeles Avenue was developed by York's Faculty of Environmental Studies with a coalition of food-related community groups to teach youth horticultural skills. Developed from coalition meetings held at the TD Community Engagement Centre in 2013, the welcome garden at Black Creek farms grew its first world crops, including callaloo, okra, chillies, sweet potatoes and eggplants. It was cared for predominantly by community members, who had access to the food for personal use and for sale in the community. Partner groups such as Afri-Can food basket and FoodShare hope to make selling organic produce from the farm economically viable for the community. The produce is also sold at YUM, York University Market.¹²⁷

CHRY (105.5 FM), a community-based campus radio station, receives resources, funding, staff and space from York. It is a valued media outlet known to young people in the Jane-Finch community who are encouraged to develop programming on a specific subject. CHRY is another voice of urban culture advocating for the community and connecting it to the university.

The Unity table in Vari Hall may not attract many students on a busy Monday afternoon, but the hip hop music playing on the second floor of Vari Hall does. The four Asian Canadian men and one woman twist themselves into shapes, flip and balance themselves on one foot, one knee, one shoulder, as they practice in a circle. Two students explained they were part of a registered charity club called Unity that works with

¹²⁷ YUM was developed by Regeneration, a student environmental and social justice group, in cooperation with York's food services.

local high schools to use dance competitions and the positive power of hip hop, beat boxing, break dance, and rap poetry for anti-violence messages.

The Unity@York club was founded in 2007 by break dancer Michael Prosserman (aka “Bboy Piecez”), who wanted to share his dance passion at the university. Unity@York students visit local high schools to promote positive messages of diversity. How do they empower high school students through anti-violence messages and dancing? They argue that transforming the negatively portrayed hip hop subculture as a positive creative outlet is one way to empower high school students to resist the violence in their communities. Unity’s message resonates with the experiences of York students. One woman spoke of feeling at home as a South Asian in a Markham high school, but felt lost when she became a minority in another high school. A young man added to the conversation that he felt like a minority in his Aurora high school, but he felt at home as soon as he came to York. They feel most at home dancing with Unity, and they connect to others in their hip hop world online, particularly through Facebook and YouTube.

The Politics of Confrontation

Social justice issues emerge in forms other than protests. But protests draw more media attention to York. Anti-war protests were not always polarizing. In the 1970s, student protests on American campuses spread to Canadian campuses, fuelled by the feminist movement, a critique of capitalism and the desire to protect Canadian culture (Conway 1994:203). Ian Macdonald, a former president of York University, recalled that the protests against the Vietnam War in the 1960s and 1970s were not divisive on campus, but rather unifying, a part of free expression. These protests unified those opposing the war on moral grounds: staff, faculty and students. Protests about the Vietnam War were not “evenly divided” between supporters and detractors of American intervention. Groups did not encounter pro-war protestors. He recalled: “It was a time to band together against war.” Activism was a personal outlet, but not a basis for a personal attack on others on campus because the Vietnamese were “over

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there.” There were few, if any, Vietnamese Canadian students on campus. Debates about the Vietnam War were part of public policy discussions, but not a basis for personal confrontation, Macdonald explained.

Activism at York is informed by the connections York students have to all parts of the world; they are drawn to all world conflicts and cannot be expected to ignore them on campus. Conflicts “over there” are replicated “over here,” with strong opinions on multiple positions voiced by students with direct ties to Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, China, Sri Lanka, Palestine and Israel, for example. To further complicate the issue, outsiders occasionally enter the campus to further polarize and antagonize opposing sides, pushing them farther away from civil dialogue.

The Chinese government officially protested the 1992 installation of the statue “Goddess of Democracy” near the entrance to The Underground restaurant in the Student Centre. In a response that reflects the Student Centre’s role as a place for student groups to help define and develop student life, the director of the Student Centre, cited “solidarity with student struggles around the world” as the reason for erecting the statue in the Student Centre. The Goddess is a papier mâché replica of the 27 foot statue that was erected during the Tiananmen Square student protests in 1989. When the papier mâché statue began to disintegrate, it was dismantled. In June 2012, a large bronze replica was unveiled behind the Student Centre to replace the crumbling version, a gift of the Toronto Association for Democracy in China.

Activism can also take the form of a collective event that attempts to draw public attention to a problem and potentially raise awareness in Canada for peace elsewhere. A Pakistani rally for peace in Vari Hall gained support from the president of United South Asians at York; as a result, Bangladeshi and Tamil students also participated in the rally.¹²⁸

¹²⁸ With the change in club leadership, policies about the politics of

It was a misty, overcast January day in 2008. The poster fair filled the periphery of the hall with brightly covered posters for sale. A group of students filled the centre of the hall, while shoppers browsed for posters. One singer stood in the centre of the crowd, and began to sing a mournful song for the dead. Men and women stood around her in silence, hands clasped. She closed her eyes, as her hands drifted up, emphasizing each note. The melody repeated, ascended, and descended as her hands emphasized the notes. She left the circle at the end of her song; a male student entered the circle and spoke of solidarity, responsibility and the dangers of dividing people along cultural and religious lines. He explained that Afghanistan faced 120 years of war and now was the time for peace. The vice president of the Tamil Students Association added: "This is a Peace Rally; we support peace." A Sikh student within the circle began to speak:

As a people only divided for 50 years . . . we should be loved as one people . . . I'm not supposed to care, not supposed to love them . . . I think to myself, do they hear the bombs blast? . . . our histories are intertwined . . . my connection is not limited to Pakistan . . . we suffer under despots; our people grow weak and poor . . . the World Bank, IMF, forces of globalization: they want us divided . . . we are humanity . . . this is a great opportunity to unify, we are not limited to concerns about Punjab and Pakistan.

