

# RED Project Report

Rights, Equity, and Diversity in  
Postsecondary Campus in  
Lethbridge  
2019-2020

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Human Rights  
Education and  
Multiculturalism  
Fund

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## Introduction

Rights, equity, and diversity are interlocking concepts that matter individually and collectively. The acronym RED represents the vibrant colour of life and its limitless symbolic representations among humans such as love, courage, and war.<sup>1</sup> But in RED, too, we aspire for transformational change in the places we live, work, and study. Transformation is the crucial call for action at this time in our history at the University of Lethbridge, in Lethbridge, and in Alberta. Human rights and freedoms have been constitutionally enshrined since 1982, and have existed in a range of legislation in Canada since the 1960s<sup>2</sup> yet racism and discrimination remain. Each Canadian province has its own human rights legislation, and the Alberta Human Rights Act (AHRA) includes race, colour, ancestry, place of origin, religious beliefs, gender, gender identity, gender expression, age, physical disability, mental disability, marital status, family status, source of income, and sexual

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<sup>1</sup> Natalie Wolchover, “How colors got their symbolic meanings,” *LiveScience*, September 27, 2011, <https://www.livescience.com/33523-color-symbolism-meanings.html>

<sup>2</sup> The Canadian Bill of Rights was passed in 1960, the Canadian Human Rights Act was passed in 1977, and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms took effect in 1982. See Department of Justice, “Learn about the Charter”, December 13, 2019, <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/csj-sjc/rfc-dlc/ccrf-ccd/learn-apprend.html>



orientation as prohibited grounds of discrimination.

Equity refers to “achieving parity in policy, process and outcomes for historically and/or currently underrepresented and/or marginalized people and groups”.<sup>3</sup> It differs from mainstream approaches to formal equality where equal treatment is the norm. Equity, on the other hand, is the recognition that everyone starts from a different place and that people sometimes need to be treated differently in order to achieve equality of result and opportunity. To achieve true equality “removing barriers to...equal participation” is paramount and this “will not occur without enforceable and systemic intervention”.<sup>4</sup>

Diversity is inherent in the notion of Canadian multiculturalism that recognizes cultural, national, and ethnic diversity. Multiculturalism, however, fails to recognize the unique constitutional status of Métis, Inuit, and First Nations Peoples. The histories and systems of exclusion in the making of the Canadian nation-state are endemic to Canadian institutions including universities. The Employment Equity Act (1986, 1995) identifies the four designated equity-deserving groups (i.e.,

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<sup>3</sup> The University of British Columbia Equity & Inclusion Office, “Equity & inclusion glossary of terms”, <https://equity.ubc.ca/resources/equity-inclusion-glossary-of-terms/>

<sup>4</sup> Frances Henry et al, *The Equity Myth: Racialization and Indigeneity at Canadian Universities*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2017, pp. 10-11.



women, Indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, and visible minorities) that require particular measures for inclusion in federally regulated entities in Canada.<sup>5</sup> Its Federal Contractors Program included a mandate for universities to implement an employment equity program to ensure diverse representation in the workplace. To realize equity in postsecondary education, it is necessary to include comprehensive EDI strategies devoted to an intersectional understanding of discrimination and exclusion that recognize that discrimination is not about who people are, but instead about how things work and the histories that made them work in discriminatory ways.<sup>6</sup>

The University of Lethbridge President’s Advisory Committee on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Report (2019) adopted the following definitions in their terms of reference:

**Diversity** is the dimensions/and or the characteristics that differentiate individuals from one another such as gender, disability,

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<sup>5</sup> See Government of Canada, “Employment equity in federally regulated workplaces”, December 31, 2020, <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/corporate/portfolio/labour/programs/employment-equity.html>

<sup>6</sup> See Department of Justice, “Cultural diversity in Canada: The social construction of racial difference”, January 17, 2015, [https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/cs-j-sjc/jsp-sjp/rp02\\_8-dr02\\_8/p2.html](https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/cs-j-sjc/jsp-sjp/rp02_8-dr02_8/p2.html)





ethnicity/race, sexual orientation, thought/perspective, age, religion, and nationality.

**Equity** is the state, quality or ideal of being just, impartial, and fair, and considers differences in opportunity and resources.

**Inclusion** is the intended outcome and can be defined by mutual feeling of respect and demonstrated enrichment that is achieved when a mix of diverse individuals work together.<sup>7</sup>

Beyond the promise of legislative protection and policy directives in over fifty years, postsecondary institutions have an important role to address equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) for students, staff, faculty, and the community they serve, both locally and internationally.

As the University of Lethbridge celebrated its fifty years in 2017, we take a critical look at the steps toward EDI mainly through an intersectional lens. This means that racism intersects with multiple systems of oppression including sexism, homophobia, classism, and more. EDI is a

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<sup>7</sup> University of Lethbridge, *Public Report from the President's Advisory Committee on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and the President's Executive March 2019*, p.9, [https://www.uleth.ca/sites/default/files/2019/03/presidents\\_advisory\\_committee\\_on\\_diversity\\_equity\\_and\\_inclusion\\_public\\_report.pdf](https://www.uleth.ca/sites/default/files/2019/03/presidents_advisory_committee_on_diversity_equity_and_inclusion_public_report.pdf)



condition for excellence as well as a ground to pursue the mission and vision of the university. The Strategic Plan 2014-2022 stipulates the “fundamental principles” and “commitment to society”, particularly to “promote diversity and gender equity, and ensure equal opportunity for participation”.<sup>8</sup> We consider these commitments in 2019-2020 and examine where the bar has been set for EDI initiatives that provide avenues for equal participation. Like other postsecondary institutions in Alberta and Canada, the University of Lethbridge seeks to attract diverse students, staff, and faculty; sustain and retain these talents with high levels of academic endeavours. Thus, promoting EDI at the University of Lethbridge supports growth and capacity building to better serve the needs of the community at large.

In this wider community context, the RED Project in postsecondary campus Lethbridge is based on a series of consultation workshops and presentations related to equity participated in by the administrative staff, faculty, students, and community members. We attempted to include Lethbridge College as the other postsecondary institution in Lethbridge in these activities but were not able to get much interest in the summer of 2019 and our campus-based presentations. This report

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<sup>8</sup> University of Lethbridge, *Destination 2022: Vision & Strategy, Strategic Plan 2014-2022*, p.6, <https://www.uleth.ca/sites/default/files/2018/07/strategicplan-final-2018.pdf>



gives a summative review on the status of equity-related initiatives, programs, and services at the University of Lethbridge. The project outcomes, *Equity Audit* and *Space Matters*, aim to engage the University of Lethbridge and its constituents on the present state of EDI on campus and its possibilities for the future.



