

# A Case for Change: A First Year Experience Framework at York University

Prepared by Dr. Janet Morrison, Dr. Mark Conrad, Brian Poser, Catherine Salole, and Dimple Savla on behalf of the First Year Experience Working Group, with contributions from Dr. Martha Rogers and Agata Stypka.

First Year Experience Working Group Members:

Dr. John Amanatides, Mary-Helen Armour, Lucy Bellissimo, Dr. Mark Conrad, John Dupuis, Amy L. Gaukel, Shawdi Kolaoudouzan, Michelle Miller, Dr. Janet Morrison, Jennifer Myers, Julie Parna, Brian Poser, Dr. Martha Rogers, Catherine Salole, Dimple Savla, Brendan Schulz, Susan Vail, Clara Miuho Wong, and Diane Woody.

November 6, 2013  
Draft for Consultation

---

## Executive Summary

York University faces unprecedented challenges. These include domestic enrolment declines, weak retention numbers, questions about our financial sustainability, and the need to bolster our reputation as a destination of choice.

Given these realities, the Working Group sets out a vision, strategic plan, and recommendations for a First Year Experience (FYE) Framework. This framework will be a key driver of York's overarching goals of student success, academic quality, and student experience and retention. The framework articulated here is grounded in theory and the literature on first year experience, student development, and student success. It is also informed by institutional data and local best practice models. In addition to quantitative institutional data, it calls on the emerging wisdom around student micro-cohorts/persona and on recent qualitative data concerning experiences and characteristics that put students at greater risk of attrition. Using all of these factors, we developed a vision that is right for York.

The vision is a comprehensive, coordinated, high-quality experience for new students. Our success depends on York's capacity to integrate curricular/pedagogical approaches with co-curricular programming, so it is predicated on a shared service model. The Working Group feels strongly that York can no longer afford to approach the issues of student experience and retention through a piecemeal, silo-ed approach. The imperative is for faculty and staff to find new ways of working together to deliver common administrative, technical, and professional services alongside cohort-specific initiatives offered locally in the faculties. These combined efforts must be anchored in a pan-University framework that supports highly responsive programs to reach those students who most need it, and it must do so with the highest degree of interoperability.

The vision is supported by four strategic goals and related objectives. Rooted in language drawn from a model developed by Alf Lizzio (2006), we articulate how students at York will: (a) develop personal and academic competence and a sense of purpose; (b) make meaningful connections with peers, faculty, staff, and York University; (c) understand and 'live' their rights and responsibilities as members of an inclusive, engaged learning community; and (d) be supported by policies, programs, and systems that foster success.

Finally, we offer a series of short-term and long-term recommendations that operationalize our stated goals and objectives. Our short-term recommendations include: (a) building institutional intelligence to inform early-alert and effective interventions; (b) enhancing key transitional initiatives/academic support programs to positively impact first-year retention; and, (c) developing and implementing strategies to incent first-year Course Directors and Teaching Assistants to adopt best practices. The nine long-term recommendations consider such issues as early integration of career exploration, exit protocols, and recovery programs.

The First Year Experience Working Group comprises a broad cross-section of faculty, staff, and students. The Group offers this paper as a basis for discussion on the first year experience and to serve as a catalyst for change at York.

## Table of Contents

<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>A 2018 VISION FOR THE FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCE AT YORK</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS</b>	<b>5</b>
INSTITUTIONAL COORDINATION AND SHARED SERVICE MODELS	5
MICRO-COHORTS/PERSONAS	5
STUDENT ENGAGEMENT	6
LIZZIO'S SENSES OF STUDENT SUCCESS	6
<b>CASE FOR CHANGE</b>	<b>7</b>
RETENTION RATES	7
HIGH ATTRITION COURSES	8
QUALITATIVE DATA	8
<i>STUDENT RETENTION FOCUS GROUPS</i>	8
<i>EIGHT HIGH-RISK EXPERIENCES AT YORK UNIVERSITY</i>	8
<i>CHARACTERISTICS OF STUDENTS WHO MAY BE AT RISK AT YORK UNIVERSITY</i>	9
<b>FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCE STRATEGIC GOALS AND OBJECTIVES</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>VALIDATING THE FRAMEWORK</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>INTERVENTIONS: CURRENT STATE AND GAPS</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>12</b>
SHORT-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS	12
LONG-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS	13
<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>APPENDIX A: STUDENT PERSONAS</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>APPENDIX B: SELECTED FYE PROGRAMS, ACTIVITIES, AND INTERVENTIONS</b>	<b>18</b>
PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES	18
CAMPUS SERVICES/FUNCTIONS	18
RECOVERY PROGRAMS	19

## Introduction

The need for a comprehensive strategy on the first year experience at York has never been more urgent. The university faces many challenges: year-over-year declines in applicant market share, weak first-to-second year undergraduate retention rates, low NSSE (National Survey of Student Engagement) scores, funding pressures and the imperative to differentiate York from other universities. In direct response, York University needs a pan-University first year experience framework.