And outside the circle another student confided sadly, "I wasn't from Sri Lanka, so I felt I couldn't participate."

Freedom of Speech

York students and faculty constantly have to negotiate potential conflicts in the university, both in and out of class. The tensions in the

student clubs may also change. Former club leaders of PSA, for example, said that the groups never became involved in political actions. But the next club leader may reverse those practices.

Middle East have caused some of the most heated confrontations at York. Many groups at York, including the Mosaic Institute¹²⁹ have tried to encourage dialogue around the Israeli–Palestinian situation and decrease tensions and potential conflict. In Vari Hall, on February 26, 2008, around 3:30 p.m., voting for student elections was underway with students clustering around the north side of the hall, against the windows. Students often voted in pairs, making the cardboard screens, meant to keep a voter’s choice secret, redundant. A person with a laptop recorded the votes and sat directly behind the two screens that were set up on a six foot folding table. Against the west wall, there was a large grey display board prepared by York Palestinian students, with photos placed on each of the three sides. The edges of the display were lined with barbed wire. People congregated around it in small groups. Jewish male students wearing yarmulke caps talked with other men. Two women came and looked on silently. A Jewish student heatedly explained: “It’s a government problem,” referring to the photographs of dead Palestinians displayed on the board. He made emphatic gestures with his arms, reaching up, emphasizing the point he was making. The other students who listened to him just nodded. His face turned red as he kept talking, directing his speech to a woman who had made her way into the circle. The other students leaned in with words and emphatic gestures of their own. One man put his hands to his temples to emphasize his point. A veiled woman forcefully interjected, opening a space for her voice: “Every week this is happening,” gesturing to the board. She raised her voice, speaking with her hands, arguing with the male Jewish student. The vote-takers looked on, curiously while other students passed by to see why the words were so heated. Most of the others en route through Vari seemed indifferent and merely concentrated on the yellow voting flyers listing the candidates for student elections they had been given by a student in the centre of the hall.

Laurie Baker provided her recollection of another event that demonstrated the tensions of protest at York. Protest can be both

¹²⁹ For more information on the Mosaic Institute, please see the website: <http://mosaicinstitute.wordpress.com>

disruptive and instructive, highlighting discord but serving as a bridge towards greater understanding. The following event illustrates some of the complexities of York's commitment to social justice, within the classroom and outside of it. Laurie recalled:

It was mid-afternoon and springtime, as we left our fourth year class. A few of us meandered down the halls, talking as we often did after class. As my colleagues and I approached the intersection of the south Ross hallway and the link that connects Vari Hall with the Ross Building, there were people everywhere, more than normal. The stream of foot traffic through the causeway was often heavy when classes let out. This crowd was different, louder, more tightly packed; people were shouting, arms raised in the air. My colleagues and I moved closer. I recall my friend saying that she wanted to take a closer look, to see what was going on. I was less eager but still curious.

As we moved into the link, I saw a thick mass of people shouting back and forth, pushing each other. Lining the sides of the hall, standing on the benches usually reserved for students to sit, stood riot police with guns cradled in their arms. They stood calmly, staring blankly into the group. Despite the tenor of the discussions going on, the police just stood watching.¹³⁰ The volume of the crowd increased as more students merged into the hall, trying both to see what was happening and cross through the hall. It was student gridlock.

This confrontation that Laurie walked into is linked to the invitation in January, 2003 of Daniel Pipes to speak on campus about "Barriers to Peace". Pipes started the campus watch website to monitor the activities of academics in the United States and to identify those considered anti-American or anti-Israel while warning against the rise of militant Islam. Students were asked to report their professors for

¹³⁰ While the tension during the event was palpable, my colleague and I never felt unsafe. (LB)

political bias in their classroom lectures (McMurray 2005:177). Student groups at York viewed Pipes as a hate-spreading racist whose views offended the large majority of the student population at York, a man who preaches the exact opposite of what higher academic institutions stand for, freedom of speech. The university and participating student groups maintained that barring Pipes would suppress the freedom of expression that he himself advocated, and he was granted permission to speak—under very tight security.¹³¹

Daniel Pipes had come and gone, but the tension he created was pushed to the breaking point by a flag hanging in the passage between Vari Hall and the Ross building. In an effort to draw attention to an upcoming Palestinian awareness week, the display by a student group called Solidarity for Palestinian Human Rights-York featured a large banner marked with a yellow Star of David inscribed with slogans referring to ethnic cleansing. The banner was removed but not before a dispute broke out between groups of students. This is the moment when Laurie and her friend tried to walk through the passage. Jewish students and others felt that the use of the flag was an offensive reminder for Jews of the lives lost in the Holocaust. The Palestinian support group removed the flag when asked by the administration out of respect for the school and other students, but the damage was done.

