

SGPS Response to “Where Next?”

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Preamble

The SGPS staff co-authored this document over the month of July 2010. An initial list of themes was drawn up by the Executive, which staff members added to or commented on by using an online, real-time Wiki program. Various points and wordings were discussed and edited over the course of the month, and these changes were immediately made public for everyone to see and give further feedback on. The Executive also sought input from SGPS members in faculties other than their own, and in the latter stages the Academic Affairs Standing Committee was solicited for input.

This document hopes to offer a graduate and professional student perspective on “Where Next?” as well as the near and long-term future of the University. Since its immediate use will be for the Academic Writing Team and Principal’s Office to consider as the school drafts an academic plan, we have provided an inventory of recommendations drawn from the body of the document. We hope these will clarify our thoughts and concerns and provide the University with a tangible set of ideas as it works through the academic planning process.

Executive Summary & Recommendations

If Queen’s attempts to grow in an interdisciplinary direction it must also seek to support the professional development and hiring of those students who pursue graduate studies in these programs. We should support the value of these degrees by purposely hiring

interdisciplinary PhDs and supporting journal publications that focus on interdisciplinary studies. In turn, these efforts will also help to ensure that Queen's remains competitive in offering increasingly sought-after courses, particularly at the post-graduate level.

"Where Next?" praises Queen's undergraduates as "outstanding" and graduate and professional students as only "high-quality" (4). We wonder why the reputation Queen's fosters as a first-class institution is not extended to these latter students. If the size of the University compared to larger schools does not prohibit us from lauding its undergraduate community, why does the school's size appear to count against the quality of its graduate and professional programs (see "Where Next?" on "'mega-research' universities" 14)?

In "Where Next?" graduate students tend to inhabit an unclear role at the University. They support a "research-intensive environment" as well as "a strong undergraduate education" (10) but are not made distinct from faculty who also contribute to these areas. While agreeing that graduate students are essential to both research and teaching at the school, we suggest that the academic plan attempt to describe the identity of the graduate student community more conspicuously. For one, it seems graduate students are also essential to the "knowledge economy" of Ontario and Canada.

Greater internationalization must also mean greater support of international students through services and funding. Queen's dedication to supporting students from outside Canada, we think, should be made explicit in the academic plan.

Any academic plan should treat equity, diversity, and inclusiveness as vital ingredients to the school's future. Further, we believe anti-oppression training and dialogue at the University need to be supported and made readily available (and known) to everyone. Proactive initiatives such as this can help make Queen's known outside its walls for "the inclusiveness of its community . . . and for its commitment to social responsibility" ("Where Next?" 6).

We would also like to see the value of professional programs at Queen's articulated in ways that reflect the special contributions they make to the University and the broader community. "Where Next?" refers to professional programs just once even though they provide some of the strongest links between the school and the public sector and Canadian society.¹ What responsibilities will Queen's assume as a training ground for future teachers and legal workers in the country?

Queen's University has recently made tremendous strides toward sustainability on campus. If any sustainability plan is to be actually implemented and followed through it needs to be written into bylaws, policies, and our mission statement whenever possible. It is imperative that Queen's continues to engage and promote sustainability in all of its endeavors through all levels of governance.

¹ We observe that professional students are missing in the tally of the various "estates" or groups at Queen's in "Where Next?" (10).

Body of Submission

Community

Queen's enjoys a national reputation for nurturing undergraduate community and socialization. In addition to strong Orientation-week traditions, our university's relative isolation from major urban centres and Kingston's walkable size make campus life integral to the social lives of most students year round. However, this spirit of community sometimes fails to encompass graduate and professional members of the student body. A number of factors contribute to an environment where non-academic undergraduate life overshadows graduate – financial support for undergrad social activities, few graduate and professional residence spaces, labour-intensive graduate and professional curricula, and at times cliquish departmental traditions. All the same, we do not believe these obstacles are insurmountable to achieving a healthy, inclusive, and lasting social life for graduate and professional students. We also believe that realizing this goal will benefit the communities in which our members live and interact.

Internationalization

The lack of external funding means that intl. students rely exclusively on internal funding. That funding needs to be improved not cut back as we've seen with the Intl. Tuition Award.