## Background of Project

In June 2018, the Support Network for Academics Colour Plus (SNAC+) submitted a human rights project proposal to the Human Rights Education and Multiculturalism Fund administered by the Alberta Human Rights Commission. This year was considered a “watershed” opportunity for Glenda Bonifacio, Saurya Das, and Caroline Hodes who have been active in human rights education outreach at the University of Lethbridge since 2016, with the corresponding rise of right-wing groups under a new political administration in the United States. We witnessed how the Canadian social landscape was not immune to racism and anti-immigration sentiments both inside and outside the university campus in Lethbridge, Alberta, and in 2021 we are witnessing violent, Canadian white supremacist, far-right groups being added to the list of those deemed terrorist organizations.

The RED Project mainly addresses how racism intersects with other systems of oppression such as sexism, ethnocentrism, homophobia, ableism, genderism (and others) that we call *intersectional racism*. We acknowledge that individuals are socially defined in many ways and that there are intersections and overlaps within and between different forms of discrimination. Intersectionality is not primarily about identity, it is an analytic approach that examines the interlocking structures,



systems, processes, and practices that shape how individuals and groups are defined, marginalized, discriminated against, and how they experience inequity. Intersectionality is not a comparative concept. It was designed to enable people to understand the qualitatively different experiences of discrimination that take place at the intersection of multiple social structures, systems, and processes. Discrimination is not located in the bodies of those that are discriminated against, it is endemic to the social structures, systems and processes that make the bodies of some people vehicles for vulnerability and target them for exclusion.

In the context of the RED project, we anchor our discussion on racial inequities. Racism is a “social disease”<sup>9</sup> that continues to permeate our institutions, our relationships, and our interactions in the public sphere in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Equity programming in postsecondary campuses in Alberta and Canada varies significantly. Some universities may have well-placed programs and services to address EDI compared to others but they also generally differ in priorities and approach. In October 2020, in response to the call for transformation and accountability of postsecondary institutions at the height of the

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<sup>9</sup> Chris Stevens, “Racism is a social disease,” *Idaho State Journal*, August 11, [https://www.idahostatejournal.com/opinion/columns/racism-is-a-social-disease/article\\_aa72d3be-15a1-54ed-a26e-bad2aece846e.html](https://www.idahostatejournal.com/opinion/columns/racism-is-a-social-disease/article_aa72d3be-15a1-54ed-a26e-bad2aece846e.html)



Black Lives Matter (BLM) Movement, the University of Toronto hosted the *National Dialogues and Action for Inclusive Higher Education and Communities* which demonstrated the disparities on anti-Black racism, equity and inclusion programs across the participating universities and colleges in Canada, including the University of Lethbridge.<sup>10</sup>

The concerted efforts toward the promotion of EDI in Canadian universities are grounded on Canadian legal frameworks and policies. Hence, EDI policies in post-secondary institutions constitute a rights-based approach to ensure protected grounds are adhered to. Examples of legislation that guide EDI include the Canadian Multicultural Act (1988),<sup>11</sup> the Charter of Rights and Freedom (1982),<sup>12</sup> the Employment Equity Act (1986 but revised 1995),<sup>13</sup> and the Canadian Human Rights Act (1977).<sup>14</sup> Of note is the growing number of international students, diverse faculty and staff that require expanded EDI initiatives. The Universities Canada, an organization that represents Canadian postsecondary institutions, recognizes that “Canadians value an inclusive country, where equity is deeply embedded and diversity welcomed” and sets the seven Inclusive Excellence

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<sup>10</sup> See <https://www.utoronto.ca/nationaldialogues/>

<sup>11</sup> See <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/c-18.7/page-1.html>

<sup>12</sup> See <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/download-order-charter-bill.html>

<sup>13</sup> See <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/E-5.401/>

<sup>14</sup> See <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/h-6/page-1.html>



Principles in 2017.<sup>15</sup> To achieve its mission, Universities Canada calls on all university leaders to commit and champion for EDI in their institutions. Mike Mahon, President of the University of Lethbridge, served as Chair of the Board of Directors for Universities Canada from 2017 to 2019.<sup>16</sup>

In 2017, the federal Minister for Science and Sports launched the Equity, Diversity and Action Plan in response to the “chronic underrepresentation of members from four designated groups”.<sup>17</sup> This Action Plan focuses on improving the governance, transparency, and monitoring of EDI within the Canada Research Chairs (CRC) program. For institutions to qualify for CRC funding, they are required to develop and publish institutional EDI action plans.<sup>18</sup> Such emphasis on EDI by the Universities Canada and the federal government has led Canadian postsecondary institutions to

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<sup>15</sup> See Universities Canada Inclusive Excellence Principles, <https://www.univcan.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/equity-diversity-inclusion-principles-universities-canada-oct-2017.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> University of Lethbridge, Office of the President, “Meet the President: Mike Mahon”, <https://www.uleth.ca/president/meet-president>

<sup>17</sup> Government of Canada, Canada Research Chairs, “New measures to recruit more women, underrepresented groups to Canada Research Chairs”, May 4, 2017, <https://www.chairs-chaires.gc.ca/media-medias/releases-communications/2017/equity-equite-eng.aspx>

<sup>18</sup> See Government of Canada, Canada Research Chairs, “Equity, diversity and inclusion requirements and practices”, November 30, 2020, <https://www.chairs-chaires.gc.ca/programme/equity-equite/index-eng.aspx>



re/formulate their goals and to show their achievements through institutional EDI action plans.

The RED Project was conceived at this historic push in Canadian universities. In designing the proposal, we asked: what is the status of EDI at the University of Lethbridge? Like other universities in Alberta, the University of Lethbridge has existing policies, programs, and services that invariably respond to EDI. In 2018, we believe that these equity-related initiatives were not widely known nor institutionally practiced. Emboldened by the call for equity transformation, the Support Network of Academic of Colour Plus (SNAC+) comprising of students, faculty, alumni, and staff at the University of Lethbridge, conducted the RED Project from 2019 to 2020. To achieve its objectives, SNAC+ organized open workshops and consultations with interested students, faculty, staff, and the Lethbridge community who responded to the public invitations. These sessions were guided by the following questions:

1. Do you consider your learning institution as an inclusive space for everyone?
2. Based on your experience, what are the programs or services that promote inclusion? What are the gaps?
3. How do you envision an inclusive post-secondary institution?





Responses to these questions are organized in the next section, *Consultation Notes*.



## Consultation Notes

### STUDENTS

The University of Lethbridge had a total of 8984 students in September 2020, including 605 and 148 masteral and doctoral students, respectively.<sup>19</sup> In addition, there were 548 international students from 90 countries. Its Calgary campus had 623 students during the same year. Based on the *Factbook 2016/2017*, the University of Lethbridge had 466 students classified as FNMI (First Nations, Metis, and Inuit) out of 8468 total student population in 2016.<sup>20</sup> Of this total, female students comprised a majority with 4890. Local students from Lethbridge numbered 2221 while those coming from outside the province of Alberta reached 797 in 2016. These numbers indicate the diverse composition of students at the University of Lethbridge.

