

Schulich Leaders reflect on their meeting with York University's president

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What makes a progressive university? What advice would you give to incoming students? How do you deal with controversy? These are just a few of the questions York University's Schulich Leaders asked President and Vice-Chancellor Mamdouh Shoukri during an informal meeting. Six of York's nine Schulich Leaders, a group of undergraduate scholarship winners in science, technology, math and engineering (STEM), joined the president in the Kaneff Tower to discuss issues that affect them and the University.



Schulich Leaders meet with York President and Vice-Chancellor Mamdouh Shoukri. From left: Ben Shachar, fourth-year biology student; Kyra McLellan, second-year space engineering student; Rathesh Balendran, first-year biomedical sciences student; Betty Seifu, third-year civil engineering student; Mamdouh Shoukri, York University president and vice-chancellor; Arma Khan, first-year mechanical engineering student; and Nadav Gasner, first-year biophysics student

Established in 2011, the Schulich Leaders Scholarships is an award program that supports promising STEM students in becoming the next research and technology innovators. Funded by the Schulich Foundation, a philanthropic organization founded by Canadian businessman Seymour Schulich to benefit educational institutions in Canada and Israel, this \$100-million endowment fund provides 50 undergraduate scholarships at top Canadian universities every year.

"One of the things that I enjoy most is meeting with students, and I'm very happy to have the chance to meet and talk with you as young achievers and future leaders," said Shoukri. "These kinds of meetings are an opportunity for me to hear directly from you, our students, about the student experience."

At the meeting, Shoukri spoke candidly about his life as an engineering researcher before entering university administration and the lessons he has learned over his nearly 10-year tenure as York's president.



Schulich Leaders are joined by York staff members for a roundtable discussion with the president

"It was great to get his advice and guidance on a number of topics," said Kyra McLellan, a second-year space engineering student, who spent last summer working at the Planetary Volatiles Laboratory on a project to help reduce lasering of aircraft. "I enjoyed hearing about his journey to where he is today. It was a great reminder that life can take us anywhere, and we'll always end up where we're meant to be."

"This meeting was important because it's my first year at York, and who better to learn from than President Shoukri himself," added first-year biomedical sciences student Rathesh Balendran, who volunteers in the Regent Park community as a high school computer teacher and founder of the neighbourhood's Gaining Higher Education to Teach Others (GHETTO) program.

Shoukri encouraged the students to use their university years to focus not only on their fields of study but to expand their horizons, read voraciously and meet as many new people as possible.

"The advice that resonated most with me was to take advantage of the diversity of people we're exposed to at York to develop a deeper understanding of other cultures," said Nadav Gasner, a first-year student studying biophysics whose scholarship will enable him to pursue volunteer and research opportunities in Israel this summer. "I walked out of that meeting with a new perspective on university life."

"The Schulich Leaders Scholarships significantly impacted my ambitions and perspective of my role in this world, and meeting with President Shoukri further inspired me to broaden my leadership skills to tackle global problems," said Arma Khan, a first-year mechanical engineering student who works with an NGO to further women's rights. "This meeting helped me to realize that our success stories can begin with unplanned ventures. I can't imagine missing out on President Shoukri's words of wisdom."

The president also highlighted the importance of remaining in contact with the Schulich Leaders network and sharing their knowledge for cross-collaboration purposes.

"I am incredibly privileged to have met and befriended the other Schulich Leaders," said fourth-year biology student Ben Shachar, co-founder of the Random Acts of Kindness Project, a movement of students doing acts of kindness, which has expanded to more than 15 campuses worldwide. "I thought that the dialogue with the president proved meaningful and raised substantive issues."

The Schulich Leaders met with the president on Nov. 7, 2016.

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