



March 25, 2025

Dean JJ McMurtry
Faculty of Liberal Arts and Professional Studies
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Subject: The Suspension of First-Year Admissions to the Department of Religious Studies

Dear Dean McMurtry,

I write as President of the Canadian Corporation for Studies in Religion, an umbrella organization of nine Canadian societies in theology and religious studies in Quebec and the Rest of Canada, to express my deep concern regarding the recent decision to suspend new admissions for first-year students into the undergraduate programs of Department of Religious Studies at York University. This decision is troubling for several reasons, and I urge the administration to reconsider its position. Learned societies in Canada are watching this decision with considerable trepidation and concern.

First, this suspension undermines York University's commitment to decolonization equity, diversity, and inclusion. York University has long been a leader in advancing critical conversations on religion and social justice, providing students and surrounding communities with the tools to analyze and challenge systems of oppression. Religion and non-religion are key phenomena that shape our worlds locally and globally. Indeed, the need for such academic programs in the Humanities and Social Sciences has never been greater. Reducing access to these essential fields of study contradicts the university's stated values of fostering inclusive and progressive teaching and scholarship.

Second, the financial justification for this decision disregards the broader impact of interdisciplinary studies. While the university's budget model (SHARP) prioritizes single-major enrollments, it fails to recognize the significant contributions of Religious Studies in supporting double majors, minors, and certificate programs. Many students pursuing degrees in other

disciplines rely on courses from this department to complement their studies and develop critical perspectives necessary for careers in law, public policy, education, and social services. Weakening the Department will ultimately diminish the academic richness of York University as a whole. Fewer students (and scholars) will be attracted to your programming.

Third, this decision sends an ominous message to both current and prospective students about York's commitment to decolonial and intersectional scholarship. Instead of suspending new admissions, the university should invest in strengthening and expanding the program, ensuring that future generations of students can engage with these vital issues in a rigorous and critical academic setting.

I therefore urge you and York's university administration to reconsider this decision and explore alternative solutions that prioritize both financial sustainability and the continued success of the Department of Religious Studies. It matters a lot to your students, faculty, staff and surrounding communities, including us with the Canadian Corporation for Studies in Religion.

Sincerely,



Pr. David Koussens
President
Canadian Corporation for the Studies in Religion