

# QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY STAFF ASSOCIATION

---

OUR CONTRIBUTION TOWARD A  
UNIVERSITY ACADEMIC PLAN

---

SUBMITTED TO THE  
ACADEMIC WRITING TEAM

SEPTEMBER 16, 2010

---

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

Table of Contents .....	2
Executive Summary .....	3
Preamble .....	4
Background.....	4
Process.....	6
Methods of Communication .....	8
The Academic Plan Itself .....	9
Outreach.....	10
Findings.....	11
Conclusion .....	15
Transition and Next Steps .....	15
Our Appreciation .....	16
List of Recommendations.....	17

---

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

---

Principal Woolf commenced the academic planning process in January 2010 when he released his “*Where Next?*” vision document to the Queen’s community. The launch of this vision document and subsequent academic planning process has challenged all employees and students to ponder our future direction and the true meaning of such.

The Principal’s vision document was further complemented with the formation of the Academic Writing Team (AWT). The AWT was charged with the mission of providing the Principal with wide-spread input from all areas of the Queen’s community, which would, in turn, aid him with the creation of the Academic Plan.

The AWT canvassed Queen’s non-academic employees for their input regarding the Academic Plan. It was at this point that the Queen’s University Staff Association (QUSA) met with members of the AWT to open dialogue and to begin to solidify our position in the process.

QUSA also contacted its ~600 members for their thoughts and views on the process, in an effort to consolidate, report, and submit our first contribution to a University Academic Plan.

Staff possess a significant wealth of institutional knowledge, provide essential resources, and work alongside of faculty and the Administration in realizing the University’s overall mission. We offer a valuable perspective informed by experience and expertise on the daily operations of this University, and our input and opinions are vital in many decision-making processes. The Academic Plan, if implemented properly, can provide for a much-needed mechanism to bridge the gap between the Administration and the essential employee resources needed to move us into the next decade with superior strength.

It is with anticipation and enthusiasm that we look forward to participating with sound vigor in the coming months as the academic planning process moves forward.

**It is indeed a daunting task to encourage and coordinate a process to gain meaningful insights and contributions from the entire University Community on the future of Queen’s.**

*-Partial comment by a QUSA member*

---

## **PREAMBLE**

---

Earlier this summer, the Academic Writing Team (AWT) canvassed Queen's non-academic staff for their input regarding the Academic Plan. It is in reply to this call from the AWT that this response is founded.

Herewith, is what we hope to be the first of many contributions toward a University Academic Plan by the Queen's University Staff Association (QUSA) on behalf of its membership.

---

## **BACKGROUND**

---

Earlier this year, Principal Woolf released his vision document entitled "*Where Next?*" to the Queen's community, with the aspiration of creating a University-wide Academic Plan that will reflect and guide the future of Queen's University. The academic planning process was harmonized later in the spring when members of the AWT began to canvas the greater Queen's community for input.

Both the Principal and the AWT invited staff to participate in the academic planning process by means of email responses directly to both parties, and through attendance at town hall forums.

This vision document has been vigorously debated over the past months, sparking much discussion within academic units, among student groups, and among employee groups including faculty members and staff.

The process thus far has seen much reflection and tribute to all that is Queen's University. We have seen the publication of many discussion papers that reveal our diversity within the greater community, our distinct and deep-rooted traditions, and our achievements as an educational institution.

But as is often the case, with reflection and expression comes much deliberation and contemplation. One only needs to muse a sampling of these discussion papers to understand the great caution that must be taken as we move forward with the academic planning process.

Each employee group on campus supports the academic mission in its own way. It would stand to reason then, that the process be inclusive of *all* groups and that each be given the opportunity to affirm their unique role and contributions in a manner in which they are heard and respected. Non-academic employees, operational staff if you will, are just one such group who aspire to participate.

Regrettably, our participation in the academic process to date has been minimal, but we seek to change this in the near future.