Protest and confrontation are part of the fabric of York, often leading towards the recognition and acknowledgement of differing viewpoints and perspectives. York continues to be a space for political dissent, protest, and a space for questioning the ways power and knowledge become salient forms of world-making. Yet, that space of protest also sometimes creates a space for intolerance, intimidation, and even overt and covert forms of violence. The Mosaic Institute at York, a network of “peace-building clubs,” works to facilitate the exchange of differing

¹³¹ The York University Faculty Association (YUFA) reflects on Pipe’s potential visit in the following communiqué: <http://www.yufa.org/archive/2003/reflection.html>.

The Varsity reports on Pipe’s York appearance in this article: <http://thevarsity.ca/2003/01/30/mideast-scholar-inflames-york/>

viewpoints and opportunities for further debate and dialogue.

Laurie's recollections about her experience as an undergraduate student caught in a dispute portray protests at York as out of control¹³², as if there are only two groups of students organizing and confronting one another. To some in the media, this confirms the belief that York is composed of radicals (both students and professors), without considering the possibility that the event reflects a spillover from learning about and becoming committed to social justice issues.

Another collective member asked York students about the effectiveness of campus protests in promoting awareness and change about global issues. He received a range of replies, many suggesting that advocacy should be considered a component of their education (Ferguson 2009:10):

Personally, I think they do [promote awareness and change]. Universities are spaces where you get an education, gain practical experience and try to make change because you have time to be more radical, compared more so to when you are older. . . .

I think so because right now we're at the stage, especially in a university, where you are trying to extend your roots as a person, and not just academically, but through your different experiences.

I think protesting on campus is a great way to get attention because it's sort of like, although I don't think of it this way, the world kind of sees the university as, you know, the academia of the world. So we have a voice, and it is in our power to use that in a good way. . . .

I know that since I came to York University, my eyes have been opened through a lot of things by just

¹³² I wonder if the mood on the day of the dispute would have been different without the presence of the Toronto Police Service. (LB)

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walking through and seeing people talk about, you know, the Palestinian things that are going on and even other topics . . . like I feel on a normal day you can walk somewhere and learn so much, more than I would just sitting in a classroom. . . .

Ferguson found that protests on campus promoted awareness of political issues, but they were unable to create change. As two students suggested (2009:14):

[A protest] is great for promoting awareness because it is [a] very obvious, flashy, way of doing things, but it is not really good at making change. Like, after the protest is done, people leave and go back to their daily lives, and it goes back to the status quo; things don't really change.

Um, not change but awareness definitely. I find that every time there is a protest . . . I get more interested in what is actually happening. So I'll actually research something or look it up. I guess in a way it promotes change because you get more people interested. Those two are not mutually exclusive, but they do go hand in hand. Some kind of change is happening . . . it's something. Where are you going to start if you are not protesting?

The administration has consciously created policy around when and where student groups can organize, even changing the configuration of space in Vari Hall with the central information desk that inhibits large groups from congregating in the centre of the hall. A new security station has been built in the link between Vari Hall and the Ross Building, ostensibly to provide information to students who are lost, but it also serves to provide a command post from which to mobilize security personnel in an emergency.

Many confrontations on campus relate to issues around freedom of speech. "Abortion Debate: A Woman's Right or a Moral Wrong," an event between Jose Ruba from the Canadian Centre for Bio-Ethical Reform (CCBR; pro-life, and active anti-choice campaigners) and

Michael Payton of the Freethinkers, Skeptics and Atheists at York (FSAY; pro-choice), was scheduled for February 28, 2008. The event was organized by Students for Bioethical Awareness (SBA) and the York Debating Society (YDS), but it was cancelled less than three hours before it was to begin. Student Centre vice-chair Kelly Holloway said the cancellation was voted on by all members of the Student Centre Board of Directors. She viewed the decision as an equal rights issue: “The reason is that it’s an equity concern for the Student Centre. Having a debate over whether or not women should be able to choose what to do with their own bodies is tantamount to having a debate about whether or not a man should be able to beat his wife,” Holloway said. “The issue is violence against women, and women in this country have a right to choose what they do with their bodies. They have a right to have an abortion, and we don’t want to validate a debate that wants to threaten that right” (Excalibur, Mar. 5, 2008).

The event reminded Holloway of an earlier experience when the CCBR came to the University of Toronto. She said, “They erected huge signs in full colour of fabricated fetuses alongside people dying in the Holocaust and also pictures of people being lynched.” She continued,

So we set up a table outside of that display at the student union to encourage students to tell us what their reactions were so we could understand the effect it was having on students. We collected hundreds of statements from students who said they were upset, they were appalled, they were traumatized and they were worried about the fact that the student union hadn’t taken responsibility to actually interfere in the matter (Toronto Star, Mar. 7, 2008).

Abortion is an intensely personal and painful subject for many women.¹³³ In Canada, it is not a matter of debate because the

¹³³ I remember taking my six-year-old daughter to a women’s health clinic to donate some books. We were blocked by anti-abortion protestors who held up large colour photographs of damaged fetuses against the window,

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necessary legal and medical regulations are already in place to protect women. The students who cancelled the debate were no doubt aware that the debate would only serve to hurt women. But others viewed the issue as an example of freedom of speech, hate speech and censorship, as letters in the *Excalibur* and the *Toronto Star* revealed in the following days.