Tuition for intl. professional students increased this past year while tuition for intl. graduate students was "frozen". This should continue. We know that intl. students contribute heavily to the Queen's academic community both through their work and their tuition. Increased tuition would mean that intl. students are unable to contribute as much to Queen's academically as they will have to spend more time working to make money. This could also result in longer completion times or even higher dropout rates as funding ineligible intl. students would no longer be supported by internal funding. If tuition is to be increased, clear benefits to services relevant to intl. students at Queen's should be seen. (For example, QUIC should get more funding instead of its funding being cut three years in a row). Greater internationalization must also mean greater support of intl. students through services.

SGS needs to do more in lobbying the province to reinstate intl. students on OHIP. Ryerson and York administrations (check these facts) are heavily lobbying the province to do this.

Internal Graduate Funding

“Where Next?” seems to be concerned that Queen's is not attracting the number and quality of graduate-student applicants it desires (see “Response to ‘Where Next?’” below, paragraph 2). We wonder whether this indicates the University's inability to do so or its non-prioritization of graduate education. It already appears graduate funding from

provincial sources, for instance, have been used to supplement the University's overall expenses more so than directly supporting graduate students pursuing research in Kingston. The "Report on the Annual Budget 2009-10" claims that "Most of the funding received to date for graduate enrolment growth under Reaching Higher has been used to support graduate students" ("Report" 8). This claim is not supported by the breakdown of these funds the Report provides, however. Out of the \$8.4M Queen's received from the provincial Reaching Higher program between 2005 and 2009 more funds were absorbed by the operating budget (\$1.5M) than were allocated for Queen's Graduate Awards (\$1.4M) ("Report" 8). We wonder whether such practices of subsidizing the University's expenditures and undergraduate education² through graduate-dedicated funds have undermined our members' academic success while at Queen's. These practices also appear to have kept excellent graduate applicants from coming to Kingston. At the first biannual Graduate Forum this spring— an event we warmly welcome — the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies noted that the most common reason for graduate applicants to decline offers to study in Kingston is our uncompetitive funding packages. It seems the Ontario government provided Queen's with enough money to ensure this situation did not have to be the case. If graduate students have been underperforming or just not arriving, we would argue this situation has been created by certain, locatable fiscal decisions.

In regards to graduate funding, the SGPS is nervous about the ways in which graduate research is presented in "Where Next?" as a means to (continue to) sponsor undergraduate education. The use of Reaching Higher funds we have outlined above seem to be condoned by Principal Woolf, and here it may help to quote him at length:

"I have concluded that Queen's should not seek to emulate the 'mega-research' universities of the country. . . . There is too much else that we do well, especially in teaching and in the undergraduate out-of-class experience, to put all our eggs into chasing universities much larger than us. That being said, it is imperative that we maintain and increase our share of the federal granting council 'pie'. Apart from allowing us to do outstanding research, research performance here generates Indirect Cost funding (a modest and inadequate sum, but necessary), and determinates such things as our share of Canada Research Chairs." ("Where Next?" 14)

Our members take pride in being able to contribute materially to our school through the scholarships we achieve in highly competitive fields of research. Yet, how long will they be able to do so if these gains continue to be dispersed among other groups, needs, and stakeholders on campus? If the University pursues the strategy outlined above, our body fears that the financial support graduate students offer Queen's could be over-tapped very easily. At what point could internal funding packages become low enough to steer future NSERC, SSHRC, CIHR, and OGS recipients away from Queen's? We believe this a question the Academic Plan should consider quite seriously.

² Of Reaching Higher funds, 3.6M were used to fund graduate Teaching Assistantships, which constitute professional development for our members, certainly, but also labour for maintaining a high level of undergraduate achievement ("Report" 8).

We also want to offer some suggestions. Last month, the McGuinty government announced the creation of 1,000 new Ontario Graduate Scholarship Awards beginning with the 2010-11 competition. This is excellent news for graduate students across the province, but particularly at a school with typically smaller funding packages than other G13 schools. We encourage Queen's not to treat this as a chance to save money on internal graduate funding but to make up for lost time and close some gaps with comparable institutions. Specifically, we suggest that the University uses the money it saves on QGAs in 2011-12 and pursue any number of internal graduate funding initiatives, such as:

- (a) restore QGA minimums across campus to the 2008-09 levels
- (b) create internal funding opportunities for 5+ year doctoral candidates
- (c) restore International Tuition Awards to 2008-09 levels, or increase them beyond these levels
- (d) reintroduce tuition waivers or "post-residency" fees for upper-year or financially deserving PhDs

Equity

Campus Climate:

While the SGPS, much like Principal Woolf, recognizes the importance of ensuring "a welcoming and respectful environment" as well as "a culture of service to our multiple communities", much remains to be improved in order to make all students at Queen's University feel openly accepted on campus. Highly profiled attacks on racialized students and faculty occur almost yearly, and the built environment of Queen's campus itself is significantly inaccessible to people who may have one or several (dis)abilities. As attest equity and student advisor reports, certain students continue to be marginalized on the basis of their gender and sexual diversity, while mature students and students with dependents often feel that institutional policy and norms do not recognize their somewhat unique needs relative to a predominantly undergraduate student body.