The strategies we propose have been informed and inspired by the abundant literature on the first year experience (FYE), current institutional data, and best practices. They span a continuum of programming, curriculum, pedagogy, institutional constructs, policies, and processes. Together, these will enhance students' engagement with the institution, their academic success, and their personal development in the first year of study and beyond. These values and goals are embedded in York's Academic Plan (UAP) and Provostial White Paper. Specifically, the First Year Experience Framework will be a key driver of academic quality, student success, enhanced teaching and learning, and an enriched student experience.

The UAP, for example, speaks explicitly to “demonstrably enhancing student experiences and student success for our undergraduate and graduate students” (UAP, pg. 6). The Plan also notes the imperative to enhance “the first year experience by fostering students' transition to the university and their engagement with each other and with faculty, with their studies, and with their community” (UAP, pg. 9). The Provostial White Paper makes explicit reference to “an enhanced first year program for undergraduate students” as a benchmark of progress towards the overarching goal of academic quality (White Paper Overview, pg. 11). It also makes the link between engagement and student learning:

Numerous studies show that students are more likely to continue in higher education if they receive concrete support in negotiating the transition to university from high school, college, or, in the case of mature students, a return to academic studies. An enhanced first year program for undergraduates should help students understand university culture, promote connections between students and between students and faculty, and encourage a student's active engagement in their own learning (White Paper Overview, pg. 11).

The First Year Experience Working Group offers this paper as a basis for discussion on the first year experience at York University. Although we are confident that it is a strong foundation on which we can build in the area of FYE, the document should not be considered as *a fait accompli*; rather, we invite the input of colleagues from across the University to inform, shape and refine the strategies and objectives identified below.

## A 2018 Vision for the First Year Experience at York

***York is well recognized for delivering a comprehensive, high-quality experience to new students. The University's First Year Experience Framework promotes engagement, academic success, and personal development through well-coordinated and accessible academic and co-curricular programming. It is both theoretically informed and evidence-based.***

***Drawing on a wide array of theory, and most notably the work of Alf Lizzio (2006), York is committed to fostering new student success by focusing on five areas of need, or “senses of success.” More***

*specifically, Lizzio argues that students' success at university depends on their: (a) sense of capability; (b) sense of connectedness; (c) sense of purpose; (d) sense of resourcefulness; and (e) sense of academic culture.*

*The York FYE Framework is rooted in a shared-service model. Common administrative, technical, and professional development support services for students and teaching faculty are provided centrally; Faculty-specific, unique programming are provided locally.*

*York celebrates the success of students in their first year of study. Stories about York's innovative, integrated approach to the first year experience enhance the institution's reputation, and the related retention benefits bolster our enrolment outcomes.*

Our vision for the first year experience is bold. The future state it describes relies on our ability to bring the full force of our expertise, energies, and ingenuity to bear on the very real challenges that face us. To succeed, the first year experience cannot rest with one unit or Faculty or Division; it requires that we work from a common base of theory, research, and data.

## Theoretical Underpinnings

### Institutional Coordination and Shared Service Models

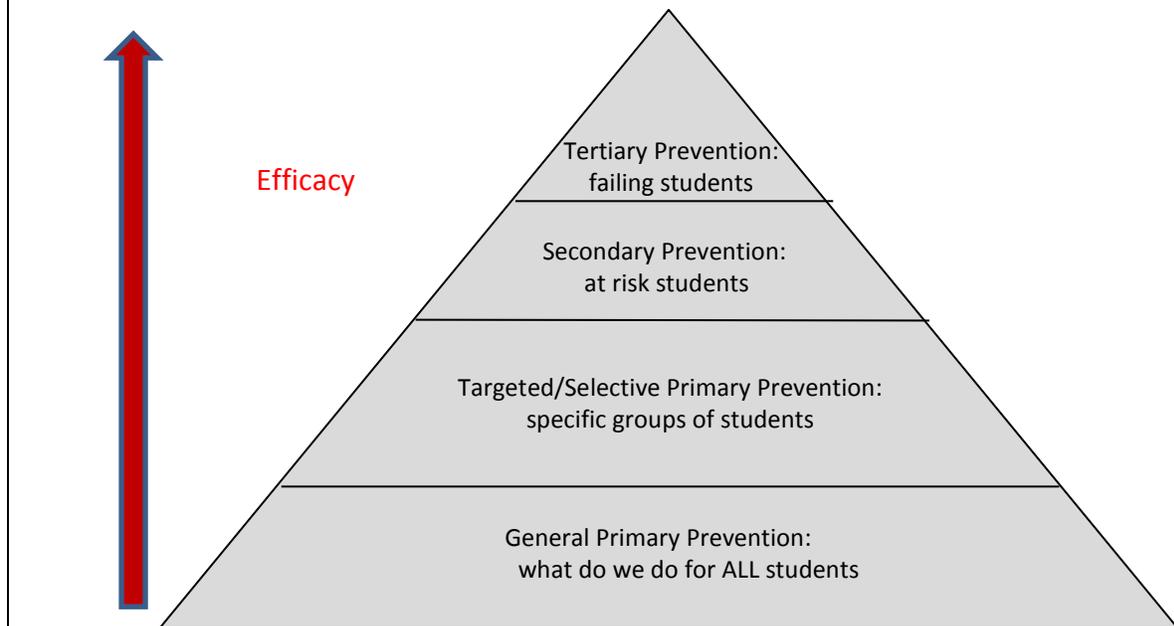
Our strategic emphasis on pan-University coordination and shared service models is grounded in the first year experience literature. This literature is vast, and points to several key outcomes as a result of a highly functioning first year experience model. In the past, small groups at institutions championed first year experience initiatives in a piecemeal way to further specific outcomes. Krause et al. argue persuasively, however, that “we have now reached the stage where universities must recognize the need for institution-wide approaches to enhancing the first year experience” (2006 at 8.8.6). Kift advances this thought by suggesting that all stakeholders in the first year initiative should work together to create a more sustainable, institution-wide approach that “transcends academic, administrative, and support areas’ silos” (2008, pg. 2).