A few days later, the York Debating Society held a public debate on the topic of hate speech in the university, where the issue of the abortion debate was raised in relation to other examples of hate speech on campus. However, the question of whether the pro-life position constitutes hate speech was not settled. In March 2014, a student club called Youth Protecting Youth (YPY) at York plans another debate around the question of whether abortion is morally permissible.

A student exposed to the YPY activities on another Canadian campus explained to the administration why she thought that they should not be permitted on campus:

This organization claims to be practicing free speech when in fact it is hate speech. By allowing them the space for this event, you have created an unsupportive and unsafe environment for me on this campus . . . No one benefits from these kinds of demonstrations. These images [of dead fetuses] are meant to terrorize and hurt women who have had an abortion or might need one someday.

Faye Ginsburg's (1989) ethnographic examination of the life and work of pro-choice and pro-life abortion activists in Fargo, North Dakota, is important for understanding activism more generally, particularly around divisive debates. Through life-story style interviews, Ginsburg's approach explores local activists as cultural agents whose work not only taps into and affects national and global discourses, but also builds identity around a cause. This is especially the case when informants consider their stance on the issue to be a moral imperative.

frightening my daughter and leaving her with disturbing memories. (PVE)

Ginsburg employs both Victor Turner's (1974) idea of the "social drama" and Arnold van Gennep's (1908) theory of "rites of passage" to explain how activists place the issue of "abortion" as a pivot point in the plot-story of their lives and how they see their commitment to the cause as a life event. In these life-stories, activists narrate their position on the issue by explaining it as a resource through which they came to understand their personal histories and experiences.

Administrative Initiatives

In March 2008, the Toronto Star published articles and letters about the dangers of aggressive student protestors, asking why professors do not take a stand against hooliganism and violence on campus. The writer of the article, a McGill University professor of history, suggested that York professors should dress in academic robes and step between rival groups to demand civility. He argued that professors have abdicated responsibility for campus life outside of the classroom. Professors have a responsibility to heal their academic homes. Other letters stress that there are lots of non-violent forms of protest and only a few "radical student hooligans."

Violent protests threaten York's reputation; the donors are restive when York is in the media. After a month of putting up with boisterous protests and heated demonstrations on campus, students at York University have welcomed the creation of a task force commissioned to address Student Life, Learning and Community to find ways to rein in shouting matches and encourage constructive debates at York, wrote the Toronto Star, Mar. 17, 2009.

After the strike ended in January 2009 the campus faced noisy protests and demonstrations just as classes and exams were getting underway. In March 2009, disruptive student groups were temporarily suspended and fined by the university after their protests in Vari Hall disturbed nearby classes. Students demanded more freedom of speech after the status of SAIA (Students Against Israeli Apartheid) as a recognized student group was revoked after loud protests disrupted academic activities in March 2013 (Excalibur Oct. 9, 2013). It was a move some

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students criticized as harsh and indicative of a campus trying to shut down dissent.

“It’s becoming really disruptive,” explained a third-year political science student who was trying to write an exam in Vari Hall when one protest got very loud. He continued, “York is really politically active, and that is why I chose to come here, but there have to be some kind of boundaries and rules that have to be implemented.”

As a result of tensions on campus, the university administration struck a task force on student life. The President’s Task Force report of 2009 on Rights and Responsibilities Within the University (York University 2009) made recommendations for addressing the issue of aggressive protests and has created further opportunities for dialogue between groups. While university life often encourages debate and dispute, York’s administration pays constant attention to the nature of that debate.

One May afternoon in 2009, a public forum was held in a large lecture hall where about fifty well-prepared students sat waiting to air their grievances to members of the taskforce. Students wanted to talk about the complexity of the post-strike fallout, particularly for those wanting to go to graduate school. The compressed schedule “robbed me of time,” said one. “It was hard for me to get back on my academic feet,” said another.

Most students at the meeting appeared to know each other, perhaps because they regularly represented their groups at similar meetings; many came with notes. Their concerns ranged from physical and emotional safety to bias in student elections to religious groups whose underlying purpose was to convert students to other faiths. Several argued that campus clubs do not represent York interests but just advocate for their own communities in a form of self-interested identity politics. “Jewish students no longer feel safe on campus,” explained one student. Jewish students complained of a toxic atmosphere on campus arising from Israel’s military incursions into the Gaza Strip. “We will lend support to this task force with the expectation that it will lead to a campus that respects civil discourse

and the fair enforcement of the rules,” explained the president of Hillel. Muslim students complained that they were treated as if they were terrorists, while different Muslim groups were pitted against one another. Others claimed there was anti-Muslim graffiti in the Scott Religious Centre bathroom.¹³⁴ One group called for increased accessibility for disabled students to the Scott Religious Centre. Another group asked for more than one faucet for one hundred worshippers for ablutions at the centre.

Students complained about red tape to arrange permission for tabling, but other students immediately responded that there was no problem. “Just reserve on the Internet; follow the rules; it is quite easy,” they advised. Others suggested that the university deal with the protests in Vari Hall by making classroom doors soundproof or erecting temporary sound barriers when activities in the hall could disrupt classes.