Students have expressed their experiences of racism and discrimination on campus in various fora organized by SNAC+ since 2016. The RED Project recognized their important contributions in achieving its objectives and present a summary of their views.

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<sup>19</sup> University of Lethbridge, “uLethbridge quick facts”, <https://www.uleth.ca/about/facts>

<sup>20</sup> University of Lethbridge, *Factbook 2016/2017*, p. 2, <https://digitallibrary.uleth.ca/digital/collection/publications/id/2344>  
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## **1. Do you consider your learning institution as an inclusive space for everyone?**

Students who participated in the consultative workshops reached a consensus that the University of Lethbridge was much farther behind in its quest to be an inclusive space for everyone. Participants pointed out that the university community was not as diverse compared to other universities in Canada. Of particular reference were the more established equity initiatives at the University of Toronto,<sup>21</sup> the University of Alberta,<sup>22</sup> the Dalhousie University,<sup>23</sup> and the University of Calgary<sup>24</sup> as good examples for the University of Lethbridge to emulate.

Students recognized the recent efforts about equity on campus, mainly the establishment of the President's Advisory Committee on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in 2018. This advisory committee was composed of appointed representatives from different sectors with the mandate to "review the University's commitment...to our shared values of diversity, equity and inclusion as stated in our Strategic Plan and our commitment to Universities Canada's

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<sup>21</sup>University of Toronto, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, <https://www.utscc.utoronto.ca/edio/>

<sup>22</sup> University of Alberta, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, <https://www.ualberta.ca/equity-diversity-inclusivity/index.html>

<sup>23</sup> Dalhousie University, Human Rights and Equity Services, <https://www.dal.ca/dept/hres/equity---inclusion.html>

<sup>24</sup> University of Calgary, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, <https://www.ucalgary.ca/equity-diversity-inclusion>



Inclusive Excellence Principles.<sup>25</sup> Despite the establishment of this committee, participants have noted the lack of a centralized office on equity on campus which is considered a vital institutional commitment to meet such objectives to date. An equity office would provide support and guidance, for example, on grievances concerning discrimination in the university.

Furthermore, participants felt that the University did not accommodate student parents who were raising and taking care of their young children. The campus day care centre is highly subscribed by faculty, students, and staff and there is a long waiting list. Student parents need designated spaces within the confines of the University building to accommodate their needs like breastfeeding.

Students also expressed their views about the idea of equity related to the faculty and administrative staff, admission policies, financial inclusion, and curriculum.

### **Faculty and the Administrative Staff**

The faculty and administrative staff at the University of Lethbridge tend to belong to one race/ethnicity and gender. That is, white and male. Students also indicated the lack of representation of racialized academics in leadership roles; these

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<sup>25</sup> University of Lethbridge, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, <https://www.uleth.ca/president/equity-diversity-and-inclusion>

inequalities also lead to limited power and influence within the university. Hence, students pointed out the need for the University to commit to the hiring of a diverse faculty and staff in which students could identify with.

### **Admission Policies**

Students in the consultation sessions perceived that the University was unintentionally excluding international students in its additional admission policies in certain programs. For instance, the minimum requirement for an English Language admission in Nursing Program differs from other programs.<sup>26</sup> One of the student participants commented:

*It is unfair to be asked to do an English test, yet I went to a school where English was the language of instruction...before I got my permanent residence papers and eventually my [Canadian] citizenship, I did English test to qualify for this status. I think it is too much.*

### **Financial Inclusion**

Participants noted that the Research and Award Office should be more transparent in how it selects students who qualify for financial assistance.

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<sup>26</sup> See Admission requirements for international students, <https://www.uleth.ca/ross/admissions/undergrad/additional-admission-requirements>



Students indicated that there were no accountability structures as to how the scholarship funds were being distributed to applicants. Failure to monitor how these financial supports are given to students could compromise the promotion of equity in allocating scholarships to them. One of the students in the workshop said:

*I got an email that I had not qualified for the scholarship award because it was very competitive. But then why should these [successful] names not be published? I feel my application was for stats information.*

## **Curriculum**

Students expressed the view that the curricula provided by the University tend to be more focused on American and European-based cultures and studies. The participants pointed out the need for more inclusive education and the offering of courses geared toward internationalization and global studies.

### **2. Based on your experience, what are the programs or services that promote inclusion? What are the gaps?**

Students expressed their responses related to programs and initiatives, sports, and the International Centre.



## Programs and Initiatives

Participants recognized that there were few programs and initiatives that fostered equity, diversity, and inclusion on the University campus. Programs and services offered by the International Centre,<sup>27</sup> the Health Centre,<sup>28</sup> the Student Counselling Services,<sup>29</sup> Women Centre,<sup>30</sup> and the ULSU Pride Centre<sup>31</sup> play a great role in bringing inclusivity on campus. However, participants pointed out that these offices should be in a centralized place for ease in finding them.

The participants also suggested that the University should commit to hosting and organizing more events that showcase diverse cultures and critical perspectives on equity to the community. An example was the presentation by Robyn Maynard on *Policing Black Lives* in Canada organized by the Department of Sociology in March 2019.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> International Centre, <https://www.uleth.ca/international/content/international-student-services>

<sup>28</sup> Health Centre, <https://www.uleth.ca/hr/health-centre>

<sup>29</sup> Student Counselling Services, <https://www.uleth.ca/counselling>

<sup>30</sup> Women Centre, <https://campuswomenscentre.com/>

<sup>31</sup> ULSU Pride Centre, <http://www.ulsupride.ca/>

<sup>32</sup> University of Lethbridge Sociology Department on Robyn Maynard talk, <https://www.uleth.ca/artsci/sociology/robyn-maynard>



## **Sports**

Attending sports events like the Pronghorns games are good avenues for inclusion. According to the students, sports activities encouraged the participation of international students. At these events, international students turned out in large numbers to cheer their teams, especially soccer and basketball. Regular sports activities within and outside the community are considered important in fostering diversity and inclusion both for local and international students.

## **International Centre**

The International Centre which assists international students in adapting to campus life socially, academically, and culturally was pointed out as a good space for inclusion. However, events organized by the Centre turned out to be attended only by the international students. It was suggested that efforts should be made to involve local students for better integration and inclusion of international students.

### **3. How do you envision an inclusive post-secondary institution?**

Students envision an inclusive post-secondary institution as having the following features:

1. Equal rights and opportunities
2. Rights to express personal opinions
3. Equitable distribution of resources
4. Place where people are held accountable





# Consultation Notes

## FACULTY and STAFF

The University of Lethbridge is one of the major employers in Lethbridge, Alberta. As of 2016, there were 477 faculty members, 9 senior executives, 7 deans, 11 executive directors, 230 administrative professional officers (APO), 21 exempt support staff (ESS), and 417 staff under the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees (AUPE).<sup>33</sup> Among the faculty members, there were 278 males and 199 females.