### Micro-Cohorts/Personas

Students' first years are not homogenous experiences. Rather, they are built by the institution and the students' characteristics (Harvey, Drew, & Smith, 2006, pg. vii). This is especially important given York's diverse student population. Our vision for a shared-service model embodies the notion that the effectiveness of our interventions is maximized only when we create personalized and purposeful programs to smaller cohorts of students (cf. Caplan, 1964) (see Figure 1). We believe the interventions that are more generic and intended to support a broad student population are better administered and coordinated through central services. Conversely, interventions that are specialized and focused on segmented/niche populations are best delivered by Faculties.

Figure 1. Levels of Intervention Framework

(Caplan, 1964)



A source of our understanding about our students and their specific needs came from our work on defining micro-cohorts and defining student “personas”(see Appendix A). These personas are fundamental to the creation of effective intervention programs.

### Student Engagement

Kuh argued that student engagement comprises two critical components: the student-driven involvement in academics and other purposeful activities; and, the institution-driven involvement that displays “how a school deploys its resources and organizes the curriculum, other learning opportunities, and support services to induce students to participate in activities that lead to the experiences and outcomes that constitute student success (persistence, satisfaction, learning, and graduation)” (Kuh in Upcraft et al., 2005, pg. 87). Building on this work, Kuh and others proposed a broader definition of student success that would include: academic achievement; engagement in educationally purposeful activities; satisfaction; acquisition of desired knowledge, skills, and competencies; persistence; attainment of educational objectives; and post-college performance. To foster success across this broad continuum, the Working Group is recommending a continued focus on Lizzio’s *Senses of Student Success*. This theory first emerged at York University in Rogers and Stypka’s (2011) work on the development of YU Start.

### Lizzio’s Senses of Student Success

Alf Lizzio (2006) discusses student success in the context of social and academic integration; his work offers an overarching theoretical approach to transition programming. His *Five Senses* (capability, connectedness, purpose, resourcefulness, and academic culture) provide both a framework and a set of outcomes that are focused, intentional, and practical in both curricular and co-curricular development. Transition pedagogy is crucial to developing a holistic approach in first year experience initiatives; it is defined by Kift as “a guiding philosophy for intentional first year curriculum design that carefully scaffolds and mediates the first year learning experience for contemporary heterogeneous cohorts” (Kift, 2008, pg. 5). Our first year experience framework includes Lizzio’s *Senses* as a deliberate model for a well-rounded approach to developing social and academic supports for new students as they enter York and progress through their first year.

Importantly, Lizzio and Wilson (2010) emphasize “sense of purpose” as an area linked closely with student academic success, persistence, and thus retention. Lizzio and Wilson write: “Findings indicated that sense of purpose acts as a protective factor in activating persistence. Students with a stronger sense of purpose for being at university are more likely to persist in the face of difficulty or even failure. In a real sense, purpose is the fundamental fuel for both students’ routine academic self-regulation (task engagement) and self-management when ‘things get tough’” (Lizzio & Wilson, 2010, pg. 1). The hard question they follow with is “Who is responsible for motivation and purpose? ... We need ways to legitimate purpose-building as part of the curriculum and to position it as a valuable educational resource best facilitated through mutual responsibility and contribution” (Lizzio & Wilson, 2010, pg. 3). Tinto (2002) recommends several ways to achieve this, including first year seminar courses, collaborative learning strategies, and learning communities to create shared experiences, frequent classroom assessment, and supplemental instruction strategies (Tinto, 2002, pg. 4-5). Building purpose for our students has the potential for significant gains, in the experiences of the students as well as the success of the institution as a whole. At York, this goal is already being advanced by the work of our colleagues on the institution’s Experiential Education (EE) integration draft proposal. That proposal highlights the areas of academic performance and aspiration, citizenship and employability by embedding EE opportunities in degree programs (Experiential Education Working Group, 2013, pg. 3).

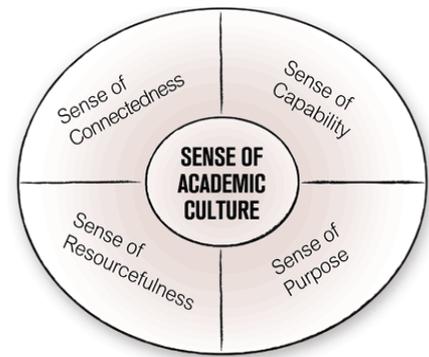


Figure 3. Lizzio, A. (2006). A conceptual model of first year transition.