Others called for more vegan, kosher and halal food, complaining that places that serve halal food mix vegetables and meat, making it difficult for Muslim vegans to find adequate food. But in the ensuing discussion, other students said that when one finds the right person to talk to, “there could be soy milk in the vending machines within three weeks.” A faculty member on the task force suggested that groups formed along ethnic and religious lines could deal with the problems raised by the students.

In contrast to all the complaints, one York graduate student from the United States spoke of the generous student services available at York, more than he saw in American schools.¹³⁵ “Students should make full use of these services and not be looking for ‘nanny services’; access the opportunities that are there. Students should be more responsible for their own self-regulation,” he challenged the undergraduate students. As the students filed out, you could hear grudging support

¹³⁴ Members of the Kroy Collective regularly monitored the graffiti in the bathrooms and found no anti-Muslim graffiti.

¹³⁵ The Maclean’s survey of universities for 2011 ranked York number one among the comprehensive universities in student services (percentage of total operating expenditures devoted to student services).

for the fact that York could be very responsive to student needs.

The Red Green Show

The Red Green Show, a Canadian television comedy that aired from 1991–2006, evokes the two contrasting images of York: red—York as a strike-ridden, radical, “pinko” school—and green—York’s environmental sustainability initiatives that seldom make headlines. Instead, headlines stress the strikes and disputes that form part of York’s ecology. Students also learn their activism from worker advocacy and strikes on campus. As one recently retired faculty member explained, the pattern of unionization at York lies behind the strikes and labour unrest on campus. The early faculty members were young and radical; many were “left of centre” and anxious to distinguish themselves from the non-unionized University of Toronto. YUFA (York University Faculty Association) was certified in 1976. The powerful role of unions and faculty associations shaped York, and unions must always be geared up for potential strikes. Indeed, strikes appear to be well grounded in York’s history.

Job actions were contemplated as early as the early 1970s. The 1978 YUSA (York University Staff Association) strike was the first disruptive strike on campus. It was a strike involving women’s issue, and it established higher standards for women’s pay and benefits, as well as child care benefits. With a larger number of women on campus, programs and services were developed to meet their needs. Three strikes in 1984–85 (YUSA 1984, followed by CUEW [Canadian Union of Educational Workers] and YUFA in 1985) disrupted campus;¹³⁶ students recognized that the problem was not a greedy

¹³⁶ I always felt like a privileged worker at York, compared to people working in factories and heavy construction and compared to my experience working in sexist universities in the United States. It was very difficult to begin my teaching career at York in 1984 amidst all the strikes (cf. Horn 2009:168). No one educates new faculty about the strike culture at York, and the strike caught me by surprise. (PVE)

From an undergraduate and graduate student perspective and after living

union or exploitive management, but rather not enough money coming into the institution (Horn 2009:167). On one level, strikes are about social justice for workers on campus. But strikes can also be painful teachable moments for faculty and part-time teachers on the picket lines and for students.¹³⁷

Some faculty members see strikes as opportunities to shake up entrenched power and to change working conditions. Faculty members generally recognized that the 2009 CUPE strike was about deep systemic problems enmeshed in the broader political economy of the university. York has a knack for making the university work in spite of “growing too fast” (Horn 2009:127), much as a bricoleur makes do with what is available.

Instead of a strike, what would have happened if both CUPE and the administration had taken their issues to Queen’s Park and confronted the provincial government regarding the poor funding of all Ontario universities? Perhaps they would have less sympathy from the public considering the economic conditions of 2008, but at least the university would not have been torn apart.

Life in residences during the strike was different than strike-life for commuters who could continue their off-campus life or even take more work hours at off-campus jobs. Both commuters and resident students must have found strike days boring and anxiety-filled, but as one residence leader explained, the strike was an opportunity for residents to get to know each other better. Shared strike experiences provided the opportunity to form firm friendships and establish

through a strike during the tenure of two degrees, I experienced the contradictory feelings of irritation at the disruption and sympathy for the plight of CUPE 3903 employees. The York strikes forced me to consider employment politics and the role of unions at the university. Unfortunately, many students only see strikes as a disruption and affront to their “consumer” entitlements. This consumer perspective misses the larger issues at work. (LB)

¹³⁷ See for example the Michael Jackson “Thriller” parody posted by John Greyson during the 2008–09 strike: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ugL3gUPFxr4>

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relations that were unlikely to happen without the strike. One student remarked that: “I never would have made so many friends.”

The strike of 2008–09 had a student advocacy component. After coming back to classes, students could vote for how the remediation would be carried out. Students do not usually have the opportunity to vote for how they are to be graded, but the disruption meant that students could negotiate how their final grades were calculated.

What do students learn from university strikes? They learn that it is always possible to make a fresh start. Faculty have noted the capacity of students to recover and reinvent themselves after strikes. Students learn that there are consequences to having a commitment to social justice. They learn that strikes can be opportunities to change the landscape for the better through personal sacrifice, but also that strikes entail institutional suffering. Like other events that interrupt life outside of the university, university disruption is an opportunity to consider what the future can hold.

