

October 10, 2019

A message from President Lenton on promoting free expression, open debate and respect

Office of the President

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As President & Vice Chancellor, I am incredibly proud of the diversity that defines the York University community. It is our great strength and integral to our mission as an institution of higher learning.

I believe that universities are a fundamental pillar of democratic society- a place where diverse perspectives can engage in open and robust debate on controversial issues, with the ultimate goal of creating a more sustainable, prosperous and just world.

We live in a political moment where, too often, public discourse is defined by anger and polarization. Free expression is fundamental to open debate, but like all basic rights, it is also a responsibility. We must take care to protect everyone's right to free speech while we assert our own. For universities to fulfill their essential democratic role, we, as a community, need to continually work towards creating an atmosphere that is respectful and inclusive.

There has been concern expressed over an incident involving a verbal altercation between students at Vari Hall on Monday, October 7th. We take any allegation of discrimination or harassment very seriously, and on Tuesday [issued a reminder to the community](#) of our shared responsibility to maintain a respectful and safe environment for everyone. We have also reached out to a student who was involved in this incident to provide support, offer resources and make that individual aware of how to make an official complaint. We offer the same outreach and support to any student who brings an issue to our attention.

This past March, in response to an incident of Antisemitism, [I issued a statement condemning all forms of racism, prejudice and discrimination](#). The message is simple: **York University has zero tolerance for hate, and it has no place on our campuses.**

We take all incidents of hate speech, discrimination and harassment within our community seriously. When a complaint is made, the allegations are investigated thoroughly, and community members found to have made hateful statements will face disciplinary action by the university or even criminal consequences under hate speech laws. A useful resource for understanding hate speech is [Hate Propaganda: A Guide for Students, Faculty and Staff](#) published by our [Centre for Human Rights, Equity, and Inclusion](#).

This is also an opportunity to remind the York community about the resources and supports that are available to everyone. Anyone with immediate or urgent safety concerns should contact Toronto Police Service or [York Security Services](#), which is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Individuals may also file a complaint under the [Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities \(CSRR\)](#). There are additional resources available through the Centre for Human Rights, Equity and Inclusion including educational training and case resolution.



Guided by our core values as an university, we remain committed to intellectual integrity, freedom of inquiry, [freedom of expression](#), and equal rights and dignity for all. Engaging, advancing and safeguarding our democracy requires that we protect diverse points of view while defending the right of every student, staff and faculty member to a safe environment for work, study and debate.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rhonda L. Lenton". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "R" and "L".

Rhonda L. Lenton, PhD
President and Vice-Chancellor