The SGPS is committed to making Queen's physical environment, social climate, and institutional structures more equitable. Specifically, the equity team of the SGPS is committed to an institutional structure that ensures all activities and policies we implement are equitable and inclusive to our membership. These values will translate into better recruitment and retention of high quality graduate students. We have a strong presence on: the Diversity and Equity Taskforce, the Senate Educational Equity Committee, and Accessibility Queen's, among others.

This past year has also seen the formation of the SGPS Equity Committee, comprised of representatives from Queen's Coalition against Racial and Ethnic Discrimination (QCRED), the newly formed Queer Grad Students and Allies Club (QGSA), the Queen's Native Students Association (QNSA), SGPS Student Advisors, Accessibility, and Mature Students. Our mandate is to provide space to discuss and respond to equity concerns of SGPS members, to research and anticipate university policies and activities in order to address them early from equity perspectives, and finally, to voice and advocate for

equity-related concerns. Thus, the SGPS is implementing institutional mechanisms to ensure that documents such as the Principal's vision and future academic planning will recognize equity-related graduate student concerns. To do this, however, we must be confident that the administration is working with full transparency and accountability, and that their lip service to equity concerns is complemented by firm and visible action.

This year is also the first year that the SGPS has implemented mandatory equity training for all employees. We have had significant support from the Human Rights Office (HRO), and believe that anti-oppression training at Queen's University is imperative and necessitates a thriving and financially secure/fully-resourced HRO. The SGPS Equity Team is also organizing an anti-oppression workshop for Teaching Development Day run by the Centre for Teaching and Learning. Again, we believe this work to be vital to creating an open and supportive scholarly and social environment on campus, and look to the administration to continue to financially and ideologically support such initiatives.

Furthermore, the SGPS is working collaboratively with the Equity Office on an equity climate survey that seeks to elucidate the issues that our membership, and the greater Queen's community, face. As we consolidate and publish the results, we will need the resources and support from the administration to implement the necessary measures that will ensure an equitable climate at Queen's. This may include, among other things, a commitment to better training and counseling, more diverse curriculum, and transparent disciplinary measures for inequitable and discriminatory behaviour on campus. Only when there is financial and administrative commitment to these endeavours will Queen's be able to attract and retain the best students in the world, and truly be that "welcoming and respectful environment" for which we strive.

International Students:

Much of the concerns that the equity portfolio of the SGPS deals with are associated with international students and the unique discrimination that these students face. We very much appreciate that the Principal's vision of Queen's University is to support Internationalization. We worry, however that emergent mechanisms will focus predominantly on the retention of internationally recognized faculty members, while the needs of international students traveling to Kingston to study under these scholars will be considered an afterthought. We look to the administration to firmly commit to supporting these students by increasing their power and voice in student-supervisor relationships, and ensuring that there is transparent and appropriate recourse for any issues that may arise.

The SGPS Equity Team is also worried that this vision promotes a market-based approach to recruiting international students. If we truly value diversity and a globalized student environment, we cannot privilege only those students who exist in growing market economies (such as India and China) or those who can pay rising international tuition rates. We must ensure that grants, bursaries, and subsidies exist to make this world class institution accessible to all bright minds.

Tradition and Queen's Culture of Whiteness:

The vision statement also acknowledges that Queen's University has had, since its inception, a "potent and mysterious spell" that is "a critical part of our identity" and "gives us an edge in student recruitment". It begs consideration, though, from an equity standpoint, what exactly this "spell" and "identity" are, and which students are recruited because of it. To many within the broader Canadian university community, this reputation is one of privilege and whiteness. While this surely contributes positively to the recruitment of individuals (and their parents) who have access to significant capital, and gives Queen's its self-identified reputation as being 'Harvard North', it creates a culture of whiteness that is oppressive to many students, especially those who are racialized, and may dissuade many excellent candidates from coming to Queen's. Thus, while it is important that we maintain our reputation for good scholarship, the University must ensure that future recruitment activities target not just the privileged white elite, and that we move beyond the 'traditional' culture of whiteness within the student body, faculty and curriculum.