Students learn about ideological battles, institutional suffering and civility, as well as the complexity of highly bureaucratic organizations, something they will likely encounter as employed persons after (or during) university life. In an increasingly de-unionized private sector where union power is limited, exposure to the rigours of union negotiation provides the possibility that students will come to understand something of the politics and power of professional, corporatized working environments. Students experience the struggles that are waged to contour the future working conditions in the university and elsewhere

The strike of 2008–09 was particularly distressing for some because it spoiled the opening celebrations for York’s 50th anniversary. Student groups and Excalibur criticized some of the campus celebrations for the anniversary. But many of the celebrations and advertisements for York’s anniversary were paid for through sponsorships, not from budgets that could help students or the local CUPE union. The purpose of the advertisements was to attract funding for the campaign to raise \$200 million for academic purposes. Instead, following a

painful strike, Excalibur complained, “50 years of hard work is swirling around the proverbial toilet . . .” (April 1, 2009). No matter how one slices it, free anniversary cake could not make up for the disruption on campus.

Less well publicized is the fact that York is also known for its widespread commitment to sustainability, to a zero waste policy, and to efforts to move the university towards more equitable environmental practices. The Lassonde School of Engineering building and the Pond Road Residence both have green roofs and are certified by the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) green building rating system as sustainable buildings. The new Kaneff Tower is also LEED certified.

The College Sustainability Report Card awarded York the grade of *B+*, the highest ranking achieved by Canadian universities in the US–Canada survey. Among the 332 schools evaluated, York scored first in Ontario, sharing the top Canadian ranking with several other universities that all received grades of *B+*. The 2010 report card assessed 48 indicators in nine categories: administration, climate change and energy, food and recycling, green building, student involvement, transportation, endowment transparency, investment priorities and shareholder engagement.

The University of Indonesia ranked York 3 out of 94 universities (behind University of California, Berkeley and University of Nottingham, UK) around the world in a 2010 survey of sustainable universities (Excalibur January 19, 2011). On April 22, 2013—Earth Day—York was named one of Canada’s greenest employers, citing initiatives such as the green roof project, the sustainability ambassador program, the battery recycling, the organic digesters and the transportation programs such as the priority busway and shuttle services.

A Toronto Star article referenced the garbage project described in the opening of Part One. The facilities staff members who were available during the garbage project acknowledged that the York system is not perfect. However, they regret getting blamed for all waste management

problems rather than the York community members who do not target their waste appropriately.

York separates the garbage generated by the community from recyclables, but there is always contamination, even with the separate bin system. Workers complain that community members “won’t walk the extra ten feet to place their waste in the special receptacles for paper, bottles and garbage.” Even putting the three receptacles together does not guarantee pre-sorted waste, but any pre-sorting helps York meet its sustainability goals. As the facilities staff member explained with justifiable pride, “York is five years ahead of the city” in recycling.

In an effort to help the cost recovery aspect of York’s waste management plan, one professor brought his newspapers from home, where he did not have access to a recycling program, to York. But what is recyclable at York is not necessarily recyclable at home, since York manages its own waste. The facilities staff member explained that the revenue earned from recycling does not yet offset the cost of recycling. Batteries can also be recycled at York, but the bins are placed in locations most obvious to staff, so that the batteries being recycled are most likely those used at the university. In 2009, York recycled 59 per cent of its waste, up from 12 per cent in 1989 (and zero per cent before that!)—all diverted from landfill sites (Yfile Apr.1, 2010); by 2013, that amount increased to 63% waste diversion.

York students, staff and faculty participated in a survey in December 2009 for the Strategic Waste Education and Elimination Project (SWEET), an initiative of York’s Institute for Research and Innovation in Sustainability (IRIS).¹³⁸ Respondents suggested that the university should place more composters closer to dining areas, introduce electronic course kits and other paperless practices, and encourage food vendors to use recyclable dishes and cutlery.

¹³⁸ Every year, IRIS’s graduate assistants perform a campus survey on a sustainability theme. In 2006, their survey resulted in initiating more environmentally friendly course kits.

The survey found that over half of the respondents used reusable mugs (60 per cent) and reusable water bottles (70 per cent) and brought their own meals and snacks in reusable containers with cutlery (70 per cent). Currently, YFS has a water bottle campaign to make the campus free of plastic water bottles by 2015 when sufficient hydration stations should be in place. Most respondents (80 per cent) reported that they would turn off lights when leaving a room (Y-File, Mar. 31, 2010). However, in 2009–10, students still produced 53.68 kg of recyclables per capita, up from 26.68 kg in 2004–05.

Students are very much involved in green initiatives at York. The Sustainable Purchasing Coalition (SPC) is a student run network of organizations at York whose vision is that “every major decision made on campus will . . . be evaluated in terms of its environmental, social and economic impacts locally, regionally and internationally and . . . draw upon the knowledge and expertise of the diverse range of campus stakeholders using effective models for participatory decision-making” (York University Sustainable Purchasing Coalition Handout). SPC began as a No Sweat working group (a group committed to sweatshop-free labour) under York’s Ontario Public Interest Research Group (OPIRG) in 2004. By March 2005, a campaign was launched to begin a dialogue with the university about developing an adequate No Sweat policy for products sold at York. Fair trade products connect the social economy in India and Canada, and provide students in the Business and Society program at York an opportunity to study ethical marketing (Yfile Mar. 18, 2011). In contrast, the University of Toronto and other Canadian universities purchase their T-shirts through Gildan Activewear, who, according to Workers Rights Consortium, has been accused of paying their Haitian factory workers less than minimum wage (Toronto Star Oct. 31, 2013, Feb. 11, 2014).