## Case for Change

The case to develop and implement a first year experience strategic plan is compelling. Not only do both the student success literature and our academic plan call us to action, our retention information underscores the urgency and necessity to do so. Our low first year retention rates coupled with high attrition rates in some year 1 courses are cause for concern – not only for the success of our students, but because the implications for the University’s financial viability and reputation are at stake as well.

### Retention Rates

York University’s first year retention rate of domestic students in 2011 was 76.7%. In other words, 23.3% of domestic, first year, direct-entry, full-time and part-time undergraduate students registered in November 2011 withdrew prior to November 2012. This includes, among other cohorts, students transferring from other universities with little, or no, transfer credit thus underscoring the diversity and complexity of the first year experience. Of these, 11.1% left York because they wanted to and 12.2% left because they had to. Twenty-seven point one per cent of first year international students registered in November 2011 withdrew prior to November 2012. Of these, 12% left because they wanted to; 15.1% left because they had to.

It is important to consider why students leave voluntarily and why others are required to withdraw. The Leavers Study conducted in 2012 was instructive: students left because they were in the wrong program, under financial stress, or subject to what they describe as substandard academic advising. One of our recommendations includes repeating the Leavers Study to inform our FYE interventions.

Unfortunately, comparative retention data from across the Ontario system is not as granular; it only includes those students who are registered and enrolled as ‘full-time’ and does not delineate whether students have withdrawn voluntarily. Under this lens, York’s retention rate in 2011/12 (i.e., percentage of first-time, full-time, first year students in a given fall term who return to the institution in the next fall term) was 85.7%, ranking us thirteenth out of nineteen reporting institutions. Those universities with first year retention rates lower than York in 2011/12 were Windsor, Trent, Lakehead, Laurentian, Nipissing, and UOIT. Both of our primary competitors had higher retention rates: the University of Toronto (all campuses) was fourth with a comparable retention rate of 91.2%; Ryerson was eleventh with a comparable retention rate of 85.8%.

### **High Attrition Courses**

In 2012, 83% of all courses wherein more than 100 students dropped out, failed, or achieved a grade of D or less were 1000-level courses. Equally concerning, 16 of the 32 courses where 50% or more of the final grades were a D+ or less were focused on the first year. Clearly, attention is needed to understand and address this reality. Programs such as Health Aid in the Faculty of Health, evidence-based and theory-informed supplemental instruction programs, and Bethune College’s math bridging program have been constructed and demonstrated to support success in high-risk courses. But this is just a start. Expanding programs such as these and others designed to support student success in first year high-risk courses is a key short-term recommendation of the FYE working group.

### **Qualitative Data**

Qualitative information enriches our understanding of how to retain first year students. Through retention focus groups and other data collection efforts, the Office of Institutional Research and Analysis (OIRA) identified high-risk experiences and student attributes that affect retention at York University.

### ***Student Retention Focus Groups***

The student retention focus groups were conducted in 2012 by OIRA. They were part of a larger project focused on developing the knowledge, tools, and methods as antecedent “capacities” for engaging in the following kinds of activities, which figure largely into our recommendations:

- Acquiring “early warning” data from entering first year students.
- Using early warning data, in conjunction with other data, to produce accurate estimates of student-specific dropout risks for first year students.
- Using early warning data to inform responses to student-specific risk estimates.
- Using student-specific retention risk estimates to evaluate the efficacy of retention policies and programs aimed at mitigating first year dropout risks.

Drawing on concepts and methods from participatory action research (Reason & Bradbury, 2008) and systemic inquiry (Ison, 2010), the purpose of the focus groups was to share, discuss and integrate experiences, relevant research, points of view, and valuations of York’s student retention situation. The groups also enabled stakeholders to actively take part in identifying key “early warning” data gaps. This was done to increase the likelihood that new data acquisition activities would be meaningful and useful within the context of current institutional policies and programs at York concerning student retention. Focus group and workshop participants co-developed a rich, pluralistic description of the structure and functioning of attrition-event generating processes at York.

### ***Eight High-Risk Experiences at York University***

Eight high-risk student experiences were frequently mentioned during the retention focus group sessions:

