



# **2019–2020 POLICY INITIATIVES**




# PREFACE

Thank you for meeting with the York Federation of Students. The YFS has been working to serve its members through its four pillars; clubs, services, campaigns and events. As part of its mandate, we believe in a free and accessible education and will continue to advocate on behalf of our members. With the introduction of the Student Choice Initiative, the YFS, and Student Unions across the province have faced challenges in the ways we are able to support students on campus. In the interest of continuing to advocate for students on our campuses, we have developed three policy initiatives which we believe would benefit York University as a whole, and which are in line with the Presidents four main pillars of Excellence, Connected, Access and Impact.

Within this document are three policy initiatives that we believe the York University Administration and the York Federation of Students can work together to accomplish and implement.

1. Extended Access to Scott & Steacie Libraries
2. Reimagining Refund Table Deadlines
3. Removing the Requirement for Doctors Notes



Fatima Babiker, President



Aaron Suresh, Vice-President Operations



Jasmine Hawamdeh, Vice-President Campaigns & Advocacy



Azinwi Kien Saningong, Vice-President Equity



Mutaz Elhawash, Vice-President Campus Life

**POLICY INITIATIVE 1**

# **EXTENDED ACCESS TO SCOTT & STEACIE LIBRARY**

Access to spaces in which to study and places in which to access educational resources is pivotal in the academic achievement of students.

Our goal is to see as many of the barriers to education be eliminated as much as possible; this includes access to both Scott & Steacie Libraries.

## **CONTEXT:**

### **SCOTT LIBRARY**

Regular hours:

Monday-Friday	8:00am - 11:00pm
Saturday	10:00am - 8:00pm
Sunday	12:00pm - 11:00pm

Scott Library is open for 24 hours on Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays as of the third week of October until the end of December and from the week following the Winter reading (third week of February) week until the end of the exam period in April. However, these extended periods only apply to the first floor of the library as the rest of the library closes during the late night hours.

### **STEACIE LIBRARY**

Regular hours:

Monday-Friday	8:00am - 10:00pm
Saturday	10:00am - 6:00pm
Sunday	12:00pm - 8:00pm

Steacie Library is never open for 24 hours. The library stays open until 1:00am Monday to Thursday from the 3rd week of November until the end of December. Then, again, 1:00am as of the third week of March.

# PROPOSAL:

## SCOTT LIBRARY

As York University's main library, it is pivotal for students to be able to access this space throughout the year. With thousands of students living on the Keele campus and thousands more commuting long distances; it is important that the university makes itself more accessible to its students and the diverse schedules within which they complete their studies.

### 1. ***Opening all levels of the Library during the 24-hour open periods.***

Libraries are meant to allow students access to the vast stores of books within them. Although the first floor of the library becomes 24hours seven weeks into the term, students still aren't able to use the library for its main function - to take out books.

The 5 upper levels of Scott Library close as of 11:00pm nightly. We would like to begin the process of exploring opening all levels of the library on a 24hour period during the current periods by assessing;

- The current infrastructure (cameras, barriers, etc)
- The availability and capacity of York security to include this in their rounds
- Installation of new Emergency Response stations

### 2. ***Include weekends in the 24-hour open periods.***

The 24 hour overnight period does not include weekends. Many students living both on and off campus are often looking for spaces to study on campus.

Due to the fact that only residence students have access to various buildings due to university security protocols, this limits many typically open and accessible spaces where students may study. Extending the 24hour open period to Scott Library on weekends will allow for students to have a reliable place in which to study late at night.

## STEACIE LIBRARY

As the library most frequented by students within the maths and sciences, it is important for these students to be able to access the resources they need.

### 1. ***Extended late night hours to begin the third week of October.***

As with Scott Library, we would like to see this library be accessible to students from within these programs earlier within the year. The third week of October is generally the end of midterm period and would like its access to be in keeping with that of Scott library.

**POLICY INITIATIVE 2**

# RE-IMAGINING THE REFUND TABLE DATES

Students pay a lot for their education and they should be able to receive that which they pay for, not pay for that which they never receive.

## CONTEXT:

Students at York University begin their school year and have two weeks from the first day of classes to decide if they may want to/need to drop a course, that is before beginning to lose a portion of their tuition. Thereafter, students are given another week (losing another 10%) before losing 60% of tuition paid for that course before the 1st of October, and 0\$ refunded after that.