Several faculty, staff, and senior leaders participated in the RED Project. A summary of the major points raised during the consultations and workshops is presented below, which dealt with graduate supervision, hiring and retention, and equity and inclusive practices.

### **1. Do you consider your learning institution as an inclusive space for everyone?**

#### **Graduate Supervision**

The University of Lethbridge is one of the four comprehensive universities in Alberta which offers graduate programs. Although there exists clear instruction for graduate students on how to find a

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<sup>33</sup> University of Lethbridge, *Factbook 2016/2017*, p. 151, <https://digitallibrary.uleth.ca/digital/collection/publications/id/23442>



thesis supervisor,<sup>34</sup> members of the faculty present pointed out that the policy for who is qualified to supervise is not clearly stated. For instance, newly hired faculty members were unsure if their teaching responsibility also included supervision of graduate work. Some department chairs advised newly hired faculty to accept direct graduate supervision only after securing tenure.

### **Hiring, Orientation, and Retention**

Participants from the faculty and staff viewed that the University policy on hiring and retention of staff does not foster inclusion. They suggested that the hiring and retention be geared toward diversity, with specific hiring of more “faculty of color”. Also, a standard orientation program should be conducted by Human Resources to all faculty and staff and instill regular awareness on anti-discrimination policies.

### **Equity and Inclusive Practices**

#### **a. Accomplices in equity and inclusion**

To promote equity and inclusion, the faculty noted the need for more accomplices/ally-ship from other faculty members. By being an accomplice/ally-ship, it meant standing with the marginalized, speaking for the marginalized population in spaces

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<sup>34</sup> See Graduate Supervision, <https://www.ulethbridge.ca/future-student/graduate-studies/supervisor>



where they are not present, and having the vested interest in the marginalized communities gaining access to spaces and resources previously not available to them.

**b. Advocacy**

The faculty participants pointed out that the University should develop multiple capacities to enhance its quality of addressing all kinds of academic, equitable, and inclusive issues using bottom-up advocacy. That equity, inclusion, and diversity should be a continuous effort from all people in the University. To avert challenges to exclusion, participants called for the need for inclusion to be *intentional*. For instance, a focus on policy implementation to promote inclusion for all members, and the promotion of diversity and multiculturalism to be integrated as a lifestyle and not an event or performance.

**c. Training on unconscious bias**

The faculty and the staff noted the need for constant training of all employees on equity, diversity, and inclusion. These regular training conducted by Human Resources will help the faculty and staff to lessen the impacts of unconscious bias in teaching and social interactions.

**2. How do you envision an inclusive post-secondary institution?**



Participants pointed out the following features as markers of an inclusive postsecondary institution:

- a. Equal access to maximum opportunities available to all.
- b. Established mechanisms to deal with racism.
- c. Addresses inclusiveness at the structural level. For instance, the mandatory training for faculty and staff on the importance of equity and inclusion in their departments.
- d. Established policies and programs that address equity and inclusion.



## Consultation Notes

### COMMUNITY

The population in Lethbridge is radically changing since the 2016 census and the fifth fastest-growing city in Canada.<sup>35</sup> It is mainly considered as a college and university town because of the two postsecondary institutions: Lethbridge College and the University of Lethbridge. The combined student population was about 14,000 in 2017. As of 2018, Lethbridge “ranked 4th in Canada for having the largest proportion of residents between the ages of 20 and 24”.<sup>36</sup> Based on the 2016 census, the largest age group, or 66.26%, were those from 15-64 years old, and 18.2% of visible minorities were of South Asian origin, and 65.79% of the total Aboriginal population were First Nations.<sup>37</sup> Lethbridge is considered the “Bhutanese capital” in Canada where over 1,300 former Bhutanese refugees have settled.<sup>38</sup> Since 2016, over 400

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<sup>35</sup> Erik Mikkelsen, “Census 2016: Lethbridge fifth-fastest growing city in Canada”, *Global News*, February 8, 2017, <https://globalnews.ca/news/3236948/census-2016-lethbridge-fifth-fastest-growing-city-in-canada/>

<sup>36</sup> Pat Siedlecki, “Lethbridge has one Canada’s largest proportion of residents aged 20-24”, *MyLethbridgeNow*, February 14, 2020, <https://www.mylethbridgenow.com/7345/lethbridge-has-one-canadas-largest-proportion-of-residents-aged-20-24/>

<sup>37</sup> See <https://townfolio.co/ab/lethbridge/demographics>

<sup>38</sup> Annalise Klingbeil, “How Lethbridge became Canada’s Bhutanese capital”, *Calgary Herald*, September 9, 2016, <https://calgaryherald.com/news/local-news/how-lethbridge-became-canadas-bhutanese-capital>



government-assisted Syrian refugees have found homes in Lethbridge.<sup>39</sup>

The RED Project invited Irfan Chaudhry and Michael Gottheil on August 15, 2019, and Dr. Nisha Nath twice in 2020 to present relevant information and insights about equity and human rights in Alberta. We collaborated with the Department of Sociology to invite Robyn Maynard to Lethbridge to talk about policing on March 6, 2019. The Women’s Scholars Speakers Series also hosted the second online public presentation of Dr. Nisha Nath about EDI letters on November 5, 2020. Below are the highlights of these community presentations.

**1. Irfan Chaudhry, Director, Office of Human Rights, Diversity, and Equity  
McEwan University, Edmonton**

*The impact of bias and discrimination on post-secondary institutions and the role of equity and inclusion offices in the context of free speech.*

In discussing the above topic, the presenter organized the discussion based on the following areas:

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<sup>39</sup> Demi Knight, “Syrian refugees in “second stage” of asylum entering workforce, starting businesses in Lethbridge: family services”, *Global News*, August 29, 2018, <https://globalnews.ca/news/4417475/syrian-refugees-in-second-stage-of-asylum-entering-workforce-starting-businesses-in-lethbridge-family-services/>



### a. Legal Boundaries in Canada

Universities are potential spaces for dialogue, protest, and polarization; but these spaces could foster equity and inclusion. Noted legal boundaries in Canada are enshrined in the following: the Canadian Bill of Rights<sup>40</sup> which guarantees freedom of speech as a human right; the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms that upholds the freedom of belief, opinion, expression and protected as a fundamental constitutional guarantee in section (2b); and the decided cases by the Supreme Court of Canada<sup>41</sup> that guarantees partial freedom of expression; and provincial human rights laws<sup>42</sup> which provide prohibitions against the publication of messages that promote hatred. According to the Canadian Criminal Code Section 318 (1), Advocating Genocide states that “[e]very person who advocates or promotes genocide is guilty of an indictable offence and liable to imprisonment for a term not more than five years”.<sup>43</sup> On the other hand, Section 319 (1), Public Incitement of Hatred bars people from the willful promotion of hatred, communicating statements in any public spaces other than private conversation,

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<sup>40</sup> See Canadian Bill of Rights, <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/how-rights-protected/guide-canadian-charter-rights-freedoms.html>

<sup>41</sup> See The Supreme Court of Canada, <https://www.scc-csc.ca/home-accueil/index-eng.aspx>

<sup>42</sup> See Canadian Human Rights Laws, <https://www.chrc-ccdp.gc.ca/eng/content/human-rights-in-canada>

<sup>43</sup> See Government of Canada, Justice Laws Website, <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/c-46/section-318>.



or inciting hatred against any identifiable group. This section states, “everyone who, by communicating statements in a public place, incites hatred against any identifiable group where such incitement is likely to lead to a breach of the peace is guilty of an indictable offence punishable by up to two years’ imprisonment, or of a summary conviction offence”.<sup>44</sup> These provisions, however, suggest that freedom of expression in Canada can be limited to promote values or goals that are of greater social importance.

b. Is it hate speech or is it freedom of expression?

