

On June 12th the Academic Writing Team hosted a town hall to provide an opportunity for faculty, staff and students to share their ideas and concerns about the future of Queen's University. The original plan was to hold the town hall in Robert Sutherland Hall, Room 202, and to record the meeting and post a transcript. Unfortunately, a scheduling error forced us to relocate the meeting at the last minute, making it impossible to record the meeting. We apologize for not being able to provide a verbatim record of what was said at the town hall; instead this summary will, we hope, offer some sense of the concerns raised at the meeting.

Participant: Can you explain the extended timeline and how your mandate has changed? How do you understand your role now?

AWT: *Our role has shifted as a result of the extended timeline. The initial plan was to put forward a first draft for a future Academic Plan but that has changed. Many stakeholders have asked to be listened to and as such, our new goal is to receive and highlight key resonances about the future of our university that exist on campus. Our document will put these resonances on the table for discussion when it is submitted to the administration for consideration at their September 1st retreat.*

Participant: We appreciate the transparency of this town hall and appreciate being included in this process. However, I'm worried that Queen's cares more about its appearance toward alumni and future students compared to current students. It seems the administration doesn't stand for helping students. Over the last year I've had encounters with many offices and very few were helpful and fewer still were pleasant. The source of my disappointment stems from the fact that I was told I could do a dual degree then found out that I couldn't. At no point were staff members apologetic. In the Maclean's survey of upper-year satisfaction, Queen's went down when students were asked about their decision to choose this school – this may have something to do with it.

AWT: *As a group collecting recommendations I'm not sure that we can resolve everybody's problems. As professors we would not want those kinds of problems to be experienced by students. We would like to hear from you further about what could be a next step. Is there an insufficient number of support staff?*

Participant: There seems to be favouritism towards applied sciences compared to a lot of arts. A wide variety of courses is offered to students elsewhere like in Engineering and Commerce. There should be more variety made available to arts students in course selection. There is a lack of a sense of community among such a large faculty as Arts and Science; there's nothing to tether the departments together. Bake sales and formals run by Department Student Councils (DSCs) are too small to be effective.

AWT: *The number of core courses that students have over the years is something that could bind a group together. Freedom to take a diverse selection of courses is considered positive but*

will not make everyone feel like a community. Mentoring within the faculty would generate a sense of community. Are you saying that the rest of the departments should have the same choices available to all faculties. We hear frequently that people want to be taught more by professors not Teaching Assistants. What steps would you take to make sure that you were taught by full-time faculty members.

Participant: I hope that academics remain the most important thing at this school. It's not good to have multiple seminars taught by PhD students. The way that funding is distributed should be changed. When students evaluate a professor they seldom care that a professor has an extensive research background; students care more about teaching quality. The Centre for Teaching and Learning is a great resource that could be used in a better way.

AWT: *It is not uncommon to hear undergraduate students say that some grad students they have had are better teachers than professors. Being a full-time professor doesn't necessarily mean you're a better teacher than a part-time professor. There is no doubt that grad students and post-doctoral fellows could be used more effectively for teaching. However, as students, would you be happy with the idea of a progressive division between the teaching and research function of faculty members? If students had their choice, would they want the "better" teacher (however "better" is defined)? Good teaching involves many things and fairly difficult to determine what constitutes good teaching. Do you want a person to be paid to just teach given that a full service professor costs a great deal while a "teaching only" professor is very cheap by comparison?*

Participant: I would say that it depends on the faculty and department. Full service professors are needed in some places, but having better teachers in the first and second years would be more important to the student. In the upper years it would be helpful to have full service professors who could provide some mentorship to those interested in further research in grad school.

Participant: In our rethinking of our how we grade we should rethink how we weigh teaching a course and rethink what a course is. There are three elephants in the room. One: who we are as a university, which has a lot to do with our facilities. There is a large need to look at why large classes are rising dramatically. Second, the teaching mode, such as virtualization and thinking about credits. Is a full-year first-year course to be weighted the same as a fourth-year seminar? Three, the curriculum: in Arts and Science there have been a lot of cross-disciplinary studies. I would hope that would be revived and as we get more advanced we become more specialized. A cross disciplinary first year course would help this.

AWT: *How does that square with what's happening on the ground? There's a great deal of academic "protectionism" whereby departments exclude students from other programs from their courses.*

Participant: Demolish departments and go towards schools. Mandate a general first year course that would provide cross-disciplinary exposure.

AWT: *On the point of infrastructure the change in format in the curriculum in the Faculty of Health Sciences in the last 18 months has shown that there are zero opportunities. If we want to have quality we need the infrastructure to play in. Team-based learning is something that would require a new way to engage students. Things worked incredibly well when new ideas were implemented and televisions were used in small-tabled groups. In terms of metrics this is something we need in order to prove that we're doing what we say we are doing.*

Participant: In terms of shifting the focus of faculty workload from 40-40-20 (40 per cent teaching, 40 per cent research, 20 per cent service) to more of a teaching role: At present faculty are run through a gauntlet on teaching evaluations that are entirely subjective and based on the student experience. We need to find out how to learn if people are teaching well or not. Without this system in place we're not going to be able to evaluate teaching properly.