Of course, to overcome this culture of whiteness, faculty recruitment should also be a primary focus for Queen's. As the Henry Report revealed, racialized faculty find the University climate hostile to work and live. Thus, in order to attract and retain the best faculty (and as a direct consequence, the best students), we must have resources and initiatives to tear down the institutional barriers and oppressive climate that exists here, perhaps by identifying social inclusion as a primary goal within the vision outlined for our university.

Furthermore, and in direct relation to the culture of whiteness at Queen's, we must look to expand our curriculum beyond a predominantly Eurocentric focus if we truly wish to Internationalize. Not only will creating more courses with an afro-centric or asia-centric focus attract more students from these areas, but it will also enable students from Canada to better understand a globalized world.

Interdisciplinarity:

Recent interdisciplinary programs in Global Development Studies and Cultural Studies are promising steps in this direction, but we must continue to develop non-Eurocentric curriculum. Furthermore, if Queen's attempts to grow in an interdisciplinary direction, as outlined by Principal Woolf, the university must also seek to support the professional development and hiring of those students who pursue graduate studies in these programs. One of the primary concerns that graduate students have while pursuing interdisciplinary degree studies is that we will not be hired; popular and institutional discourse holds that if you are not trained in a specific discipline, you will have a difficult time publishing and gaining employment in a university setting. Thus, Queen's must support the value of these degrees by purposely hiring interdisciplinary PhDs, and supporting journal publications that focus on interdisciplinary studies. This, in turn, will also help to ensure that Queen's remains competitive in offering increasingly sought-after courses, particularly at the post-graduate level.

Students with Dependents:

Within a competitive academic job market, post-graduate students are increasingly under pressure to complete their programs in a timely manner, to obtain external funding (which is also tied to likelihood of timely completion), to develop both strong teaching and research dossiers, and to publish within and outside their research domains. Students with dependents must balance these responsibilities with the added demands of child care. At a time when child care is less than affordable, and waiting lists for access are growing, students with dependents are particularly vulnerable to attrition – or, also problematically, to taking longer periods of time to complete their post-graduate work. As a matter of making Queen’s a truly welcoming environment for all, and of making services accessible to this particular segment of our student community, access to safe, affordable on-campus child care is long overdue.

Overall, the SGPS Equity Team feels that a number of glaring omissions – notably the needs of already marginalized groups within the student body – must be more purposely addressed within the Vision Statement in order to foster cultural and social inclusivity, highlighted as one of the founding values of our institution. While change may indeed be at times “inconvenient, untidy and raises questions that we may not want to ask, about things we take for granted”, changes which work towards making Queen’s more equitable are absolutely “indispensable”, “bold”, and “innovative”. Such are the changes which we believe, in this time of transition, will make Queen’s a more diversely competitive and collegial space for all.

Sustainability

Queen's University has recently made tremendous strides toward sustainability on campus through incentives such as establishing the Sustainability Advisory Committee and GHG Reduction Working Group, Signing the University and College President's Climate Change Statement of Action, establishing a community garden, and many many more. Presently, there is a very healthy relationship between various student groups working in collaboration with University departments, sustainability office and administration and this is setting up a very fertile ground for future developments and enrichment of the Queen's community. This needs to be maintained through already established channels and committees (such as the Standing Advisory Committee) and through open discussions, healthy dialogues and open documentation in order for everyone to be informed on issues at hand and help contribute ideas for best possible decisions. Queen's University has access to immense resources: research groups, faculty, student groups, etc all willing to lend a helping hand for this joint cause; Queen's should not be afraid or reserved in seeking help when needed and take advantage of all our combined efforts and abilities in making Queen's a leader in sustainable practices. We are all in this together!

Most importantly if any sustainability concept/ idea/ plan is to be actually implemented and followed through it has to be written as a part of rules/ bylaws and other formal documents of policy whenever possible. It is imperative Queen's continues to engage and promote sustainability in all of its endeavors through all levels of its governance - administrative or student related to continue to entrench Queen's status as a leader and

not a follower in all aspects of education and research. This means the lessons and concepts taught and promoted should be followed and executed in offices, classrooms, cafeterias, residences, food courts, maintenance buildings and etc. Vast majority of the sustainable practices has an immediate social, economic and health returns and we must engage and demonstrate their potential for all of the World to see and benefit from.