This is a daunting task to separate hate speech from freedom of expression. For something to be considered hate speech, it must be severe and must have targeted an identifiable group. That is, statements must be hateful when considered in their social and historical contexts. For instance, the spread of hate against immigrants. Some of the examples of hate speech given in the workshops included the Proud Boys<sup>45</sup> group in Canada and the

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<sup>44</sup>Julian Walker, “Hate speech and freedom of expression: legal boundaries in Canada”, June 29, 2018, Parliament of Canada, [https://lop.parl.ca/sites/PublicWebsite/default/en\\_CA/ResearchPublications/201825E](https://lop.parl.ca/sites/PublicWebsite/default/en_CA/ResearchPublications/201825E).

<sup>45</sup>See Stewart Bell, “Manitoba Proud Boys disband following Jan. 6 violence at U.S. Capitol”, *Global News*, January 12, 2021, <https://globalnews.ca/news/7571702/manitoba-proud-boys-disband/>





US that espouse ultra-right conservative values and engage in extreme, often violent tactics, to promote their agenda.

The impact of bias and discrimination on postsecondary institutions has led to protest by the university community depending on whose side the protesters leaned. For instance, the protest against Jordan Peterson at McMaster University in 2018,<sup>46</sup> the protest against Masuma Khan of Dalhousie University in 2017,<sup>47</sup> and the protest against Faith Goldy at Wilfrid Laurier University in March 2018.<sup>48</sup> The impact of bias and discrimination often compromises community safety, campus safety, campus inclusion, and resistance. Due to these challenges, there is a need to respond to discrimination and bias by creating relevant policies and procedures, the establishment of places to report incidences of bias and discrimination, like the Equity and Inclusion Office providing regular training on unconscious bias awareness and other workshops to promote and protect human rights on campus.

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<sup>46</sup> See Jordan Peterson Protest, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/hamilton/mcmaster-freedom-of-expression-1.4559067>

<sup>47</sup> See University of Dalhousie, Masuma Khan, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/masuma-khan-dalhousie-university-apology-1.5335599>

<sup>48</sup> See Wilfrid Laurier University, Faith Goldy, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/kitchener-waterloo/fire-alarm-wilfrid-laurier-university-faith-goldy-1.4585125>



**2. Robyn Maynard, Activist and Author,  
*Policing Black Lives: State Violence in  
Canada from Slavery to Present*  
(Fernwood 2017)**

*Policing Black Lives* deals with the stories of surveillance, punishment, criminalization, and brutalization of Black peoples across Canada. These stories date back to the era of slavery that lasted over 200 years on indigenous lands. Robyn sees the criminalization of Black lives to have always been a major part of policing in Canada. For instance, she points out the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) which was used to quell Indigenous rebellions and to help clear land for white settlers in Canada. Decades after the abolition of slavery there is still heightened surveillance and policing of Black communities, high Black incarceration rates, and the segregation practices that were part of life in many parts of the country. Robyn sees anti-Blackness, the surveillance and punishment of Black people of all ages and genders as embedded within all major state institutions. For instance, the contemporary practices of racial violence like carding, the war on drugs, the war on gangs, the treatment of poor Black families by social service agencies, and the destruction of Black families by child welfare agencies point to the reality of anti-Black racism and anti-Black punishment since slavery. Black people with mental health issues and other disabilities across state institutions in Canada are



often treated as less valuable and more disposable than others. Robyn argues that a country that is so premised on the erasure of Blackness relates to the erasure of Black resistance to state violence that can be traced back to centuries as well. For instance, the resistance by Africans in Nova Scotian communities, and the 1970 resistance of Black Jamaican domestic workers who were fighting against racism and persecution by the state with attempted deportation. Thus, policing Black lives come out of the broader movement that is not based only in Canada but also in the United States, UK, Brazil, and other countries that refuses to normalize or accept Black suffering and death at the hands of the state.<sup>49</sup>

During the public open forum, Robyn responded clearly that those who have the privilege and power in existing structures could be instrumental in fostering change. One way is to advance the voice of the marginalized and powerless during meetings; in other words, be an ‘agent’.

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<sup>49</sup> The information about *Policing Black Lives* was based on Robyn Maynard’s talk available on *YouTube*. Jacklyne Cheruiyot transcribed her talk for this report prepared in December 2020 to February 2021 in the absence of notes from her campus book tour in Lethbridge. See University of Lethbridge, Department of Sociology, “Robyn Maynard”, <https://www.uleth.ca/artsci/sociology/robyn-maynard>



### **3. Michael Gottheil, Chief of the Commission and Tribunals, Alberta Human Rights Commission**

Postsecondary institutions need to apply human rights and freedoms to achieve certain goals such as accommodation of students with mental and physical disabilities, creating safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQI, and for everyone irrespective of race, religious beliefs, ancestry, place of origin, marital status, source of income, family status, gender, and class. “Ensuring barrier free environments, and a commitment to accommodation also provide opportunities for enhanced learning and understanding across postsecondary institutions. An inclusive space benefits all, not just those who are welcomed into the space, but may offer different perspectives on one’s place in space”.

Accommodation suggests, for example, that persons with disabilities have equal access to postsecondary education. According to the Alberta Human Rights Commission, accommodation is the process of making alterations to the delivery of services so that those services become accessible to more people, including persons with disabilities. Postsecondary institutions are potential places that could offer inclusive spaces for people and address an inclusive future. However, accommodation in postsecondary institutions is faced with implementation challenges due to factors like limited resources.



In postsecondary institutions, accommodation can be applied to both individual students and groups of students. For an individual student, accommodation would require a level of customization for each student. For example, a student with a specific anxiety disorder may need to write exams in an empty classroom. While for groups of students, accommodation would require change across the institutional system. For instance, the need to accommodate students using wheelchairs in laboratory spaces. Nonetheless, accommodation for students with disabilities should not lead to the lowering of academic or non-academic standards. In sum, money as a form of compensation to infringement of human rights and freedoms is not the best solution but in restorative justice.