Operational staff sustain and support the academic mission of this institution. We collaborate on and enable implementations of all types, we oversee, coordinate and deliver critical processes, services and systems, we repair and maintain infrastructure, and we provide continuity in situations where faculty members are unqualified or otherwise unable to do so.

Staff provide the necessary transitory links between academic goals, classroom teaching, student interactions, and research, which in turn enables Queen's to fulfill its academic mission and goals. We are an equally vital and necessary part of this institution and should be acknowledged and respected as such.

**More than  
anything, there  
is a shortage of  
human  
resources.**

*-Partial comment  
by a QUSA member*

---

## PROCESS

---

It is with the *process* to create a University Academic Plan, as laid out by Principal Woolf, that staff at Queen's must first react and address.

When one takes great care to review the "Where Next?" vision document, it is difficult to even catch a glimpse of the importance of staff as they relate to the Academic Plan. It is with disappointment that staff digest this document and are left to acknowledge the following:

- the consideration of Staff as valuable and critical members of this University is not found within the vision document itself, and
- Staff were not truly invited to participate in its creation.

Staff are mentioned but three (3) times within the vision document. Sadly, this implies that Principal Woolf envisions a Queen's devoid of the valuable and critical contributions that non-academic employees have been making to this University for all of its long history.

In one breath, the Principal invites us to participate in the academic planning process without context or appropriate framework, and with the other breath, he stresses that it *is an academic plan*. This approach to invite us to participate, while implying that we are ill-equipped to do so, is disheartening and demoralizing at best.

This approach is further compounded when it is realized that staff are not acknowledged in many types of communications and undertakings, both within and outside our community. It serves to reinforce yet again, that our participation and input is all too often disregarded.

Beyond this, the membership of the newly formed AWT does little to offer hope that an inclusive process might emerge. Neither staff nor students, as critical groups of acknowledgment on campus, were properly represented on the AWT.

Non-academic employees, along with faculty, students, alumni and others, form the foundation of this institution. An academic plan cannot succeed without *our* part in stabilizing this foundation, or without our support.

**The Principal's academic planning process initially excluded non-academic staff entirely and even after additional consultation was made available, its academic focus served only to reinforce the view that non-academic staff serve at the will of faculty. While it is true we are an academic institution and we all wouldn't be here if it were not for the students, the other reality is that the university would simply not function were not for the equally important roles that non-academic staff play.**

*-Partial comment by a QUSA member*

**RECOMMENDATION 1:** As the Academic Plan takes shape, measures should be taken to facilitate the more active participation of *all* staff in the recommendations and changes as they slowly come to realization across campus. Part of this engagement is deeply-rooted in our attendance and inclusion at meetings where both deliberations and decisions are made. While the decision process lies firmly with the governing body, we believe that when staff attend these meetings, it serves to enhance the overall understanding of how units, departments, faculties and the administration operate. Knowledge and familiarity in how these decisions are reached would help facilitate smoother implementation, could ease anxiety, and may encourage staff to embrace the changes taking place in our workplace environment. As well, active participation could aid significantly when transitioning between academic planning and operational implementation.

To enlighten further, the inclusion of diverse groups of staff who encompass a wide breadth of job grades and position types in the deliberation processes should be afforded careful consideration and effort. Frequently, consultations are restricted to staff in grades 10-14, who are too closely aligned to the administrative bodies to adequately represent non-managerial staff. This does little to encourage the fulsome participation of staff in consultative processes or to support their participation in resulting changes.

This type of revised approach to the planning process may also provide strength and much needed stability overall, and seek to acknowledge vital *change management practices* that are readily utilized by many institutions of today.

---

## METHODS OF COMMUNICATION

---

In the coming months, QUSA will make every effort to participate in the academic planning process on behalf of our members with a staff perspective, but it should be noted that this is challenging at best. QUSA can only communicate with its membership of ~600. This leaves a significant disadvantage to an additional ~1400 staff that are left to communicate directly and individually with the Principal and his Advisory Team. Extracting valuable input for this group of staff will be difficult as they have long been marginalized in discussions of this nature.

