



York University: Stop denying extensions, respect your own equity commitments!

We, the undersigned members of the York University community, are deeply concerned by the administration's repeated violations of graduate students' human rights and callous disregard towards the difficult realities faced by today's graduate students—especially but not solely disregard for those with disabilities or other Ontario Human Rights Code-based grounds for accommodation, and/or international students. York's actions send a clear message to graduate students with disabilities, care responsibilities, financial difficulties, or international status that their wellbeing does not matter.

Since at least Fall 2024, the Faculty of Graduate Studies (FGS) has increased the pressure on graduate students to meet program milestones and timelines regardless of the circumstances they might be facing. That increased pressure has taken the concrete form of pressure from graduate programs, an unprecedented hike in enrollment blocks, and a marked increase in the number of denials of extension requests.

This is most acute for graduate students with disabilities or family care responsibilities. These students have rights in the CUPE 3903 Collective Agreement guaranteeing them funded extensions, in recognition of the real toll illness, disability, and family care responsibilities can have. Yet, FGS is ignoring these rights and denying codes-based extensions. Denials of these extensions used to be quite rare; yet this academic year, several students were denied extensions on grounds that would typically have been approved in the past. These denials—which are in multiple cases being handed down by someone with no training in human rights-based adjudication—do not give clear reasons for the denial, despite the fact that providing a basis for denials, in writing, is a Collective Agreement requirement.

While CUPE 3903 was able to reverse 50% of these denials, doing so required arguing that similar medical documentation had been sufficient to substantiate academic or workplace accommodations. Not only does the FGS appeals process rest with the very same person who denied the original petition to consider the appeal, but FGS is issuing refusals to even allow for an appeal. This is in flagrant opposition to the concept of fairness and transparency, and clearly contradicts principles and approaches followed by a number of York's own human-rights-based offices, such as Student Accessibility Services; Health, Safety and Employee Wellbeing; and The Centre for Sexual Violence Response, Support & Education.

International students are also disproportionately impacted by this shift towards more aggressive completion timelines. In order to remain in the country and not jeopardize their chance at a Post-Graduate Work Permit, international students must retain full-time enrollment. Yet, FGS has been inconsistent about whether needing to stay in the country is a good enough reason to allow international students to get time limit extensions. International students are willing to pay exorbitant tuition for the chance to finish their degrees, yet York is behaving arbitrarily around considering international students' precarious circumstances.

We are seeing a clear pattern and policy shift on FGS's behalf to push completion at the expense of all else, including human rights and students' wellbeing. There is no evidence that this approach will actually result in higher completion and graduation rates. On the contrary, we are concerned that the shifts in practice will result in delayed graduation and program withdrawals as graduate students scramble to fund their education. In other words, York's moves to apparently shorten completion times and improve completion rates would seem to be having the opposite effect, while placing students under increased pressure and precarity.

Consequently, we demand that the York University administration live up to its stated commitment to equity by taking the following steps:

1. Respect the Ontario Human Rights Code and the CUPE 3903 Collective Agreement by resolving the grievances filed by CUPE 3903 regarding Code-based extensions
2. Commit to delivering adequate training for administrators who are responsible for adjudicating Code-based petitions, including creating clear guidelines about what constitutes adequate documentation for extension requests
3. Commit to providing clear reasons in writing for each petition denial
4. Create a transparent and accountable petitions appeal process in which the original adjudicator is not also the person deciding the appeal
5. Recognize that Code-based extensions are collective agreement rights that can be enforced through the grievance process, and not simply an academic matter

Further, we demand that York University act with fairness and compassion towards all graduate students by doing the following:

1. Remove completion-related enrolment blocks for graduate students currently enrolled at the university
2. Clearly communicate the enforcement of timelines/milestones for future students
3. Ensure that all York's required portals, websites, and processes work as designed, and that graduate students are not penalized if they do not
4. Maintain York's own posted timelines for research ethics approval and enforce standards on departments and faculty for response timelines
5. Act with fairness and compassion towards all graduate students by considering factors such as economic need and immigration status when considering completion milestones and extension applications

Signed,

Art History Graduate Students' Association
Communication & Culture Graduate Students' Association
Earth and Space Science Graduate Student Association
Gender, Feminist, & Women's Studies Student Association
Geography Graduate Students Association
Graduate Film Students' Association (Cinema and Media Arts)
Graduate History Students' Association
Graduate Political Science Students' Association
PhD Environmental Studies Students' Association
Science and Technology Studies Graduate Students' Association
Social Anthropology Graduate Students' Association
Social & Political Thought Graduate Students' Association
York Sociology Graduate Students
CUPE 3903 Executive Committee
York University Graduate Students' Association Executive Committee