**4. Dr. Nisha Nath, Assistant Professor of Equity and Diversity, Athabasca University<sup>50</sup>**

Dr. Nath participated in the RED Project in two online events in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The first campus presentation in March was cancelled, and Dr. Nath served instead as the resource person in the group consultation with SNAC+ on April 16, 2020. Her second online presentation on November 5, 2020 was in collaboration with the Women's Scholars Speaker

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<sup>50</sup> Email: [nnath@athabascau.ca](mailto:nnath@athabascau.ca)



Series. We have outlined below selected excerpts of her two presentations. Excerpts from our consultation meeting (questions and responses) have been distilled and summarized into bullet points, edited for clarity, and in some cases elaborated on by Dr. Nath. Exchanges with project members have been edited out.

### **a. Consultation meeting**

#### **Excerpts**

#### **Do you consider the learning institution as an inclusive space for everyone?**

*\* The Covid-19 context demonstrates how online and face-to-face spaces are not inclusive, power circulates in violent ways in both these spaces, but these spaces are also distinctively oppressive.*

*\* Inclusion into online and bricks and mortar spaces are accompanied by deep amounts of regulation and violence.*

*\* Shaista Patel and I have detailed how, when we provisionally center whiteness, there is a long list of ways that the academy is not inclusive: 1) EDI and what Joyce Green has described as “wreckonciliation” center white people but demand the labour of BIPOC; curriculum and pedagogy function as settler colonial projects of replacement; 2) racialized conceptions of knowledge and expertise devalue BIPOC; 3)*



*campuses surveil and target BIPOC through risk management, this includes conference spaces; 4) administrations reinscribe whiteness through hiring practices and governance models; 5) academic violences in the form of micro-aggressions, tenure denials, funding and grants applications that require that we translate or code/decode insurgent/insurrectionary/decolonial work; 6) financial investments and pensions trade on racial capitalism, extractivism, imperialism, occupation and militarization; 7) classroom spaces where the legitimacy, authority, emotional and physical safety of BIPOC people, studies, contingent faculty and faculty are threatened; and, 9) labour policies that trade on unrecognized work by BIPOC, including the undocumented work of managing racism and settler colonialism.*

**How could you characterize the violence you are talking about in these online spaces to further neoliberal institutions?**

*\* Some institutional violences manifest similarly online and in bricks and mortar institutions, for example through curriculum and pedagogy, and excessive workload (including undocumented work from managing racism and white supremacy, and what Rita Dhamoon describes as “fugitive work”).*

*\* While surveillance is significant in both contexts, it takes on a new modality of violence when everything is online. For example, the online*



*context has implications for academic freedom – what kinds of critical interventions are risky to put online and for who?*

*\* The isolation and disconnection in a virtual context can also mystify how power and domination is circulating in daily but structured ways, making it more difficult to map hence challenge.*

*\* In an online context, it can also be challenging to do equity work that adopts and decolonial praxis. What do we do when our institutions do not seem rooted in a specific space or place which we can be accountable to?*

*\* In these and other ways, while the violence in online and physical spaces overlaps, it takes on different intonations.*

**When you talk about the reluctant Equity Professor, is the reluctance in terms of reproducing these power relations as you are trying to subvert them? Is that part of reluctance you are experiencing or are/ is there something more that you want to speak to?**

*\* The talk I was initially going to give spoke to the impact of institutions taking up equity, diversity and inclusion, and then packaging them as EDI.*





*\* There is a lot of baggage that comes with the title 'Equity Professor' – for example, how many committees are you expected to sit on or why, how this institutional work interfaces with (and sometimes derails) your own research and teaching, and the presumptions about what your work is or should be.*

*\* The larger question is, what happens when anti-oppressive, decolonial or insurrectionary language gets taken up by an institution and made palatable by the institution? What happens when these anti-oppressive lineages become folded into an institution?*

*\* These are not new questions and implicate existing debates about inclusion, especially when inclusion is treated as a good unto itself.*

*\* I find it helpful to remember that the academe is not only non-inclusive, but that inclusion is deployed in ways that regulate and inclusion can actually work to sustain power. Inclusion itself can be weighty and violent such that resisting it can be another way in which you are deemed unruly, undisciplined etc...*

*\* My concern around inclusion (or EDI) is when it becomes institutionalized as a project of mitigation as opposed to a transformative one.*



## **How could you characterize institutional perspectives of inclusions?**

*\* Inclusion does matter, as does presence and representation. There is a fundamental issue of justice that is at stake here.*

*\* We can be concerned when within institutionalized EDI, inclusion is primarily tokenistic.*

*\* When inclusion is not accompanied by a broader systemic analysis, inclusion is being deployed by institutions against us. In this way, inclusion can be risky, coopting more radical politics, and also doing the work of legitimizing what you are being included into.*

*\* These tensions are especially evident during this 'moment of reconciliation', when you have these structures of power like settler colonialism being translated and recoded through 'progressive' language and tools. In that translation, an analysis of power is intentionally lost or displaced, and in that translation it becomes more 'comfortable'. Or, we might look at what happens when institutions take up intersectionality, with its lineage in the radical thought of Black feminists. How does the institution take up intersectionality without drawing from that lineage?*



## **How could you challenge co-optation in institutions?**

*\* I have been thinking a lot lately about Rita Dhamoon's article, "Racism as a Bargaining and Workload Issue." She meticulously captures how racism and workload are treated as separate and distinct domains of academic life, but that workload issues that faculty of colour and Indigenous faculty face are inseparable from racism.*

*\* How might pushing back against narrow understandings of racism and intersecting structured violences (transphobia, misogyny, ableism, heterosexism) as only issues of equal opportunity/discrimination/human rights/and harassment, and adopting an analysis of work and labour shape our collective bargaining and our position within institutions?*

*\* Sometimes the work of challenging whiteness and settler colonialism might not be 'seen' by the institution but is felt by those who are precarious within the academe – this might be curriculum work for example, or different forms of mentoring. This of course has implications with respect to workload.*

*\* There are other more 'conventional' issues of access that remain important – accessible, safe and affordable child care; accessible, reliable and safe*



*health services and mental health services that are delivered with an anti-oppression/anti-racist lens; international centers that support students, particularly as they navigate issues related to border regulation (i.e. visas); access to space for organizing, community, prayer, breastfeeding; affordable housing and transportation; access to loans, full program funding, emergency financial assistance, and grants (for students and faculty); access to reliable employment; shifts in pedagogy and curriculum; granting procedures, ethics review and institutional recognition; transparent and open data collection; control over one's data, including the capacity to change pronouns; provisions for non-pathologized compassionate and medical leaves; institutionalized changes on tenure and hiring committees, etc...*