If the invitation for staff to participate in this process is not hollow in its delivery, then creative methods need to be developed to engage staff more broadly. In the end, this will aid to ensure an academic plan that has been founded on the consultations of *all* employee groups, including staff.

At the Town Hall hosted by the Principal in March 2010, staff expressed their concern regarding methods of communication that would allow for comfortable settings and constructive feedback. Many staff members were not able to participate in their departmental/unit submissions, and were left with the option of individual email submissions directly to the Principal, or to be heard at the town hall forums. Our concerns went unheard as no alternatives were proposed.

**More venues for members of the Queen's Community in all its diversity, need to be provided so that various ideas can be presented, heard, discussed and analyzed among the members present and not just between presenters and interpreters.**

*-Partial comment by a QUSA member*

It goes without saying that staff do not enjoy freedom of speech to the same extent as faculty members. Faculty are protected by the principle of academic freedom, the *QUFA Collective Agreement*, and for some tenure, which affords them freedoms that staff simply do not have. Our freedom of speech is encumbered by hierarchy and subordinate implications.

All too often, we are invited to pass along our input, interests, and concerns in a public forum that does not allow sufficient time to properly channel our commentary, and to present in front of our Supervisors and Managers who possess disciplinary authority. For many, this type of engagement is daunting and does not allow for effective communication.

If staff are uncomfortable with the methods provided, they will continue to be less inclined to participate in the process.

**RECOMMENDATION 2: The Principal and his Advisory Team need to address the concern regarding methods of communication and find creative ways to engage staff.** The Administration ought to work with the QUSA Executive and its membership, and other employee representatives, on this endeavour. Furthermore, the Administration needs to enhance its communications to include *all* employees when changes are being discussed, and prior to implementation.

---

## THE ACADEMIC PLAN ITSELF

---

A resounding question that continues to be heard markedly is, “*is this truly an academic plan?*”

The process to date seems more of a strategic plan or tactical realignment, as it slowly comes to realization and attempts to appraise several aspects of our academic and operational structures.

Is this accurately entitled an “Academic Plan”, or is this plan cleverly cloaked as an institutional planning process or budget-cutting exercise?

Based on apprehensions circling this question, staff are wary that the implications of the Academic Plan will not be sensitive or reflective of our contributions, our ability to provide support mechanisms, or our needs as they generally relate to our chosen workplace. If we continue to be, for the most part, excluded from the deliberations, the Academic Plan has the potential to profoundly affect many staff negatively.

One only needs to investigate the implementation of the QUASR project and talk to affected staff to see the significant negative impacts that poorly implemented change can have. We are not suggesting the plan for the future bear a resemblance to the status quo, but rather that the Academic Plan recognizes that Queen’s is more than just an academic institution. It is an employer, it is a community and national resource, it is a source of knowledge and opinion, a source of recreation and the arts, and a host of other functions which extend far beyond the scope of an Academic Plan.

**RECOMMENDATION 3: Clarity regarding the Academic Plan itself needs to be provided by the Principal to the entire Queen’s community.** Most employee groups remain uncertain of the overall goal of the exercise. If the plan itself is perceived as undefined, it allows doubt and noteworthy hesitation by all to creep into the process. Essentially it could, and may have already, tainted the validity of the process.

The Principal and his Advisory Team should remain ever cautious and exercise great care when proceeding this fall with the rest of the planning process. Community wide announcements should be delivered with unreserved transparency, and candid communications should be considered of utmost importance as the Academic Plan becomes reality.

Moving forward in this manner with *all* community groups, not just operational staff, could see the successful integration of an Academic Plan embraced and supported by all.