1. ***Student experiences a confusing and overwhelming “blizzard” of information before arriving on campus.*** In the weeks that follow the acceptance of an offer of admission, new students receive a lot of information from a number of different sources at York – about University events, programs, services, policies, and procedures. Lack of coordination among various offices can lead to a sense of confusion and information overload.
2. ***Student does not attend orientation activities, or feels isolated or lost even after attending orientation activities.*** Orientation activities are intended to result in early and enduring involvement by students in the academic and social systems of York University (cf. Mullendore and Banahan, 2005). Students who do not attend orientation activities miss the opportunity to develop a sense of connectedness, resourcefulness, and culture (Lizzio) relative to the university. On the other hand, orientation can be a hectic and challenging social experience for some students and there is a risk that large-group orientation activities may leave some students feeling more isolated or lost in the crowd than they felt before.
3. ***Student does not get into program of choice and instead accepts a “switch” offer.*** Students who are not admitted into their first-choice program and instead accept an offer of admission into a different program can feel a limited sense of affinity for their program and a reduced sense of commitment compared to students who gain admittance to their first-choice program.
4. ***Academic expectations within a course are not communicated to the student in a specific and concrete manner.*** Students who have clear, accurate perceptions about what success looks like in a course – what they need to do (and not do) and when; what they need to produce – are more able to meet academic expectations. Academic and cultural expectations can differ dramatically between high school and university.
5. ***Student does not receive or understand early feedback regarding performance relative to course expectations.*** Not all new university students will be able to gauge how well they are performing in their first year courses before receiving their first set of grades. Obtaining very early feedback on academic performance within the first few weeks of classes provides more time for students to take corrective action before academic performance issues become difficult to overcome.
6. ***Student does not understand what his or her potential is as someone spending time and energy in a course.*** Pedagogies that link course content to real-world issues and the interests of students are more likely to engage today’s students, enhancing their sense of purpose and self-identity as university students.
7. ***Student is enrolled in one or more high-risk courses, that is, courses with 30% or higher drop/withdraw/fail rates.*** Some courses persistently have high dropout/withdraw/fail rates and may involve pedagogies and academic policies that represent institutional barriers to student success.
8. ***Student is confused about how to access advising and other support resources/services, or help is not available.*** Uncoordinated, bureaucratic, or poorly described processes for accessing supports and resources increase the likelihood that students will not know how – or will not be willing – to ask for help when they need it. And, of course, support service levels ought to be commensurate with demand.

### ***Characteristics of Students Who May Be At Risk at York University***

Six characteristics of at-risk students emerged through the retention focus groups:

1. ***Student does not hold realistic expectations about what university will demand of him or her, both academically and financially.*** Academic expectations can be dramatically different between high school and university, and as a result, many students have unrealistic expectations. These students do not put the necessary time and effort into their course work and they often fall behind quickly. Similarly, many students experience financial challenges as a result of inadequate planning and/or not fully understanding what is required of them financially. This is particularly true of students who are living away from home for the first time and find themselves responsible for living expenses.

2. ***Student does not hold necessary skills for university academics.*** Again, academics are drastically different at university than in high school. Many new students do not have the necessary academic literacies (particularly writing and research skills) or the learning skills and habits required for success in university.
3. ***Student feels that studies at York do not relate clearly to their personal interests, life aspirations, and/or career goals.*** This characteristic is particularly true of students who have accepted a switch offer (see Eight High-Risk Experiences at York University, above). But this characteristic is also true of other students who feel that some of their courses are not relevant to their interests. A low affinity to courses and/or the program can result in poor motivation and initiative.
4. ***Student feels isolated from university communities.*** Students who did not attend orientation, are not involved in co-curricular activities and programs, and commute to campus tend to have a poor sense of connection to other students, staff, and faculty, who all serve as important resources to new students.
5. ***Student is unwilling to speak up or does not know how to access required assistance.*** Many students who need help do not ask. This could be because they are embarrassed that they need help in the first place or because they do not know who to ask or where to go for help.
6. ***Student does not understand ethical and social expectations of university life.*** York University has high expectations for all of its students. New students are given the right to learn and participate as valued members of our learning community. With this right comes the responsibility to live and embody York's values. Students who do not understand and embody these expectations may feel disconnected or out of place, and they may experience a turbulent first year.

## First Year Experience Strategic Goals and Objectives

The FYE Working Group has established goals and objectives to guide and advance the creation of the first year experience framework at York.

### **New students will develop personal and academic competence, and a sense of purpose.**

York University can achieve this by:

- Ensuring students are clear about what will be expected of them academically.
- Investing in teaching resources for full- and part-time faculty, and teaching assistants.
- Investing in accessible learning resources/services.
- Providing career and academic advising that encourages reflection and builds a sense of purpose.
- Offering programs that foster practical competence and physical, emotional, and mental well-being.

### **New students will make meaningful connections with peers, faculty, staff, and York University.**

York University can achieve this by:

- Delivering effective, well-coordinated orientation programming.
- Expanding the recruitment, training, and deployment of peer mentors.
- Encouraging awareness and involvement in co-curricular experiences.
- Facilitating strategies for faculty, academic advisors, other staff, and peers to connect with students in and outside the classroom.

### **New students will understand and 'live' their rights and responsibilities as members of an inclusive, engaged learning community.**

York University can achieve this by:

- Facilitating opportunities for students to positively engage with York's mission and values.

- Educating students about their rights and responsibilities, and York’s behavioural expectations.
- Creating opportunities for students to have a meaningful voice in policy development, implementation, and enforcement.
- Creating mechanisms to hold all members of the York learning community accountable for their choices and behaviours.
- Providing opportunities for students to understand and honour differences.

**New students will be supported by policies, programs, and systems that foster success.**

York University can achieve this by:

- Reviewing, restructuring, and – if necessary – developing new transition programs.
- Implementing an early-alert system to identify students who may be facing adjustment/transition difficulties.
- Facilitating scheduling and enrolment to support student success.
- Developing a theoretically informed and evidence-based intervention and recovery framework.
- Building awareness of, and facilitating effective referrals to, campus resources.

