

YUFA Community Projects Committee (YUFA-CP)

2010-2011 ANNUAL REPORT

Background & Introduction

The Community Projects Committee (YUFA-CP) is a standing committee of the Executive. Its mandate is to advise YUFA and to facilitate its work with community groups to promote democratic citizenship through access and equity programs, and to undertake community-based research. Priority is given to initiatives focused on improving access, opportunities, and outcomes for groups currently underrepresented in post-secondary education.

Our process includes regular monthly meetings. This year there are fifteen faculty members on the Committee representing a range of YUFA constituencies (Environmental Studies, Kinesiology and Health Science, Nursing, Fine Arts, Libraries, and various departments in Liberal Arts & Professional Studies). At each meeting ongoing projects are reviewed and new initiatives considered. To fulfil its mandate, the Committee builds on community networks and the feedback those networks provide. In this connection, partnerships have been forged with groups both internal and external to York, including: the Jane/Finch Caring Village, the Westview Partnership, the Toronto District School Board, the YUFA Queer Caucus, the Black Creek Education and Training Working Group, and the York Administration.

Accomplishments This Year

New Initiatives

The Transitional Year Program (TYP). Launched in September 2010 after five years of planning, this initiative has been a huge success, exceeding all expectations. Twenty-seven students are currently enrolled, a solid majority of whom are expected to continue at York in the Fall. (After a review of the literature and consultation with faculty and staff involved with similar programs at Ryerson and the University of Toronto, we had anticipated a first year enrolment of only twenty students, with a fifty percent attrition rate by December.) In September 2011, the second year of this two-year pilot project, forty students will be accepted into the program. Incoming students will be mentored by students from this year's cohort.

TYP is a unique program for youth (19+) and adults who have experienced social and financial barriers to higher education. It provides an intensive, full-time program combining academic and non-academic activities in a two-term (September to April) session. Students are enrolled in a combination of academic and non-academic courses and workshops and have approximately 16 hours of class time per week. Courses and

workshops bridge the gap between a student's prior experience and level of education and the credentials needed to qualify for admission. Upon completion, students earn 12.0 – 15.0 academic credits toward undergraduate degree programs. They also become eligible for admission to select undergraduate programs at York.

LGBT Equity. In the spring of 2010, members of YUFA-CP and the Queer Caucus began meeting to discuss issues relevant to the LGBT. The focus of this ongoing conversation is to develop an equity discourse that is relevant to the particular culture at York and to YUFA's practices and policies. Collaboration with other equity-seeking groups to explore how queer issues intersect and overlap with their concerns is also anticipated.

In October 2010, we organized our first public event, the LGBT Equity in Education Workshop, a one-day workshop on accessibility issues in higher education. The workshop included two panel discussions with faculty, students, teachers, and activists from York, Ryerson, the University of Toronto, and the Toronto District School Board. Roundtable discussions with speakers and workshop participants were also included. The response from the community was overwhelming. We had anticipated an audience of twenty-five; at fifty we had to close registration because of space limitations. The workshop drew participants from a variety of constituencies from York and beyond. Barriers to LGBT educational equity were identified and the need for pooling and better coordination of existing resources was highlighted. So was the importance of mainstreaming LGBT concerns into union and university policies and projects. Finally, feedback from participants confirmed the need for similar events in the future.

Community Partnerships. In light of the demise of Jane-Finch's Caring Village, a non-profit group of community agencies, service providers and area residents, the Committee is in the process of rebuilding its links with the community. One initiative in this effort is a communal dinner meeting involving members of the YUFA-Community Projects Committee and representatives from the community. This meeting is planned for 22 March at PEACH (Promoting Economic Action and Community Health), a local agency for youth who are disengaged from the education system.

Ongoing Projects

Website. The YUFA-CP website (<http://www.yufa.org/CommunityProjects/index.html>) was launched in September. Its purpose is both to keep members informed about the Committee's work and to raise our profile at York and in the community. The website contains information about the Committee's history and mandate, budget, meetings, upcoming events, and ongoing projects.

Advanced Credit Experience (ACE). ACE is targeted at students who show the academic potential for university or college but who, due to systemic barriers such as race, ethnicity, gender or social / economic class, may lack either the confidence or the

resources to proceed. Grade 11 and 12 students spend one semester on York campus enrolled in a first-year university course while working 3 days per week in a cooperative education placement. The students are supported by teachers from their home schools, graduate assistants, and teacher candidates from the Faculty of Education. The students return to their secondary school the following semester to complete their graduation requirements, share their experiences and act as role models and leaders among the student population. Students who complete the program are eligible for bursaries provided by YUFA when they apply to York.

Readers to Leaders. The Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) is a compulsory standardized test used to assess Grade 10 students' reading and writing skills. The test is written every year on the last Thursday of March; successful completion is a graduation requirement. Not surprisingly, the success rate for schools in the Jane-Finch neighbourhood is significantly lower than the overall success rate for Toronto schools. Readers to Leaders is a literacy enrichment program that provides some fifty Grade 9 and 10 in students from Jane-Finch schools with the opportunity to prepare for the OSSLT. From October to March, these students spend every Saturday from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. with four teachers and eight teacher candidates from York in various reading / writing exercises and small group activities designed to increase literacy skills. Test taking skills are also addressed throughout the program.

Looking Forward: The coming year

We see the coming year as a time for YUFA-CP to increase its visibility in the community and to expand our links with other unions and social justice groups both on campus and off.

In addition to ongoing projects, we have a number of new initiatives being considered, some of these include:

- Grant Writing and Program Evaluation workshops for community groups seeking new or renewed funding.
- Academic support and retention programs for racialized, low-income students currently at York. This includes programs aimed at enhancing educational experiences and retention for students enrolled at York, e.g., by means of mentoring, academic tutoring, bursaries, etc.
- A social justice and equity speakers series.