**Does a plumber, or a library technician or a custodian or a chemical stores technician have anything to say about the Academic Plan for Queen’s? Are they a part of the Queen’s Community, or are they just employees? Many of us would like to think it is the former, but the reality seems to be more reflected in the latter.**

*-Partial comment by a QUSA member*

---

## OUTREACH

---

Given the short time frame for this part of the process, QUSA determined that the most efficient way to begin communicating with its membership was to circulate a message requesting feedback and input for this response. While this can be perceived as the most efficient method given the access we retain to our membership ListServ, it cannot be perceived as the most effective.

Response from the membership was minimal. This could be attributed to the following:

- short time frame afforded by the AWT to submit input
- lack of framework provided by the Principal for staff input into in his vision document
- significant summer vacation period as experienced by staff and other employee groups
- the ability by QUSA to communicate with only a third of staff at Queen's.

As a new term approaches, we are however, receiving further input from our colleagues as it relates to the Academic Plan, and will continue to foster further engagement.

Nurturing open and positive dialogue during this academic planning process within our membership and among *all* members of the Queen's community is of critical importance.

**RECOMMENDATION 4:** It would be beneficial if QUSA were able to communication with *all* non-academic employees at Queen's during the coming months as the academic planning process progresses. Human Resources could easily provide assistance and aid QUSA in this endeavour.

**"Staff" always come last - in every document, every communication, etc. We are the last group to be invited to participate and often our participation and input is overlooked.**

*-Partial comment by a QUSA member*

---

## FINDINGS

---

Some of the input from the membership, while sparse, focused more specifically around the subjects of “*what are the concerns of staff on campus at the moment*”, and “*how could these issues be addressed to allow us to fully support a new Academic Plan at Queen’s*”?

Overall emerging themes that were received from the membership are evidenced within the comment boxes throughout this document, and by the following comments:

- **Downloading/Workload**

*Yes, it's happening more and more. Both Faculty and Senior Administrators are increasingly downloading parts of their administrative work to support staff. There seems to be a growing trend for faculty to only reside in Kingston for half the week. This makes running programs administratively difficult.*

- **Doing more with less resources (of all types)**

*The staff support system for faculty has dwindled significantly because there are fewer support staff providing full-time secretarial services. Nowadays, support staff must juggle work for faculty, administration, and students - with their competing schedules - in a day. This situation creates competition for support staff services and it also places unrealistic expectations on staff who routinely put in extra hours by arriving early or staying late, and who work through their lunch and break without any compensation. I am aware of several staff who are burned out from this unhealthy situation, and I know that faculty are not happy with the level of support they can expect to receive.*

- **Concerns with new software implementations**

*The roll out for the new QUASR system could have been far smoother, the training done in a more timely fashion – closer to the roll out, not after the fact, nor months in advance! The communication regarding training sessions was somewhat limited. If you didn't happen to be on the HR site, you would not have a clue training was available.*

- **Pension Plan and Retirement/incentive packages for Staff**

*Staff must have a say in any changes to the pension plan.*

**We are not mere “support staff” but rather critical players and as such, the University ought to be sure in moving forward, it takes care to coach its language, approach, policies, procedures and decisions to reflect the reality that without our contributions, Queen’s would simply not be. I’d like to see this reflected in the next academic planning document.**

*-Partial comment by a QUSA member*

- **Reorganizations/restructuring**

*There are many people at the top requiring the support services of too few people at the bottom. Staff are never consulted on how changes might affect the smooth running of the department before those changes are made but we should because we're doing the work which those changes might impact. Frankly, there needs to be a chart of what people in my department do. Something as simple as that can save a lot of time when you're looking for answers or help.*

- **Training for Staff**

*I find that skills or knowledge building for career advancement is not deemed a good reason for taking Queen's workshops during work hours. A workforce that is not allowed, or encouraged, to acquire new skills is a workforce that is not prepared to help lead Queen's into the future. I quote from the 2009 Educational Equity Policy found at:*