## Validating the Framework

The FYE Working Group has tested the validity of the strategic goals and objectives, as well as Lizzio’s five senses, against the identified risk factors for students at York University. The following table presents the analysis and demonstrates that the FYE strategy is relevant to the York University student experience. More importantly, this table highlights the significant risk factors that lead to student attrition.

Table 2: Testing the first year experience framework and theoretical underpinnings with York University’s risk factors.

<b>First Year Experience Framework</b>	<b>Lizzio’s Five Senses</b>	<b>Risk Factors: A student is more at risk if he or she ...</b>
New students will develop academic competence and a sense of purpose.	Capability	... does not hold realistic expectations about what university will demand of them (academically, financially). ... does not hold the necessary skills for university academics.
	Purpose	... feels that studies at York do not relate clearly to personal interests, life aspirations, career goals.
New students will make meaningful connections with peers, faculty, staff, and York University.	Connectedness	... feels isolated from or pulled away from the university’s communities.
New students will be supported by policies, programs, and systems that foster success.	Resourcefulness	... is unwilling to access, or is unaware of how to access, required assistance.
New students will understand and ‘live’ their rights and responsibilities as members of an inclusive, engaged learning community.	Academic Culture	... does not understand ethical and social expectations of university life.

## Interventions: Current State and Gaps

Many individual programs and activities already exist at York to support student success in the first year. Several emerged through the Academic Innovation Fund (see Appendix B). Hoping to analyze our current state and uncover opportunities to provide recommendations to advance the FYE strategy, the FYE Working Group mapped York's current activities and programs against the four strategic goals. The team also grouped the programs according to whether the program was focused on prevention, intervention or recovery. Four overarching gaps were identified:

1. **Our current interventions are not tied to personas.** Our current interventions are not customized to the needs of unique cohorts of students. Interventions that are targeted and purposefully constructed around the unique needs of cohort groups, or personas, are considered the most effective (see Levels of Intervention Framework, pg. 9).
2. **Our current interventions are poorly coordinated.** Nothing unites our interventions; they exist in isolation. Our interventions should be incorporated into a single systematic, theoretically informed, and evidenced-based strategy.
3. **Our current interventions are under-evaluated.** The impact that our numerous and varied FYE activities and programs have on student success and retention is unclear. Our FYE vision and strategy embrace evidence-based decision-making; compelling evaluative data will assist us in leveraging the best and most effective programs.
4. **There is a relative absence of interventions at the recovery stage.** Even with programs in place at the prevention and intervention stages, a percentage of students will still fail. Therefore, effective recovery programs need to be part of an effective FYE strategy.

## Recommendations

Our gap analysis, literature review and reflection on best practices have inspired the following recommendations.

### Short-Term Recommendations

#### Focus on building enrollment intelligence to inform early-alert and effective interventions:

- i. Identify and source a technical “backbone” to collect information across the student lifecycle that will facilitate heightened SEM intelligence, identify students at risk, facilitate early alerts, and foster student engagement through two-way communication.
- ii. Repeat the Leavers Study annually for all students who depart – voluntarily – after their first year of study at York University. Information from this study will inform “recovery” programs.
- iii. Conduct a thorough evaluation of SPARK, the Library's virtual learning commons.
- iv. Further develop and affirm the first year experience initiatives evaluative criteria. Develop a template and timeline to review all existing programs.
- v. Create a First Year Experience advisory group made up of faculty, staff, and students to provide guidance to York University in the implementation of its FYE Framework.

### **Enhance key transition initiatives/academic support programs to positively impact first year retention:**

- i. Expand YU Start to include all direct entry/101 FW14 admits.
- ii. Sponsor a coordinated academic and social orientation program for all 101 and 105 FW admits that is built on clearly articulated learning outcomes and includes early exposure to career services.
- iii. Expand the use of peer supports to foster student success and increase student satisfaction.
- iv. Advance key PRASE Academic Advising Working Group recommendations. These include: (a) developing and launching a “live” on-line academic calendar; (b) developing and delivering a competency-based training program for academic advising staff; and (c) investigating and pursuing technical solutions to enhance the effectiveness, efficiency, quality, and accountability of academic advising at York.

### **Develop and implement strategies to incent first year Course Director and Teaching Assistants to adopt best practices:**

- i. Ask each Faculty/Dean to identify a First Year Experience Champion.
- ii. Direct all academic units to embed the first year experience in their Integrated Resources Plans with clearly identified objectives, measures of success, and accountabilities.
- iii. Enlist a small group of Associate Deans from across the campus to draft recommendations for embedding the First Year Experience Framework into the curriculum.
- iv. Ensure recognition through the Tenure and Promotions process for faculty who teach in the first year and adopt course design that reflects best practices.
- v. Focus on high-risk courses: engage the Colleges to expand Supplemental Instruction to cover more courses with DWF (dropped, withdrawal, failure) rates greater than 30%; pilot the use of mobile technology to provide continuous assessment and feedback, foster engagement, and collect analytics.
- vi. Engage Faculties and the Teaching Commons to offer professional development for faculty members and Teaching Assistants who would like to explore first year course redesign and/or delivery.

