

# Cross-Campus Alliance response to Board of Governors' statement on York's presidential search

## Student and employee groups issue second joint-statement

January 10, 2017

Many members of our community will have seen last month's communication from Maureen Armstrong, the University Secretary of York University. In her statement, Secretary Armstrong repeats the claim that closed senior administrative searches for university presidents ensure the best pool of candidates. There is simply no evidence of this. Rather, there is wide agreement that closed and fully confidential presidential searches seriously impede the ability of a search committee to gather relevant information from a wide range of sources.

Indeed, contrary to what Secretary Armstrong says, closed searches are a convenient way to filter out inconvenient input from members of the university community, thereby removing obstacles to the centralized and top-down control of the search process itself.

We know that large numbers of students, staff, and faculty have expressed serious misgivings about the current search and one of the candidates, Provost Rhonda Lenton, who is rumoured to be a preferred recommendation of the committee. Consultations with York's employee groups were extremely minimal and, in some cases, non-existent. To the extent that consultations did take place, they were overwhelmingly oriented to current and former administrators, and to the corporate sector, in particular—hardly a representative constituency of the wider university. It is very clear that the community has not had a genuine opportunity to participate through broad and inclusive consultation.

In addition to the lack of consultation, there has also been very little public reporting on the search. Until the York University Faculty Association (YUFA) began to conduct its poll about the search, not a single communication had been issued by the committee in over four months. Of course, we are told that preliminary pre-short-listing consultations within the community did ensure meaningful input and helped the search committee formulate the priorities and "position profile," which were used to guide the search. Unfortunately, the negative response that has been generated by the rumour of Provost Lenton's possible selection strongly suggests that this early-stage community input was either inadequate or disregarded.

Moreover, the Chair of the search committee, Rick Waugh, is also the Chair of the Board of Governors—the body that is responsible for considering the recommendations of the search committee. This type of conflict of interest would never be accepted in the dozens of academic and staff appointments made each year at our university. For example, Deans do not sit on departmental search committees for this very reason.

Whatever the result, the current presidential search has highlighted the need for an urgent dialogue regarding governance at our university. Why, for example, does the Board of Governors routinely ignore the by-laws requiring representation from a broad spectrum of society when recruiting new Board members? Why has the role of Senate been so greatly diminished in the process of the presidential search process, despite the prominent role assigned to it in *The York University Act*? As a coalition of the leading student and employee groups at York, we intend to use this occasion to initiate a review of governance and invite all key stakeholders in our community to participate.

In the meantime, we repeat our call to the Board of Governors to listen carefully to these stakeholders. The appointment of a new president is a rare and special occasion: it should unite and inspire the York community, not divide and demoralize it. For these reasons, we strongly believe that the Board of Governors should reopen the search process to ensure greater input from the community so the outcome of the search has the greatest legitimacy possible.

Sincerely,

**Canadian Union of Public Employees, Local 1356** (CUPE 1356)

**Canadian Union of Public Employees, Local 3903** (CUPE 3903)

**York Federation of Students** (YFS)

**York University Faculty Association** (YUFA)

**York University Graduate Students' Association** (YUGSA)

**York University Staff Association** (YUSA)

These organizations comprise the **York Cross-Campus Alliance**. Together, they represent tens of thousands of students, staff and faculty at York University.

For more information, please email [yorkcca@gmail.com](mailto:yorkcca@gmail.com).