

York University continues Scholar's Hub program ?@Home?

The definition of ?democracy? along with rights and freedoms in a rapidly changing world ? have recently been hot-button issues in this uncertain time.

In fact, they were issues due to be tackled at the Aurora Public Library (APL) this past April as the Library and York University planned to host the second lecture in their Scholar's Hub partnership launched last fall.

Plans to host a York University professor on the topic of democracy had to be pushed to the backburner as APL was forced to close its doors in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, but the partnership is moving forward in a new way ? virtually ? in Scholars' Hub @ Home.

Now a series of webinars, York's partnership with APL was renewed this Wednesday, July 22, with Exploring the Summer Skies, a talk on astronomy and developments in space research carried out by the university, with future talks ? free for everyone, regardless of educational background ? resuming on a bi-weekly basis.

?The entire world changed,? says Kairi Williams, Associate Director of Alumni Events for York University. ?The challenge then became?how do we still fulfil the organization's mandate under these new circumstances with the pandemic? That was the question many of us were trying to answer and we're also trying to answer at York. It really came down to moving, transitioning this in-person experience to a virtual experience. The difference is we actually found a way to do this where it almost didn't matter where you were in the world, you could be a part of this experience.?

York subsequently pre-recorded two lectures for Scholars' Hub @ Home, each of which were well-received, as was a third lecture that was livestreamed, and going live is the order of the day moving forward.

?We have the same premise, which is to deliver lectures from academics from York related to topics that are current, relevant and now,? says Ms. Williams.

From APL's perspective, they were looking for ways to continue their partnership with York in this ?new normal? and they were eager to jump on board with this new virtual format.

?This is an opportunity to be curious and engaged,? says Reccia Mandelcorn, APL's Manager of Community Collaboration. ?It is so important to keep alert with the things that are going on in the world, especially when many of us are not being a part of that world. I love the opportunity that every two weeks, two o'clock on a Wednesday afternoon, people will be able to tune in and listen to a short lecture on something they may have always been interested in or didn't even know they were interested in. I look at this as not a substitution but a whole different experience.?

As they began looking at transitioning to a virtual world, York was trying to make sense not only of the pandemic itself but how that reality would inform the future. They wanted to look at how the ?new normal? was going to impact how people interact, as well as economic and societal impacts. They explored how COVID-19 was impacting mothers, the homeless, and even the ?politics of vaccines? and how that will shape the future.

Incidents at home and abroad, including the killing of George Floyd, sparked a discussion on anti-Black racism as well as the Black Lives Matter movement.

?We said, ?we've got to do this too? because our commitment is to do things that are timely, relevant and just relatable,? says Ms. Williams. ?Those two topics basically took us through the Spring?and our highest attended sessions were those two sessions on anti-Black racism because it really seemed to resonate with people who wanted to know what is going on.

?People aren't done hearing about COVID, they're also not done hearing about anti-Black racism.?

While these sessions have proved to be well-attended, this is not the only measure of success being eyed by York and the APL. Although numbers are important, Ms. Mandelcorn says her own personal yardstick is how people may have been challenged and changed at the end of a lecture.

?How have people's lives been changed? How have they opened up? If one person walked away and was changed and impacted, that's my measurement,? she says.

Adds Ms. Williams: ?This series is part of supporting York's reputation as being a leading educational institution featuring York's scholars, whether they be professors or researchers. Just also advancing knowledge and thought leadership within our communities ? with people who are sort of surrounding the university either physically or even virtually. Thought leadership, getting people to question and think differently about things, is part of what an educational institution stands for. Tactically, we're always looking to have more people coming and coming back, but holistically it is about furthering York's mission to be an inclusive and progressive educational organization.?

For more on Scholars' Hub @Home, visit aurorapl.ca or register for upcoming discussions at yorku.zoom.us/webinar/register. The next lecture will take place Wednesday, August 5, from 12 noon to 12.45 p.m., and will feature Silvia Vasquez Olguin on gardening and food sustainability.

By Brock Weir