Collaboration

Queen's university has tremendous resources at its fingertips: from ideas and minds of its faculty and students to scientific tools and research programs. All of the departments have something beneficial to contribute to any project and all of our collaborative ideas, resources and knowledge can only improve any project - this collaborative spirit not only fosters good relations between departments and students but the power of numbers and diversity of expertise enhances ideas and allows for best possible decision-making.

AMS and Undergraduate Colleagues:

For a long time our graduate-student members have enjoyed working closely with undergraduate colleagues through teaching and research assistantships. We are very interested in exploring new ways to build on these relationships. One possibility, which we have begun discussing with the AMS, includes developing a mentorship program for undergraduates interested in pursuing graduate studies.

Open Access/ Open Source:

Within the context of collaboration Queen's should promote and make available as many open access/ open source programs and tools as possible. Open Access/ Open Source programs are very inexpensive tools, promote sharing and collaboration and are slowly becoming the norm in the computing industry. We need to know what projects are people working on in order to be able to collaborate and aid each other. Q Share is an amazing tool and there needs to be more of such programs and softwares which help us connect with each other, gain knowledge, exposure and to be able to harness our collective wisdom.

Service Learning/ Hands-on Experience:

Service learning programs and hands-on experience should be engaged in as much as possible both for the enhancement of classroom knowledge as well as community and collaboration. Studies show that service learning within classroom provides an additional layer to students' theoretical knowledge and in many cases provides a far more knowledge retention in general. In addition, hands-on projects foster a sense of accomplishment, test out and apply theories and ideas from classroom in practice and can be used effectively to lay out the necessary groundwork for departments and the Queen's University instead of having to hire outside companies. For this to happen there need to be better mechanisms in place to allow for a healthy communication, advertisement of skills and ideas and exchange of knowledge for groups to find each other and collaborate. Internet and the power of online posting and search engines should be engaged with searchable projects, groups and data/ reports readily available for everyone to benefit from. There are plenty of Open Source softwares which would cost the University

nothing to implement. For example a computer science class can work on a project to design, upload and establish the database using one of such free programs, the school of Communication can work on advertising it and making sure everyone is aware of it and then individual departments can post relevant projects and reports pertaining to any number of topics.

Direct Response to “Where Next?”

Perhaps our greatest concern regarding “Where Next?” is its argument that undergraduate education is what Queen’s does best, thus lending it prominence over graduate and professional education in the Academic Planning process. While the Principal observes, for instance, that graduate students have traditionally formed one of the three primary “communities” or “estates” at Queen’s (10), we cannot help but notice that the centrality of this community appears to be devalued when the Principal turns to the future of the University. In what may be Principal Woolf’s most optimistic statement on the potential of this institution in “Where Next?” graduate students figure as merely one ingredient of a “research-intensive environment” that supports “a strong undergraduate education” (10). Our members are neither made distinct from faculty who also contribute to this research environment nor identified as another “strong” community of learners at Queen’s.

This is not to say that “Where Next?” fails to mention graduate or professional students. Both groups, we are pleased to see, are included in the document’s overarching remarks: “We must preserve this university as a balanced academy that offers an outstanding undergraduate experience enriched by high-quality graduate and professional programs within a research-intensive environment” (4). We are concerned about what it means for our members, however, that they are here to “enrich” the primary, undergraduate mission of the University and that our undergraduate colleagues receive greater praise in Woolf’s diction. We wonder why the reputation Queen’s fosters as a first-class institution is not extended to graduate and professional students. Further, what metrics, assumptions, or traditions allow us to measure Queen’s undergraduates as “outstanding” and Queen’s graduate and professional students as only “high-quality”? All of these programs and students could benefit from an academic plan that takes for granted that all learners on campus constitute the core mission of the school.

The SGPS certainly recognizes the significance of undergraduate education at Queen’s. They are the students we help teach, grade, and learn from - and they constitute the majority of any single group on campus. Our concern is that if the University moves forward under the impression that these programs and students should form our central mission, the success of our members will be put in jeopardy. This could spell jeopardy in various ways for the research and teaching Queen’s already succeeds at. Graduate and professional academic prospects, social life, alumni relations, Kingston and community ties, and private and public funding avenues would perhaps suffer from an exclusive emphasis on undergraduate education. The graduate and professional community, despite its challenges, succeeds in attracting first-class members. An academic plan that forgets this would be incomplete.