

January 22, 2010

To: Professor Asia Weiss, Associate Dean (Academic) FGS and Chair
From: Alex Murray, President, ARFL

Re: FGS Task Force on Appointments and Reappointments to the Faculty of Graduate Studies

I am submitting comments on behalf of the Executive of ARFL (Association of Retired Faculty and Librarians) at York University. Our mandate is to defend and promote the rights and interests of retired faculty and librarians. For this reason my comments about the preliminary recommendations and consultation document circulated by the Task Force are limited to issues that may be of concern to our membership as follows:

1) FGS and interdisciplinary graduate programmes:

One of York's strengths has been its interdisciplinary character. Indeed some undergraduate and graduate programmes have grown in response to the demand by students for interdisciplinary studies with cross-appointed faculty. In graduate programmes this need may be met on an ad hoc basis by faculty who are cross-appointed or drawn from a variety of hiring units. Interdisciplinary scholarship is one of the legacies of older and retired faculty yet by the omission of a statement about the need for graduate faculty for interdisciplinary programmes and the reference to a single hiring unit throughout the paper there appears to be an assumption that graduate programs are based in one discipline.

How are appointments to interdisciplinary FGS programmes and those drawing on the skills and knowledge of faculty on an inter-Faculty basis to be taken into account as hiring units for new appointments may limit their consideration to a single discipline or Faculty? This may be an area where post-retirement faculty are of particular benefit to graduate programmes and FGS.

2) FGS Appointment Categories and Eligibility:

Members Emeriti represent a resource that graduate programmes may draw upon to enable graduate students to complete their studies or to assist graduate programmes to meet their obligations when the need and demand for knowledgeable and experienced faculty cannot be met by full-time faculty.

When individual post-retirement faculty teach, supervise or participate on committees for FGS they are expected to carry out this work under the same terms and conditions as full-time faculty who are appointed to FGS. But the tone and conditions outlined for Professor Emeriti in this document appear to assume that age is equivalent to a mental or medical condition warranting limitations and the retired faculty are treated as a group rather than as individuals with a variety of strengths and abilities as is the case with full-time faculty.

This assumption is evident in the conditional approval of principal supervision by post-retirement faculty. But also of concern is the open-ended statement that "The graduate program may place further limitations on the activities of Members Emeriti." What are the grounds for such a statement? Does this open-ended reference apply to the current limitations that apply to all appointments to FGS? Or does the statement mean that Professors Emeriti may have additional limitations placed on their scope of work that are not applied to pre-retirees?

One of ARFL's concerns with this section of the discussion paper is that limits on the participation of individual post-retirement faculty may reflect a systemic ageist attitude and thus stifle the contribution retirees may be able and willing to make to the University. There is no entitlement by post-retirement faculty to membership in FGS or to the individual graduate programmes but the underlying assumption of the document appears to be that once FGS and the University have appointed a retired faculty member to FGS for a limited term there is a need to provide further conditions over and above those required for pre-retirees. We do not share this assumption. Where is the evidence to support the additional limits?

Ageism as a form of discrimination may occur in intergenerational workplaces and for this reason it should be of concern to older workers regardless of their status as full-time, part-time or retired faculty and librarians and to younger members as they will age too. Older faculty who remain in the university, especially since the end to mandatory retirement, and those who retire or phase-in their retirement and wish to maintain their research interests or to continue to teach under the terms of Article 14 may experience age discrimination either by finding their opportunities reduced or by having to accept the assignments that younger faculty and librarians cannot or do not wish to do.

When conditions are placed on retired faculty that reflect ageism it may be the university that loses – especially when their academic resources cannot meet demand or the promises made to students. Some full-time faculty and librarians may even conclude that continuing as an active scholar or researcher is fruitless because the support and recognition they received earlier in their careers is no longer provided while retired members may find their efforts to continue to be active scholars or researchers frustrated by ageism.

We believe that older pre-retirees and retirees who continue to associate themselves with scholarly activities and research are often confronted by colleagues with systemic and negative beliefs such as age means “out of action” yet there is substantial evidence to the contrary. We are concerned that ageism may result in involuntary withdrawal from the academic community by both pre-retirees and retirees because negative assumptions and anecdotes have been applied to a group rather than reasonable terms and conditions applied on an individual basis when warranted by evidence.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with the FGS Task Force to discuss the past and future conditions for participation of retired faculty in graduate activities.

Yours sincerely

Alex Murray
President, ARFL

cc.

Douglas Peers, Dean Graduate Studies/Professor, History
Suzanne MacDonald, Chair and Associate Professor, Psychology
Ben Richardson, Graduate Program Director and Associate Professor, Law
Nell Tenhaaf, Associate Dean, Fine Arts/Associate Professor, Visual Arts
Daphne Winland, Graduate Program Director and Associate Professor, Anthropology
Paul Tonin, Academic Affairs Officer, Graduate Studies (Secretary)