AWT: *The CTL is designed to evaluate and affect teaching, research and services. If we focus too much on teaching, are we at risk of forgetting how to evaluate learning?*

Participant: My vision for Queen's is to remain a smaller school and the most likely outcome is to grow even smaller than we are now. We do have to make tough choices in what we offer and how we do things. The path for Queen's is to do a few things really well and focus on what we feel we will be providing as an advantage to students. We can continue to achieve excellence if we do fewer things. We should have more interactive learning opportunities while at the same time being honest with prospective students that they won't have the same choices they'd get at the University of Toronto or McGill. There's a place for us between Trent and U of T - I think that Queen's has an opportunity to achieve with special partnerships. Queen's also has a unique opportunity to engage the aboriginal community. There are already a number of initiatives focused on this and these could be integrated into other aspects of the curriculum.

AWT: *You're suggesting that we improve quality where possible, but at the cost of something else. Making difficult choices is always going to have consequences. What we need to think about is how we want a student to come out of our university. For example, there is no doubt that some inter- or cross disciplinary engagement is important or that being given the opportunity to develop writing and verbal skills.*

Participant: This process contributes to the problem of myth and reality – i.e., we aren't doing what we say we are doing. The elephant in the room is money. We say we are looking for ways to have more excellence, new classrooms and better teaching but we can't afford it. The process is changing but I'm concerned with preserving my own turf. One person described that whenever there are limited resources departments should be given the chance to say why they are better and other departments aren't. Cross-department discussion and openness would save some money.

AWT: *Would advancing the aspect of interdisciplinarity be useful? What about recommending that groups who worked together would get the most resources? Money is of course the problem as you can't write a strategic plan without thinking about pulling this off. The notion of getting smaller is problematic because the government of Ontario is keen to keep tuition more*

or less frozen and grants as low as possible. This forces Ontario universities to attempt to grow their way out of the funding problem. Would a greater transparency in departmental budgets be helpful?

Participant: Transparency would help a lot and it's hard when resources are tight for people to be nice to each other. That's where meetings like this are helpful, if several departments could talk and open their doors to more students and find ways of saving money. It requires a force above these departments like the AWT to facilitate these meetings.

AWT: *How do you start this process? When people do see each other's details then there is a sense of camaraderie towards the department for the good of the school.*

Participant: Virtualization is something that we are a little iffy on. I think that it's difficult to have virtual classes. Students are so used to doing so many things at the same time electronically that this wouldn't be as effective as being in a classroom. Virtualization is something that I would like to stay away from, but it can be brought in to classrooms and be used to add to and supplement the learning experience.

AWT: *The bodies in the room do matter, but I think that recognizing the technological innovations that exist and not using them would be a loss. That's why clarification of what virtualization means is important. Another thing that we've been discussing is the related matter of class size. To ensure that every student has a small-class experience, it is important to consider having mega-classes, and technology would be helpful in that situation. The differences in learning behaviours is something that is important to consider because there is wide variation in what each student needs to experience in order to decide how they learn. We are trying to get people ready for a next step and if that next step is grad school, professional school or work. To be effective we will need to make sure that when we send the student out of the classroom they can advance their learning in a different way – virtualization would help facilitate that.*

In the last few minutes that we have we will now invite any suggestions or concerns that you would like to express. We will just listen and take down your points for later discussion.

Participant: I'm concerned because the line when technology becomes primary over secondary is easy to cross. What happens when a professor relies on those tools more than having face to face time with students? There should be some guidelines that say they should only post a percentage of material online. We should also use resources that are already there which students don't really know about such as Mindfind and the Learning Commons. We could improve the student experience by having departments talk to their students about these types of resources. Departmental Student Councils (DSCs) are also being underused, apart from having bake sales and hosting socials; a DSC could actually work with the departments to implement policies without adding to costs.

Participant: Our discussion today has mainly addressed the undergraduate experience; how do graduate students fit in? I know what we are supposed to do – support undergrads and support research, but what is our role? What do departments want us to do?

Participant: We must acknowledge the primacy of finance. It's unfortunate that *Where Next* led with 'doing less with less'. I don't want to discuss cutting services; I want to discuss cutting inefficiencies. One disappointment is having so much time wasted on evaluation. There are many ways to cut inefficiencies and students are not used efficiently, procedurally there are things that we can cut.

Please note that we will be hosting another Town Hall meeting in August. In the meantime, we would like to thank all members of the Queen's community who took the time to participate in this process. Please forward your comments to:

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