

November 9, 2020

## **A Message from President Lenton on Facilitating and Safeguarding Political Discourse and Freedom of Expression**

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With the results of the United States election now announced, I'd like to acknowledge the many members of the York community who have been and continue to be affected by the political events south of the border. Whether you are an American citizen, have friends or loved ones living in the U.S. or have been concerned about the global impacts of the election, I recognize that the past weeks and months have been both a mentally and emotionally charged time for students, faculty and staff across the University.

No matter what your own political beliefs may be, I think we can all agree that many of the kinds of discourse we have witnessed over the past few weeks, especially those that seek to de-humanize or incite violence against opponents, are contrary to a healthy and open democratic society. Irrespective of our personal ideologies, I believe that all members of the York community are working toward the same shared goal of building a better and brighter future. Now is a time for our community to come together with a mindset of inclusivity and respect, and to continue to ensure that people from all sides of the political spectrum are free and safe to voice their opinions and engage in productive democratic discourse.

In today's increasingly polarized world, where public debate is often coloured by anger and resentment, universities play a particularly important role in facilitating and safeguarding the free exchange of thoughts and ideas. Unfortunately, as places of higher learning and forums for open debate and free expression, university campuses are occasionally settings where ideological tensions come to a head, and in rare instances, turn toward violence. Last week, we witnessed this come to pass through the devastating attack at Kabul University in Afghanistan, where dozens of innocent students, staff and faculty were injured or killed under the guise of ideology.

At York, we believe that everyone has a right to express their views, provided this expression does not violate the limits prescribed by Canadian law. York's [Statement of Policy on Free Speech](#) recognizes that free speech is not without limits, and that it does not protect any expression that constitutes hate speech, harassment, threats, discrimination or otherwise violates the law. York University unequivocally denounces the use of violence for any reason, and our community has zero tolerance for hate.

As we mourn those lost and injured in Kabul and look ahead to a new era of political discourse across the U.S. and around the world, I hope that we will continue to choose kindness over hate and respectful debate over acts of aggression, and that we will continue to find ways to bridge our political and ideological divides and come together to enact positive change on our campuses, in our communities and around the world.

Sincerely,

Rhonda L. Lenton  
President & Vice-Chancellor

