

University Affairs Board, Vice-Provost Students' Report # 5

In February, Toronto Mayor David Miller announced he was forming an advisory panel on community safety, under the leadership of Ontario Chief Justice Roy McMurtry. The panel was formed in the wake of escalating violence in several Toronto neighbourhoods, involving young people and the use of guns. The terms of reference for the panel are broadly defined, and include the development of action plans for identified at-risk neighbourhoods, as well as innovative programs and services for communities where violence has increased.

The University responded by offering several kinds of assistance to the Mayor's panel. The first initiative was an offer of expert advice on all topics included in the terms of reference. On April 2, the University convened a day-long workshop of researchers and faculty from York University, Ryerson University and the University of Toronto. This group met to identify the most relevant and up-to-date research about 'best practice' in addressing the challenges of youth violence and creating safe and vibrant communities. On June 25, the University will host a colloquium at UTSC for all members of the Mayor's Panel, as well as invited City of Toronto staff members and staff from community agencies. University researchers and academic colleagues will present a series of papers and panel presentations, outlining the findings of the most current research addressing the Panel's mandate. In doing so, the Toronto area universities will provide the Panel with relevant research and ideas about public violence and strategies to address the City's immediate concerns.

The University also will contribute to the work of the Mayor's Panel, particularly to the rebuilding of community resources and the strengthening of neighbourhoods, by expanding our involvement in community service opportunities for students. University of Toronto students are already involved in a range of community service and community activity, including: volunteer activities such as mentoring and tutoring; co-curricular community services, such as assistance with recreational or educational programs; academic service learning, such as upper-year courses that include capacity-building in conjunction with community organizations; and internships and field placements.

While there is considerable activity on this front, much of it occurs in isolation from other divisions. As part of our contribution to the work of the Mayor's Panel, the University has offered to focus a part of its student community services to those projects identified by the Panel as high priority. The University's stepped-up contribution in this area will be coordinated through the Office of the Vice-Provost, Students. Working with community agencies identified by the Mayor's office and staff from Community and Neighbourhoods, as well as the Youth Cabinet and other groups involved with these issues, we will be able to locate areas of high need where student involvement would be appropriate and welcomed.