Current grid for York University refunds (2019-20 Fall/Full Year Term):

Percentage of Refund Received	Date of Eligibility
100%	September 10th
90%	September 11th - 17th
80%	September 18th - 24th
40%	September 25th - October 1st
0%	October 2nd

# PROPOSAL:

The York Federation of Students believes in a free and accessible education for all students, however, as education in Ontario is treated more as a commodity than a right, we expect to see students pay for that which they truly get access to. McMaster University has done just that and is a clear example of what fair and accessible drop deadlines look like.



With the course drop deadlines, students are given two months ( $\frac{2}{3}$  of a term) to decide if they should stay within the course. This is due to the fact that students need time in class in order to assess how they feel about the professor and teaching assistants, the material covered and the difficulty of the work and lastly every other aspect of life which isn't related to the classroom. The university understands that there are many extenuating circumstances which justify the drop deadlines.

However, there currently exists a different standard of reasonability when assessing a dropped course on an academic standard as opposed to a financial standard. However, there currently exists an alternative standard of reasonability when assessing a dropped course; there is an opportunity to assess it by assessing academic standards rather than financial standards.

## MCMMASTER UNIVERSITY

McMaster University has a very different approach to their refund timetables. They've scaled the refund eligibility to a regressive refund table. The main difference between York and McMaster is the continuation of a 10% reduction per week as opposed to York's hard deadline of October 1st.

Current Grid for McMaster University Students (2019-20 Fall/Full Year Term):

		<b>Academic Year:</b> 2019-2020
<b>Undergraduate Course Cancellation Schedule</b>		
<p>The following percentages apply to tuition only. Supplementary fees are non-refundable for the year after September 11.</p> <p>If you drop/cancel a course within the following dates, your original tuition for that course will be reassessed as follows;</p>		
<b>Fall and Multi-term A (September to December)</b>		
Up to Sept 11		No Charge
Sept 12 – 20		20% Charge
Sept 21 – 27		30% Charge
Sept 28 – Oct 4		40% Charge
Oct 5 – 11		50% Charge
Oct 12 – 18		60% Charge
Oct 19 – 25		70% Charge
Oct 26 – Nov 1		80% Charge
Nov 2 – 7		90% Charge
Nov 8 onward		100% Charge

With the intent of wanting to make our university refund deadlines more accessible to students, we believe that the amount of education received (classes attended/ education received) should be equal to the amount ultimately paid.



## EXAMPLE:

Using the current sessional dates for the 2019 Fall Term, the model proposed here is one which uses the first day of classes as a starting point for a regressive refund table. Every week, the eligibility of refunds is reduced by 10% per week until the second week of November.

Example of proposed York University Financial Deadlines:

<b>Percentage of Refund Received</b>	<b>Date of Eligibility</b>
100%	September 10th
80%	September 11th - 21st
70%	September 22nd - 27th
60%	September 28th - October 4th
50%	October 5th - 11th
40%	October 12th - 18th
30%	October 19th - 25th
20%	October 26th - November 1st
10%	November 2nd - 7th
0%	November 8th onward

In conclusion, we would like to see York University's Refund Table adopt these new guidelines as of the Fall 2020 Term.

**POLICY INITIATIVE 3**

# REMOVING THE REQUIREMENT FOR DOCTORS NOTES

Students in university already face so many bureaucratic and financial barriers within their education, demanding a doctors note for missed classes, examinations and assignments is only one more way those barriers manifest. In exploring a more holistic educational experience, doctors, nurses, employers and even university institutions are seeing the ineffective and damaging effects of demanding a doctors note.

## **CONTEXT:**

York University does not have a uniform policy for missed classes, assignments or examinations. Besides the existence of the "Attending Physician's Statement, these policies are decided on a departmental or faculty level. What we've seen however is that a vast majority of faculties demand the need for doctors notes regarding medical related absences.

## **PROPOSAL:**

When people get sick, a doctor will tell you that the important things to do are to go home so as not to spread the illness, to rest so that you can heal in order to get back to your responsibilities such as work and school. The requirement of doctors notes demands that students take the time they should be resting to go to a doctor's office in order to get a form filled out. This process is arduous and nonsensical, when better, more effective and safer alternatives exist.

## UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

The University of Alberta has developed a deeply harm reductionist approach for students who have fallen sick. There exists reasonable expectation from students to declare their circumstances while ensuring that an appropriate level of academic standards be upheld. This begins by banning the requirement for doctors notes across all levels.

***This picture outlines what is expected of students who find themselves falling sick and having missed a class, assignments or mid-term examination at the University of Alberta:***

### If you have missed term work or a midterm exam

- Contact your instructor by phone or email as soon as you are able to in order to advise them of your absence. You do not need to do this in person. Keep your instructor advised of when you will be well enough to return to class.
- Request an Excused Absence from the term work or midterm exam as soon as you are well enough. Delay in doing this may harm your chances of getting the excused absence approved.
- Your instructor may ask you for some documentation of your illness. A medical note cannot be required, so you cannot be required to go to the doctor if you choose not to.
- If you have no medical documentation, you can provide alternative documentation to your instructor if he or she requests it in the way of a faculty-approved form, or a Statutory Declaration, available from your faculty office.
- Your instructor may, at his or her discretion, provide an alternative method for you to complete the missing term work or exam, or may shift the weight of the missing term work or exam on to the final exam or other term work or exams.
- Excused absences are not automatically granted, even where you provide documentation.
- For more information, contact your faculty, or see [University Regulations and Information for Students](#) in the University Calendar.

***This picture outlines what is expected of students who find themselves falling sick and having missed a final exam at the University of Alberta.***

### If you have missed a final exam

- Contact your faculty by phone or email as soon as you are able to, in order to advise them of your absence. You do not need to do this in person.
- Visit your faculty office to request a deferred examination as soon as you are well enough. Delay in doing this may harm your chances of getting the deferral approved.
- Your faculty may ask you for some documentation of your illness. A medical note cannot be required, so you cannot be required to go to the doctor if you choose not to.
- If you have no medical documentation, you can provide alternative documentation to your faculty, if they request it, in the way of a faculty-approved form or Statutory Declaration from the faculty.
- Deferred exams are not automatically granted even where you provide documentation. Speak to your faculty office about detailed requirements.
- For more information, contact your faculty, or see [University Regulations and Information for Students](#) in the University Calendar.

**Here attached is a Statutory Declaration Form referred to in the previous images.**

Faculty of  
**SCIENCE**

**DECLARATION**  
In the matter of absence from  
Term Work (including midterm examinations, assignments,  
presentations, laboratory sessions, etc)

I, \_\_\_\_\_ Student ID# \_\_\_\_\_  
(Print Name in full)

of \_\_\_\_\_ in the Province of Alberta  
(Address)

do solemnly declare that I was absent from \_\_\_\_\_ until \_\_\_\_\_  
(Day, Month, Year) (Day, Month, Year)

and that I missed  Midterm Examination  Laboratory Session  Other

in \_\_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_  
(Course name, number, section) (Day, Month, Year)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Instructor Name)

for the following reason(s):

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Declarant's Signature) this \_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_  
(year)

**1. Completion of this form does not imply approval for an excused absence.  
2. Making a false statement on this form will constitute grounds for a charge to be laid against you under the Code of Student Behaviour, Section 30.3.6(4) Misrepresentation of Facts: "No Student shall misrepresent pertinent facts to any member of the University community for the purpose of obtaining academic or other advantage."**

30 October 2014

Lastly, here attached is a portion of the University of Alberta's website in educating instructors on how to deal with students who have missed classes, assignments and/or exams.



***Excused absences are not automatic, and, in the case of term work or midterm exams, are at the discretion of the instructor. Instructors may request supporting documentation from students to support the request. There are many forms that this documentation can take depending on the reason for absence (e.g. police report, death notice, court documents). However, if the reason for absence is medical, newly approved policy says that instructors cannot require students to visit a doctor or other healthcare provider and cannot require students to provide a medical note. However, students may have seen their doctor for medical reasons and they may have a medical note to support their request.***

***In the absence of a medical note, or where the absence is due to a reason other than illness, instructors can ask a student to visit their faculty office and obtain either a Statutory Declaration or a Faculty Form to outline the reasons for the absence. Instructors should use common sense in deciding whether to require students to provide this level of documentation. Instructors should contact their faculty offices if they have any concerns.***