Four working groups—Fair Trade Products, No Sweat Clothing, Ethical Investing and Green Purchasing—came together in 2005 to form the more integrated SPC coalition on campus. The organization is non-hierarchical and no single issue is any more important than another. Everyone participating in the coalition has an equal voice. One member explains,

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We have people who mediate and kind of lead the meetings, but in general they work very hard and they strive to keep it very open and have everybody on an equal level . . . which I think is effective.

After three years of discussions with administration, the SPC took action by holding a rally on March 6, 2008. They also brought signed petitions to the office of York's president and held a sit-in to wait for his response. After a 45 hour sit-in, the president recommended that a Sustainability Council be set up under the jurisdiction of the President's office. York has since ranked first among Canadian universities in the GreenMetric Survey on campus sustainability.

Some green initiatives take place in the residences. One project, the Res Race to Zero, is a campus-wide initiative to reduce energy consumption and reduce the carbon footprint of the university and each individual residence building. Res Race to Zero takes the form of a competition, whereby the winning residence building receives a \$2,000 prize for having the highest reduction in energy consumption. Each student is encouraged to participate in the reduction of the building's carbon footprint through simple steps such as turning lights off, unplugging electronics that are not in use and cleaning lint filters after doing a load of drying. There are reminders placed all over the residence buildings, and stickers on every light switch that say "Turn me off." Stong College tries to create an environmentally friendly building by making residence events as environmentally conscious as possible.

Representations and Reputations

York is misrepresented when people only remember the red and forget the green. By the mid-1970s, York had a reputation as a distant suburban campus wracked by conflict and full of "pinkos" (Horn 2009:159). Some York graduate students say their friends accuse them of attending a "communist" school. Many students chose York because of its presumed opposition to more elitist values at the University of Toronto.

Protests of various types are important parts of York's history. Some would like to attribute this to the fact that the university trains its students in critical thinking. As a result, York-work is often contested work. Others might see confrontation and political protests as rites of passage among students, a form of seasonal consciousness-raising. As far back as the 1970s, York also had a reputation for infighting among the faculty (or as phrased by the Dean of Arts [2001–09], Robert Drummond, the tendency of faculty to circle the wagons and shoot inward). Even discounting some of the most rabid critics of York, the media coverage of York suggests that York tends to ratchet up conflict instead of reducing it. The presence of activism at York emerged in the late 1960s; there was a student radical group called the Sunday Morning Movement who were critical of the ways in which York University operated, and a film was even made about them (*Student Radicals* 1969).

York's academic self-image changes constantly. In York's early years, its identity changed from the Harvard of the north to "overflow station for other universities" (Saywell 2008:24). In the early 1970s, York had to lower its academic entrance standards or close as a university. "Until 1971 we automatically accepted those who had 60 per cent or over" (Saywell 2008:130).¹³⁹ This is probably the origin of the University of Toronto taunt: "If you can hold a fork, you can go to York."¹⁴⁰ How insulting to the vibrant intellectual communities at York today. But stories like this may have historical roots in the early struggles to meet the provincial mandate requiring the university to accept 7,000 undergraduates (Saywell 2008:129).

As one student reflected on her choice of York: Queen's is tight-knit; Western is tight-knit. York is *not* tight-knit. It's a commuter school . . . We bring different values, cultural ideologies and perspectives to classes . . . People come from different cities, countries . . . Queen's is a closed community. York is a collection or a reflection of the greater

¹³⁹ The University of Toronto and York both had to lower their entrance standards to encourage enrolment at that time (cf. Horn 2009).

¹⁴⁰ A member of the Kroy Collective found a number of items with this taunt at the University of Toronto Bookstore in the summer of 2009.

community.” “Unlike Queen’s and Western, York was not socially acceptable—and to many south of St. Clair it still isn’t” (Saywell 2008:xiii). As anthropologist F.G. Bailey expressed nearly forty years ago, academic collegiality is strained by “incompetent teachers, authoritarian insensitive administrators and colleagues who manage to exploit the system, leaving others to carry the burdens” (1977:14).

Glimpsing York Culture

The Way Must be Tried (Horn 2009) captures the official history of York. *Trying the Way* is a first attempt at defining the ever changing York culture ethnographically. We have tried to be faithful to the stories we were told, the confidences we were asked to keep and the events we attended. As a result, the ethnography tracked some trajectories rather than others, lingering on some aspects that shape York culture while obscuring others; such is the nature of all ethnographic research.

Without a long-standing institutional history that inspires fixed ideas about tradition and place, York culture is always culture-in-the-making, always attempting to do more with less, to push student engagement in unique ways and to stand out amongst its institutional peers. York attracts students who want to make a difference in the world and provides a space where the professorate share their social critiques and strategies for engaging with social justice issues. These actions often challenge traditional educational hierarchies.