### **Long-Term Recommendations**

- 1. Explore the intentional inclusion of career development programming** in curricular and co-curricular aspects of the first year experience to support students' sense of purpose and systematically link the First Year Experience Framework to the Experiential Education case for change.
- 2. Expand the development of stand-alone, portable learning modules that can support students' development of academic literacies** inside and outside the classroom. These would provide a repository of accessible tools to support embedding the First Year Experience Framework into the curriculum. Explore the configuration of elective/not-for-credit mini-courses (e.g., University 101, Jump Start) that bring these modules together into a stand-alone form.
- 3. Develop policies and practices to support the implementation of a formal exit protocol for early leavers.**
- 4. Invest in additional on-campus employment opportunities for students as a means of heightening student engagement and sense of purpose.**
- 5. Develop cohort-specific recovery programs on the basis of institutional intelligence.**
- 6. Communicate the impact of the First Year Experience Framework to enhance our efforts in recruiting new students and reshaping our public-facing image.**
- 7. Expand pre-enrolment testing to support proactive institutional responses to cohorts of at-risk students.**
- 8. Establish early-alert practices based on student academic performance.**
- 9. Revision living-learning environments on campus.**

## References

- Astin, A. (1993). *What matters in college? Four critical years revisited*. The Jossey-Bass higher and adult education series. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Astin, A. (1984). Student involvement: A developmental theory for higher education. *Journal of College Student Personnel* 25, 297-308.
- Astin, A. (1996). Involvement in learning revisited: Lessons we have learned. *Journal of College Student Development* 37 (2), 123-134.
- Chickering, A., & Reisser, L. (1993). *Education and identity (2<sup>nd</sup> ed)*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Experiential Education Working Group. (2013). A case for change: Experiential education integration at York University.
- Gilligan, C. (1993). *In a different voice: Psychological theory and women's development*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Hardy-Cox, D., & Strange, C. (2010). *Achieving student success: Effective student services in Canadian higher education*. Montreal, QC: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Harvey, L., Drew, S., & Smith, M. (2006). *The first-year experience: a review of literature for the Higher Education Academy*. Retrieved October 4 from [http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/documents/archive/first\\_year\\_experience\\_full\\_report.pdf](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/documents/archive/first_year_experience_full_report.pdf)
- Ison, R. L. (2010). Systemic Inquiry. In: *Systems Practice: How to Act in a Climate Change World*. London, UK: The Open University.
- Kift, Sally M. (2008) The next, great first year challenge: Sustaining, coordinating and embedding coherent institution-wide approaches to enact the FYE as "everybody's business". In *11th International Pacific Rim First Year in Higher Education Conference, An Apple for the Learner: Celebrating the First Year Experience*, 30 June - 2 July 2008, Hobart.
- Kinzie, J. (2005). Promoting student success: What faculty members can do (Occasional Paper No. 6). Bloomington: Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research.
- Kohlberg, L., Levine, C., & Hewer A. (1983). *Moral stages: A current formulation and a response to critics*. Basel: Karger.
- Krause, K. (2006). On being strategic in the first year. Keynote presentation, Queensland University of Technology First Year Forum, 5 October 2006. Retrieved October 31, 2013, from <http://www.griffith.edu.au/centre/gihe/>.

- Kuh, G. D. (2005). Student engagement in the first year of college. In Upcraft et al., *Challenging and supporting the first-year student: A handbook for improving the first year of college* (pp. 86-108). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Kuh, G. D. (2007). What student engagement data tell us about college readiness. *reerReview*. 9 (1), pp. 4-8. Association of American Colleges and Universities.
- Kuh, G. D. (2001). Assessing what really matters to student learning: Inside the national survey of student engagement. *Change* 33 (3), pp. 10-17.
- Kuh, G.D., Cruce, T. M., Shoup, R., Kinzie, G., & Gonyea, R. M.. (2008). Unmasking the effects of student engagement on first-year college grades and persistence. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 79 (5), 540-563. Ohio State University Press.
- Kuh, G. D., Kinzie, J., Schuh, J., Whitt, E., & Associates. (2005). *Student success in college: Creating conditions that matter*. San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons.
- LaSere Erickson, B., & Strommer, D. (2006). Inside the first-year classroom: Challenges and constraints. In Upcraft et al., *Challenging and supporting the first-year student: A handbook for improving the first year of college* (pp. 241-256). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Lizzio, A. (2006). *Designing an orientation and transition strategy for commencing students. A conceptual summary of research and practice. First Year Experience Project*. Brisbane, Australia: Griffith University.
- Lizzio, A., & Wilson, K. (2010). Strengthening commencing students' sense of purpose: Integrating theory and practice. In *13th Pacific Rim First Year in Higher Education Conference*. Adelaide, Australia: Griffith University.
- Mullendore, R., & Banahan, L. (2005). Designing orientation programs. In Upcraft et al., *Challenging and supporting the first-year student: A handbook for improving the first year of college*. (pp. 391-409). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Pruitt, J., & Adlin, T. (2006). *The Persona Lifecycle: Keeping people in mind throughout the design process*. San Francisco, CA: Morgan Kaufmann.
- Reason, P. W., & Bradbury, H. (Eds.). (2008). *The Sage Handbook of Action Research: Participative Inquiry and Practice* (2nd ed.). London, UK: Sage Publications.
- Strange, C. , Banning, J. H. (2000). *Educating by design: Creating campus learning environments that work*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition* (2nd ed.). Chicago:, IL University of Chicago Press.
- Tinto, V. (2002). Promoting student retention: Lessons learned from the United States. In *11th Annual Conference of the European Access Network*, Prato, Italy. Retrieved October 31, 2013, from: <http://survey-dev.csuprojects.org/uploads/wp/79/wp79euh7GmrceQ2NVV112A/Tinto-re>