*<http://www.queensu.ca/secretariat/senate/policies/EDEQ2009.html>*

*"The cornerstone of employment equity is equitable access to education and training programs for all employees. This access is required to enable individuals to reach their full potential. Employment equity, in turn, is fundamental to fully achieving educational equity because it is central to the creation of a welcoming and supportive educational environment. Universities, therefore, have a key role to play as change agents in the achievement of equity in society"*

*Not all departments encourage staff to take advantage of the training workshops available through HR, nor do they encourage them to take courses available on campus through the various faculties.*

- **Overtime/Flextime**

*Many staff that I know are burned out. A shortage of support staff has placed an enormous amount of pressure to produce timely results within an unrealistic time frame on those who work here. Working unpaid overtime is all too common and it's been my experience, as well as many other staff I know, that flex time is something some departments don't want to talk about or grant. This situation is unfair and unhealthy for staff and it will not serve the university well if staff get sick and require longer leaves.*

*This practice varies across the campus and should be more consistent. Either flextime is available to all or none; it should not be a departmental policy, but a University policy. As with any other benefit, it must be available to all staff. Hours should be consistent throughout the University; overtime should be paid either through lieu time or added to pay.*

- **Job Evaluation**

*Staff should have direct input into the job evaluation process. I am not convinced that all job descriptions are up-to-date. This is either through insufficient knowledge of what the employee does or else an undervaluing of their duties. Either way, it impacts an employee's self-esteem and moral when their contributions go unacknowledged and they are not fairly compensated for the work they do. At the very least, there should be a process in place for*

*staff to request a re-assessment of a job evaluation and such as request should not be dependant on their department's approval.*

*Very inconsistent across the campus. Office assistants, for example, have been noted to be either a 4 or a 5 – some have financial responsibilities and are a 4, yet in a different dept would be a 5?*

- **Job Security**

*Wouldn't it be grand to be able to come to work each day and not wonder if you will be the next to be let go??*

- **Lack of management training for Department Heads and Administrative Assistants**

*Supervisors and Managers should be given mandatory training in interpersonal skills development, and respecting cultural differences as soon as they are promoted to a supervisory position, or sooner. I also strongly suggest within-department training/orientation for management to learn how the flow of work and information works both laterally and vertically.*

- **Inconsistent workplace rules and policies**

*Inconsistencies across campus – also within each dept! Lots of favouritism shown, rules change dependent upon supervisors etc., within the same dept...*

*The application of employment equity principles is monitored only in faculty hiring, as provided for in their collective agreement. Application of employment equity principles for non-academic staff is left to the discretion of departments*

*Consistency, or more exactly the lack of consistency in the application of policies, job evaluations, availability of training are among the frustrations that create barriers which prevent staff from embracing change. One of the root causes of this situation is a lack of meaningful consultation and communication between administrators and their staff. The perception across campus, and the reality in some parts of campus is that change means that some staff will be walked off campus without warning and without recourse so that Queen's can change the way it does something.*

*The required new HR system, with its remarkable ability to track employee time at work or away from work down to the minute among other capabilities, will be used track non-academic staff only*

- **Lack of acknowledgement of the work that staff do**

*It seems to me that in a real and fundamental way, non-academic staff members at Queen's are seen as less important than faculty – full stop. This is woven into the fabric that is Queen's and informs so much of how the University operates. Because it is taken for granted as being fact, it allows the administration and others make decisions and develop processes that continue to marginalize non-academic staff.*

- **Communications**

*Listserv's can be exclusionary if you're not on it and the information does not get to you even though you need the information just as much as those on the listserv, or have an important point or perspective to contribute to the issue being discussed on the listserv. Usually, it is staff who are left out of the information loop. This affects our preparedness, planning, and it limits our knowledge of, and contributions to, the policies or issued raised and that may end up impacting our services to faculty and students down the line.*