**Could you speak more to us about racism being a labour issue? This is because labour is viewed as a dirty word at the University of Lethbridge. If you raise issues about labour whether it is an increase in class size or answering emails in the evening etc. labour becomes a dirty word and you are not collegial if you mention labour, you become like a pariah who is speaking out against the institution and its administration and you are not allowed even if it's part of your academic freedom to criticize the institution.**

*\* Labour is a dirty word everywhere, and within the context of the pandemic, we can see so clearly*



*how far we are from being able to have these difficult conversations.*

*\* In part, there is a gap in understanding by union leadership with respect to having this specific conversation about labour, but also the same power dynamics informing the academe are also present within unions – so these erasures are systemic within unions too.*

*\* These questions pertaining to inclusion and labour are also profoundly linked to us having public funding; we are in a provincial context where that is constantly under distinctive threat.*

**Based on your experience, do you think there are programs or ways of challenging inclusion?**

*\* There is a very real tension in talking about inclusion and equity in our institutions and through programs and services given that we are operating within an institution that trades of exclusion, regulation, and interacting forms of domination – this isn't to over-determine the academy, but it is to identify the context in which we think about what's possible, why institutions take up certain kinds of language, and how power travels through those circuits in new formations. Here we might turn again to the ways that reconciliation narratives are taken up, all the while deep colonizing continues.*



*\* Particularly as we look to where our institutions fail us and our students during this pandemic, we can see quite clearly how inclusion policies and politics are relational – meaning that the institutional well-being of non-academic staff, faculty, contingent faculty, undergraduate students, and graduate students are all mutually reliant (or should be seen as such).*

*\* We might ask ourselves some basic questions: What is inclusion meant to effect? Is it a mitigation project? A project of harm reduction? Or, is inclusion meant to be transformative? Whose inclusion is at issue, and what are they meant to be included into? Is inclusion meant to do the work of merely rehabilitating the academe?*

*\* Part of this conversation about inclusion needs to turn to accountabilities – of the board of governors, of university administration in terms of organizational development, of administrative policies and operational practices, of governance (including training, representation and recruitment), of human resources, of strategic planning and development (marketing, branding, communications, revenue generation), of the metrics we use to evaluate ‘performance’, etc... When we talk about inclusion, generally we don’t talk a lot about power, complicity and accountability. I would like to see the accountability piece as part of that conversation.*



**The University of Lethbridge has been struggling to hire an equity officer to do EDI work. What are your thoughts on this issue?**

*\* Fully staffed equity offices are needed in each and every institution. These staff should be compensated well – this is difficult work. Faculty should not be appointed to constitute the equity office in the ‘free time’ – although, faculty involvement (that is accounted for in their workplans) is important. Involvement of non-academic staff and students is critical as well. Furthermore, one person is not sufficient to carry out the work of a substantive equity office. We need people who are trained, people who can provide spaces of safe disclosure, people who can carry out research, and people who can handle the data provided etc. – an equity office with stable funding, a specific mandate to enact measurable change and an office that is appropriately positioned within an institution’s organizational structure is important given that engaging in equity work does tend to put one in a vulnerable position with respect to different forms of personal and institutional backlash.*

**On the faculty association on equity committee, there is this narrative that because equity is for everyone and because of labour issues, what is necessary is to have white male faculty on equity talks about equity. What are your thoughts on this?**



*\* When EDI becomes something that feels good to the institution and those who hold power in the institution, that's a sign that there's a problem. We can remember at least two things here: First, the people who have benefitted the most from equity measures have been white women. Second, equity is about dismantling structures which have been put in place that support only some people to thrive. Challenging those structures is not going to feel good. Moreover, challenging those structures isn't simply about redistributing 'benefits', but rather restructuring the institution in such a way that extractive relationalities are not fundamental to it. This idea that 'equity is everyone' really relies on a distortion of the meaning of equity.*

**What do you suggest are potential activities that could foster equity among all students (international, Indigenous, local) in a post-secondary campus?**

*\* It is tricky to think about inclusion through the lens of activities. Do you mean events and activities that foster solidarity or community, including mechanisms that enable folks on campus to be in community with each other – to be present and engaged?*

*\* There are a whole range of access-type issues that we can confront – in an on-line context, there are very real barriers in terms of internet connectivity for example in remote northern*





*communities, or in predominantly Indigenous communities; there are issues around identification and pronouns and the capacity to control one's identification without being outed. In bricks and mortar institutions, there are a range of physical barriers that prevent people from being in community with each other or being fully present in a setting – whether it be seating, space, inability to hear or see. There are childcare barriers, this was huge for me... so having childcare available during talks, or having talks or classrooms open to children, or having spaces to pump and store milk if you are breastfeeding and are on campus as an employee or a student. There is also the insecurity generated by campus security, police and surveillance and how that might impede people from participating in activities on campus.*

*\* Thinking about events that foster solidarity or community, what I found during my time at the U of A was that the events that felt most inclusive were events that were being shouldered by marginalized students, contingent faculty and some faculty members who were connected to the broader community and saw their role as one to build that relationality and solidarity. During my time at U of A, we saw this with the work done by the Palestine Solidarity Network, their outreach to the Palestinian community and the broader community, and that real interface on campus.*



*\* Fostering such activities is challenging – this is a big question because this kind of relationship building requires a huge amount of time, effort, care, ethics – this is slow work, this is work that is undervalued or not valued by the institution, this is work that is often deemed risky by the institution, this is work that is not a money-maker and in many ways pushes back against all forms of capitalist extraction. We are faced with this question of how to foster that kind of work if the ethos of the institution is in fact contradictory to it.*

**b. Online Presentation, ‘The Letters’:  
EDI and Tracing Work in the  
Academe<sup>51</sup>**

**Excerpts**

*...to begin with, if I were in a room with you, I would start by asking you about your letters:*

- a. Who among you has written a letter in past 2-3 weeks? This might be a letter or an e-mail with an opening salutation and signing off or you anticipated a response from the letter you wrote.*
- b. How many of you have written a letter advocating for something in the academy?*
- c. How many of you have written a letter advocating for students, yourself, your*

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<sup>51</sup> University of Lethbridge, Noticeboard,  
<https://www.uleth.ca/notice/events/dr-nisha-nath-letters-edi-and-tracing-work-academe#.YBwH6uhKjIU>



*research participants, co-workers, co-creators, community etc., a letter that you felt at risk.*

- d. How long did you spent on these letters, whether it was crafted strategically, did you anticipated a backlash hence write something air tight, did you think and re-think about whether to send it, engaged in an in-depth process with those concerned etc.*

*The genesis of this talk is two letters that converge:*

- a. The letters 'EDI', where the words EDI have become bundled together in shorthand - almost trade-marked within the academy.*
- b. Actual letters*

*The point I want to make today is simple, "These letters matter." They matter because they offer an opening to explore the circulation of work within the academy and they also matter because in illuminating this, they tell us how EDI works on us. As such, I present to you three epistolary relationalities:*

- a. University to 'us'*
- b. 'Us' to the university*
- c. 'Us' to each other*

*I use the word 'us' with care to signal those who experience structured precarity in the EDI institution. While at the same time remembering*



*that those experiences of structural violence vary and that some of us are often adjacent to and participate in those violences. So, I am arguing three things:*

- a. *Letter writing within university is a form of social practice that is revealing of the form and content of the EDI academy*
- b. *'The Letters' are also an archive, revealing a body of analytically rich intentional strategic, undocumented work, written by those who experience the academy in the most precarious ways*
- c. *Documenting these letters matters particularly given Rita Dhamoon's reminder that racism within the academy is a workload and bargaining issue.*

....