Tinto, V. (June 2008). Access without support is not opportunity. *Inside Higher Ed*. Retrieved October 31, 2013, from <http://www.insidehighered.com/views/2008/06/09/tinto>

University Academic Plan (UAP). Retrieved October 24, 2013, from York University website: <http://www.yorku.ca/secretariat/senate/committees/apprc/documents/UAP2010-2015.pdf>

Upcraft, M., Gardner, J., & Barefoot, B. (2004). *Challenge and support: Creating climates for first-year student success*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

White Paper Overview. Retrieved October 24, 2013, from York University website: [http://vpap.info.yorku.ca/files/2012/09/White\\_Paper\\_Overview\\_April\\_15.pdf](http://vpap.info.yorku.ca/files/2012/09/White_Paper_Overview_April_15.pdf)

Wintre, M., & Yaffe, M. (2000). First-year students' adjustment to university life as a function of relationships with parents, *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 15 (1), 9-37.

## Appendix A: Student Personas

Personas are fictitious, specific, concrete representations of our students (Pruitt and Adlin, 2006). They are derived from a synthesis of information gleaned from a number of different sources. One of these sources is institutional data.

York's personas are detailed profiles for various segments of the undergraduate student population, including: direct-from-high-school GTA; direct-from-high-school non-GTA; Ontario college transfers; Ontario university transfers; mature students with no previous PSE experience; and international students. Personas are created using survey data, research reports, and peer-reviewed literature, as well as qualitative data such as output from the student retention focus groups. The core logic of each student persona was developed collaboratively in a workshop setting by a group of York faculty and staff.

The student personas are designed to convey – in a memorable, engaging, and accessible way – a consistent set of insights into our students' goals, expectations, needs, attitudes, and behaviours. These insights serve to help individuals at York design different aspects of the student experience. These might include recruitment strategies and messaging, student transition and orientation programming, in-class learning experiences, co-curricular activities, and so on. Working with a consistent, commonly understood set of insights should help us create a coherent overall student experience.

The retention focus groups and the persona development workshops provided two different opportunities for York faculty and staff to work together towards a shared understanding of our undergraduate students and their first year experiences at York. The themes that emerged during these two sets of events echo the framework provided by Lizzio for synthesizing, and acting on the previous research on student experiences, retention, and success. They are connectedness, resourcefulness, capability, sense of purpose, and culture. These same themes are found in the FYE Framework.

## Appendix B: Selected FYE Programs, Activities, and Interventions at York University

### Projects and Activities

Academic Integrity Tutorial  
Clubs/organizations/teams  
Code of Student Rights & Responsibilities  
Course-Based Peer Mentorship Program (AIF)  
Enhancing the First Year Experience of Mature Students (AIF)  
Experiential Education  
Fine Arts Summer Intensive (AIF)  
Fostering First-Year Student Engagement, Academic Success through the HealthAid Network (AIF)  
Health Education & Promotion  
Healthy Campus (Phase I) – Mental Health Outreach, Education & Awareness (AIF)  
Jump Start – Successful Transition to University (AIF)  
Lions Achievement Program (AIF)  
Living/Learning Environments  
Math Bridging and Supplemental Instruction at Bethune (AIF)  
Orientation (Academic and Social)  
Peer Mentor Community of Practice  
Peer Mentoring Programs  
Project Advance (LDS)  
Red Zone  
REDI Tutorial  
Residence Theme Floor Living-Learning Communities Peer Academic Support (AIF)  
Science-First – A learning community for first-year students (AIF)  
SPARK/Virtual Learning Commons (AIF)  
Stong Academic Springboard: Supplemental Instruction for Students' Success (AIF)  
Student Ombuds Service (SOS)  
Supplemental Instruction Training (AIF)  
Supporting Academic Literacy Instruction within Courses (AIF)  
Transitions (AIF)  
Tutoring programs  
York University Incoming Student Transition Initiatives (AIF)  
YU Start (AIF)

### Campus Services/Functions

Academic Advising  
Atkinson Centre for Mature and Part-Time Students (ACMAPS)  
Career Services  
Change of major process  
Co-curricular week  
College Councils  
Colleges  
Counselling and Disability Services  
E-Learning/Technology Enhanced Learning  
Effective/facilitated referrals  
Experiential Education  
High DWF courses identified  
Learning Commons

Office of Student Conflict Resolution  
Outreach at mid-term/Early Alert and Intervention  
Student Financial Services  
Teaching Commons  
Tools to manage work/life balance  
York Federation of Students

**Recovery Programs**

Fundamentals of Learning (LA&PS)  
INSight (Faculty of Fine Arts)