- **Lack of effective functioning grievance process for staff**

*There is no process where staff can address or bring forward disagreements or perceived injustices or favoritism by supervisors. I know personally of 2 people who are off on sick leave due to work stresses where there is no forum for dispute resolution. This causes stress and indignity to the staff involved, extra work for the staff at work, and still there is no resolution or even perception of a possibility of a solution.*

**I think that something more is needed from the University besides better communication between the administration and non-academic employees. Rather, there needs to be a fundamental shift in values that purports non-academic staff as working alongside of, and in partnership with, faculty and the administration in achieving the University's mission, goals and vision.**

*-Partial comment by a QUSA member*

---

## CONCLUSION

---

Given the enormity of the task at hand, creating a University-wide Academic Plan that will see Queen's emerge stronger than ever, is an overwhelming notion. Bringing together all community groups that comprise Queen's to seek their input and opinions, will be both inspiring and distressing for many. Regardless, staff are essential members of the Queen's community and are eager to contribute.

It is evident however, that Queen's staff need a clearly defined structure that will allow for enhanced participation and effective inclusion in the process.

Developing a solid strategy for staff participation that could assist the transition between the Academic Plan and operational implementation, should not only enhance the planning process overall, but also provide much-needed stability to the current situation.

Working with QUSA and its membership to cultivate and augment staff engagement, is just one approach ready to be explored.

We remain optimistic that Principal Woolf will recognize the need for staff participation in the creation of the University Academic Plan.

---

## TRANSITION AND NEXT STEPS

---

In their written response to the Principal entitled "*Imagining the Future: Towards an Academic Plan for Queen's University*", the AWT clearly states that their report is "but one in a series of introductory steps to the process of creating an academic plan", and that this is merely the beginning of the process; not the end. This is encouraging indeed.

With this in mind, QUSA plans to make every effort to participate in the Academic Planning process on behalf of its membership. To effectively meet this challenge, QUSA is working to form a sub-committee charged with the task of following the planning process through to conclusion, and to offer our advice, opinions, and views accordingly.

We look forward to engaging wholeheartedly with *all* groups within the Queen's community in this very critical process.

---

## OUR APPRECIATION

---

The QUSA Executive would like to take this opportunity to thank those individuals within our membership who took the time to send in their input regarding the Academic Plan. Your solid and constructive feedback was essential to this overall response to the AWT.

We would also like to thank the AWT members for:

- meeting with the QUSA Executive to discuss our comments and concerns
- striving to meet with *all* members of the Queen's community in town hall forums
- publishing a response to the Principal that was informative and concise, and which we expect is greatly appreciated by everyone in the Queen's community
- for including the thoughtful and insightful section entitled "The Value of Staff" in your response. Feedback from staff to date regarding this section appears to resonate positively with most, and for this we are appreciative.

---

## LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

---

**RECOMMENDATION 1:** As the Academic Plan takes shape, measures should be taken to facilitate the more active participation of *all* staff in the recommendations and changes as they slowly come to realization across campus.

**RECOMMENDATION 2:** The Principal and his Advisory Team need to address the concern regarding methods of communication and find creative ways to engage staff.

**RECOMMENDATION 3:** Clarity regarding the Academic Plan itself needs to be provided by the Principal to the entire Queen's community.

**RECOMMENDATION 4:** It would be beneficial if QUSA were able to communicate with *all* non-academic employees at Queen's during the coming months as the academic planning process progresses.

**2010-2011 QUSA Executive:**

Mark Publicover, President

Gillian Berry, Vice-President

Lisa Neumann, Secretary

Cheryl Power, Treasurer

Davin Carlson, Member-at-Large

Carol Johnson, Member-at-Large

Carol Kavanaugh, Member-at-Large

Kelly J. Smith, Member-at-Large

Deborah Stirton-Massey, Member-at-Large

Maureen Bartram, Research Grant & Contract, Member-at-Large

Susan Kemp, Research Grant & Contract, Member-at-Large