



March 24, 2025

Re: York University suspension of admissions to the Religious Studies Program

As of next year, York University is proposing that not a single one of its 53,000 students will be able to enrol in the Religious Studies Program. What is this message meant to convey? By excluding the study of religion from the majors available to incoming students, York University is suggesting that the study of religion doesn't matter.

Religion matters. It is part of the Canadian university story and democracy, the story of Indigenous peoples, residential schools and traditional spirituality in Canada. Religion is the scaffolding that provides support as refugees are forced to flee homelands and motivates the outreach that helps people when they arrive with nothing.

Religion was supposed to end as society became more secular. It didn't. And while it is true that Canadian churches have declining congregations, people still cleave to beliefs and practices that mark the significance of religion and spiritual belonging from birth to death. A growing number of Canadian newcomers are religious as evidenced by the need for prayer rooms on campuses and interfaith dialogue in the face of anti-immigrant sentiments in society and the political arenas.

Religion matters as we struggle with new kinds of exclusions from increasing poverty, a lack of affordable housing, and a growing population of unhoused and unacknowledged citizens. What does it say about York University if it chooses to exclude the study of religion to make space for other programs deemed more valuable?

As society moves toward a future with increasing climate uncertainty, AI, and polarized politics, is there no place for a student who wishes to understand Islamophobia and Anti-Semitism, Sikhism, and maybe even Buddhism? Has humanity lost its currency in the late capitalist marketplace?

We urge York University to reconsider its decision to cut admissions to its Religious Studies program.

*Alison Marshall*

Sincerely,

Alison Marshall, PhD

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