

Request for Provincial Inquiry into Safety at York University

York University failed Qian Liu and is continuing to fail this dynamic forward-looking young woman who came from China to study in Canada and was brutally killed on April 15, 2011, because York University has refused to address the systemic, entrenched trivialisation of violence on campus and on the just-off campus 'village' where many students live.

York University Board of Governors failed Qian Liu, York University President Mamdouh Shoukri failed Qian Liu, and York University Faculty Association failed her. Student organisations have been speaking out against poor safety on campus for years, but the Faculty Association, who has a moral obligation to show leadership, has taken no initiative.

The news release announcing the renewal of President Shoukri for another five-year term speaks of campus development, new buildings and better engaging with the community. Nowhere is there any mention of the fundamental question of safety. In the official new release concerning the funeral service for York student Qian Liu, President Shoukri talks of tragedy, but does not call it by its name, homicide. Nowhere in the press release does the University speak of the need for an inquiry into how this murder could happen in a student housing neighbourhood so close to the University.

Under pressure from students and other concerned members of the York community, York reluctantly commissioned METRAC to carry out a campus safety audit in 2008 and 2009. This was not an independent report. METRAC worked closely with the University Safety Audit throughout the process. The final report was only filed in June 2010, and the care METRAC takes to portray University efforts positively suggests that negotiations may well have taken place to downplay safety concerns for University public relations purposes.

The METRAC report nonetheless highlights numerous important issues with respect to safety at York University, including lack of accountability and systematic implementation policies, and makes specific recommendations. The Report indicates clearly that safety improves when senior management is perceived to show determined leadership.

Almost one year years after the METRAC consultation, there is still sign that York University Administration has recognised the need for a major change in attitude on campus safety. This spring, not only was Qian Liu murdered, but two other women students were sexually assaulted on campus. In its update on the report on the latest rape, the University indicates the student received counselling and the Toronto Police are on the case, but again, nowhere is the question asked why, after the recent safety audit of the university, these assaults are still happening. On the contrary all signs point to a continuing trivialisation of these incidents, and a sloughing of responsibility.

Being able to study on a university campus without fear for one's safety is a fundamental right. That students, and particularly women students, continue to be the target of brutal violence on the campus of Canada's third-largest university is simply unacceptable and shameful.

Academic Women for Justice is asking the Ontario government for an inquiry into safety at York University.