York culture tries not to be elitist; the university is a place that takes learning to the streets. This masks the hierarchy that is intrinsic to university education. Neither brand image marketing nor research excellence overrides the gritty energy that emerges from an array of niches on campus. These pockets of energy and vitality, visceral qualities at the heart of York culture, thrive in contact zones where a mix of ages and ethnicities come together and relate to one another, usually peacefully but sometimes in ways that disturb others.

York’s culture is produced by the relationship between education as a

public good, informed by the world of ideas, and the university as an institution. In the last decade, York, like other universities, has been run more like a corporation—with great emphasis on bureaucracy, efficiency and cost-benefit accounting—through the expansion of well-paid, non-academic administrative positions. This management strategy appears to draw funds away from academic work and irritates faculty who feel they always absorb the costs of shifting policy directions. The corporatization of the university contrasts with a student body and teaching faculty that aims to be progressive, innovative and independent (and as a result, hard to rein in). Such a teaching faculty holds to the rhetoric, if not always the practice of public service. Tensions between the image of the university as an ivory tower, a public institution and a business are as old as universities themselves.

Ethnographies end. But ethnographic research never ends; it just sets up questions for the next researcher. The four parts of this ethnography suggest directions for the next ethnographic exercise, the next piece of the Kroy project. A new framing of the ecology of York should expand the concept of engaged diversity and explore how the subway will alter the relations between the waterholes, niches and contact zones. How does hierarchy, for example, shape the ecology and landscape of York?

Classrooms, studios and laboratories encourage distinct academic cultures. Classrooms provide the intellectual excitement for students who can make connections across disciplines. Career orientation emerges in all spaces but may easily deflate the self-discovery that comes from working across disciplines, particularly when so many students are fighting parental instructions to study for a job. Studios and laboratories provide clues for keeping creativity and excitement alive in classrooms. Looking ahead, the fast pace of technological change and the fear of economic downturn should be integrated into future explorations of academic culture.

York's campus culture includes celebrations and everyday rituals that unite the campus and reduce the impact of differences in academic culture. Future ethnographic work needs to explore whether campus

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culture offers continuity with or runs counter to the competitiveness and career orientation of academic culture. Campus culture is driven by the need for creating and maintaining relationships. This can take a great deal of psychic energy away from academic pursuits. How can Red and White days, for example, create rituals that go beyond mascots and Red Bull?

Successful activist engagement teaches negotiation skills and civility. It associates community building and social justice with everyday activities both in academic and campus culture. Activist niches provide energy and vitality at York. It will take substantial academic work to keep activism from becoming ideological. Similarly, engagement on and off campus may frame student activism but it also informs professional development.

The relationship between different aspects of York's changing campus and academic culture has been central to these ethnographic glimpses. The nature of York's changing culture is both the challenge and opportunity of an initial institutional ethnography of a place whose culture, identity and self-image is a moving target. These glimpses suggest we need more ethnographic work on institutional memory, temporal cycles and social change and the affective dimensions of learning.

As we were writing the conclusion of this ethnography, the February 24th, 2014 issue of Maclean's magazine arrived in the mail, with the annual feature on how students ranked their schools. Both first year and senior year students were asked how they would evaluate their entire educational experience at their institution; York was ranked last among 33 institutions. Quest University ranked first. It is an independent, secular, not-for-profit school with 540 students who pay \$30,000 a year to study in Squamish, B.C. in classes averaging 15 students.¹⁴¹ Maclean's rankings are based on data from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), metrics¹⁴² that do not capture

¹⁴¹ For more information On Quest University, please see the following website: <http://www.QUESTU.ca>

¹⁴² For information about the types of indicators Maclean's relies on for

the realities of university life, nor aspects of culture-in-the-making.

In February and March, 2014, the latest round of NSSE surveys began at York. The survey is designed to measure student engagement for the purposes of determining strengths and weaknesses of a university's programs and services. The assumption guiding the survey is that measuring engagement is a metric for determining student success and consumer satisfaction. What kind of picture does this survey present of York and does it reflect the everyday, lived experiences of students?

Faculty members received copious memos and materials to promote student participation in the NSSE survey at York.¹⁴³ A senior professor dutifully followed the instructions and urged the members of his fourth year class to fill out the survey. To his surprise, the entire class burst out laughing—an appropriate response to a ranking system that compares apples and oranges, or universities of different sizes, orientations and cultures. His students recognized the futility of context-free surveys that attempt to capture the truth of university life.

Trying the Way provides a markedly different picture of York, the first, we hope, of many ethnographic analyses of York. The value of ethnographic analysis lies in following the events, experiences, and meanings that help make sense of a place in motion, culture in the making. Why does York continue to participate in and promote the NSSE survey, accept their rankings and base policy decisions on them, even when the questions and related indicators do not come close to capturing the essence of York culture? We suggest that ethnographic research provides a more holistic and useful picture of the complexity of York culture, and adds much needed context for the NSSE surveys—surveys designed for American schools—geographically and culturally distant from York.

their ranks, please see the following website: <http://oncampus.macleans.ca/education/2013/10/30/measuring-excellence-2/>

¹⁴³ To encourage participation York is offering students who fill out the survey a free latte and eligibility for other prizes.

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