Beyond the University of Alberta, the following article outlines three Universities which have taken different approaches to students missing classes/tests or examinations. These are alternatives which we believe will greatly relieve much of the extensive bureaucracy at York University inevitable for students who are sick:



***Sick notes can be a huge burden to the people writing them, said Ms. Murdock. The group of physicians who provide medical services at Carleton wrote 2,350 sick notes for students, staff and faculty in a 12-month period in 2013-14, she said. "It's a waste of our resources to have students come to the clinics just for sick notes," she said, and "it increases the wait for students who want to be seen because they are ill." If it was up to her, Ms. Murdock said she would abandon the need for medical notes altogether. "When I call my employer and say I'm sick, I don't have to bring a note," she pointed out.***

***That's the same thinking that led Jane Collins, nurse manager in the student health centre at Saint Mary's University, to stop writing sick notes in 2013 (with exceptions for mental health issues and chronic conditions). In an interview with CBC News at the time, she argued that medical clinics should be taken out of the equation when it comes to academic accommodations. The website of the health centre at University of Alberta, meanwhile, outlines its preference that students stay at home to recover from acute illnesses rather than waiting for a note in a doctor's office. The physicians will still write notes when medical attention is required, but the university policy emphasizes that students should first contact instructors, by phone or email, to request an absence or extension. (Note, or no note, it's at the instructor's discretion to accept the request).***

***In an effort to smooth the sometimes uncomfortable process of note negotiations between professors and students, at Queen's University students who visit the university webpage on sick notes are encouraged to print out a letter outlining the school's policy for their instructors, along with an optional self-declaration of illness form used to declare one's own non-serious illnesses in writing. It's a system based on trust and instructors are free to accept the form or not.***

We have attached here another article published by the Globe and Mail by professor Francis Woolley, a professor of Economics at Carleton University. She outlines here more research and work done on the study of doctors notes and the current push found within the medical, labour and educational fields to eliminate them. Here you will find examples from Queen's University, Memorial University and the University of Alberta and their elimination of doctors notes.



***In Ontario, progress has been made in the fight against employers' demands for medical notes. Yet within the educational system, demands for medical notes are ubiquitous. At my university, some professors demand medical notes of students asking to defer any kind of examination, even low-stakes quizzes.***

***I wonder if these colleagues realize the hardship demands for sick notes can create. I have spent time in university administration, and heard heart-rending stories. Students have told me they faked medical notes because they were too sick to get to a doctor's office, or felt that they could not afford the \$15, \$25, or more that a medical note costs. I believe them.***

Although, we believe that a student who is found to be lying on a Statutory Declaration should be held accountable within the Student Code of Rights and Responsibilities. Such a breach is already covered under the Senate Policy on Academic Honesty:

#### **2.1.8 Falsification or unauthorized modification of an academic document/record.**

*It is a breach of academic honesty to falsify, fabricate or in any way modify, either through omission or commission, an application to the University or a program, course student examination or test, transcript, grade, letter of recommendation or related document, a degree, a physician's letter/form or any other document used in support of an academic application, record, petition/appeal or endeavor.*

We also believe that the benefits for putting students well being first, eliminating the need for students to pay even more money on their education, eliminating the onerous demand of doctors notes from medical clinics such as Appletree and allowing for an overall more accessible education at York University far outweighs the potential negative impacts.

We urge the York University administration to move towards banning the requirement for doctors notes and prioritize students mental, physical and financial well being in this endeavour.

# LOOKING AHEAD

Cuts in post secondary education overall are impacting students, their institutions and their unions. We recognize this and for that reason have provided these cost efficient policy initiatives which allow us to make education at York University even more accessible. It is incredibly important to us that we continue to work with the university administration in order to better the lives and educational experiences of students - a goal we share. As the administration and the YFS continue to serve students in a multitude of ways, we look forward to contributing to making York University a world class educational institution.

We look forward to working with the administration on these policy initiatives and hope that our enthusiasm is matched by making these positive changes a reality for students.



Fatima Babiker, President



Aaron Suresh, Vice-President Operations



Jasmine Hawamdeh, Vice-President Campaigns & Advocacy



Azinwi Kien Saningong, Vice-President Equity



Mutaz Elhawash, Vice-President Campus Life