### **What are 'The Letters'?**

*Letters are documents that signal epistolary intent... which involve the intent to communicate and in some kind of representational medium to someone who is removed in time and space ... and in engaging in this communication, there is an opening for response.<sup>52</sup> The writer of the letter who is 'here' has in mind the reader, who is 'there'. 'The Letters' are meant to close that gap of time*

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<sup>52</sup> Liz Stanley, 2015. "The death of the letter? Epistolary intent, letterness and the many ends of letter-writing". *Cultural Sociology* 9(2): 240-255.



*and space, but the writer must anticipate how distance will impact the message.*

*... letters are most revealing when viewed as a social practice. They gain meaning from social location and they mediate a “huge range of human interactions” written with different purposes, narration, description, explanation, instructions and is housed in different vehicles e.g. faxes, journals, post-card, open letters in e-mails etc.<sup>53</sup> ... So, the act of writing a letter, who takes up the quill, represents a structural encounter and letters themselves - with respect to form - display power in that regard too. So, in multiple ways, letters occupy an interstitial space, they are both impersonal and personal, intimate yet public.<sup>54</sup>*

### **Letters from the institution to ‘us’**

*These are often letters written to a campus community. They trade on supposedly collective values and shared meanings and they teeter on the border of being a statement, in that there is an expectation that they will be read but no presumption that there will be a sort of writing back...*

*Of importance is that the context for these institutional letters is one of deep grief over the structured violence targeting black lives. For*

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<sup>53</sup> David Barton and Nigel Hall, eds. 2000. *Letter Writing as a Social Practice*. Vol. 9. John Benjamins Publishing.

<sup>54</sup> Margaretta Jolly and Liz Stanley. 2005. “Letters as/not a genre”. *Life Writing* 2(2): 91-118.



*instance, violence through racial capitalism, state-sponsored carceral terror, and the necropolitics of the COVID-19 pandemic...*

*And you have Universities in Canada and U.S., built upon anti-Black racism and settler colonial violence witnessing this and pressed to respond, and they do, with 'The Letters'. In many ways these institutional letters share some similarities to the diversity documentation that Ahmed (2012)<sup>55</sup> has written about...*

### **Organizing Logic of white supremacy**

*Let's remember that the context for these letters is ongoing logic of white supremacy within the academy where whiteness is transmitted through:*

- *institutionalized approaches to EDI...*
- *racialized conception of knowledge and expertise that devalue BIPOC...*
- *risk management on campuses and targeted surveillance of BIPOC.*
- *hiring practices and governance*
- *academic violences like micro-aggression, tenure denials etc.*
- *financial investments and pensions ... and militarism*
- *unsafe classrooms, emotional and physical safety of BIPOC, queer and trans students, contingent faculty, and faculty*

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<sup>55</sup> Sara Ahmed, 2012. *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*. Duke University Press.



- *labor policies and undocumented work of managing racism and settler colonialism*<sup>56</sup>

*Documents and letters are useful to the universities for they measure good performance...*

*Unlike documents, there is no pretense about voice and process in the production of these letters. These letters are not usually borne from a supposedly lateral transparent, collective, and consultative process...*

*'The Letters' also speak in a reactive register. In that though, the documents and 'The Letters' are similar and often produced in a situation of pressure and in their urgent reactivity they expose the structural inertia of the EDI academy with respect to anti-racism and decolonial work. Both documents and letters play with temporality, this manifests differently, albeit with similar effect...*

*A critical difference between documents and letters is that these letters a display distinctive intimacy...*

*Yet when we reflect back to the organizing logics of the institution, and the deep disjuncture between*

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<sup>56</sup> List from Patel and Nath. "What is pedagogic about 'settler of colour'? White universities and ethics of decolonial work for non-Black People of Colour", in *Whiteness at Work: Disturbing Practices of Racism Across the Canadian Prairies*, eds. Amanda Gebhard, Sheelah McLean and Verna St. Denis (Fernwood, forthcoming)



*the letter and reality, the EDI academy is not the caring, reciprocal, relational academy...*

*So, 'The Letters' are a tangle in the EDI academy where the intimacy of the letter is disciplinary. Something we see in invocations to dialogue. This intimacy is powerful, evoking commitment not of the institution but commitment of us to be loyal, gracious, supportive, civil, team members, or institutional champions...*

*... we can think of the responses of our various institutions and what work is being done in these letters that border on statements or vice versa. 'The Letters' support an institution that pretends not to be what it is...*

*The letters we write are another manifestation of not only the power structures that underscore the imperative to write letters but the actual survival and political work that we undertake that has no institutional value when connected to our labor, but require extraordinary stamina, energy, fortitude, skill, analysis, and time...*

*... these letters are **neither isolated nor infrequent**. They form a regular part of our workload yet are not formally designated as such...*

*... the documents are often produced by individuals in situations of extreme pressure. This is not unlike 'The Letters'. Often we are called in to do **crisis management** by the institution or through our own politics and sense of accountability. In this*





*urgency, 'The Letters' do become a differently understood kind of life writing, but they are letters that also derail us from life...*

*... the letter is rarely **if ever recognized as work, nor as having value.** The letter does not get to become part of the document. This careful, intensive epistolary work becomes undocumented, and invisible work...*

### **Racism as a Workload and Bargaining Issue**

*...racism and settler colonialism in the academy are issues of workload and bargaining for at least two reasons. First, racism has implications for the division and distribution of labor. Second, this is work that is unaccounted for in the EDI academy. This work is “overwhelmingly carried” by BIPOC<sup>57</sup> ...*

*... racism and workload are treated as two distinct domains of academic life.<sup>58</sup> When you look at how BIPOC work, and the nature of the work across teaching, service, research, and what Dhamoon describes as **fugitive work/institutional cultural work**, racism is entangled throughout and does not simply manifest as a matter of discrimination, harassment, or human rights - those being typical registers in which EDI function. As Dhamoon reminds us, these kinds of labor demands also are*

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<sup>57</sup> Rita Dhamoon, 2020. “Racism as a workload and bargaining issue”. *Socialist Studies* 14(1).

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*



*made of cis women, lesbian, queer, trans, and gender non-conforming folk of colour and of course with those institutionally precarious contingent positions. 'The Letters' are just one part of this on- going accruing weighty work. Work that is not valued but work that collects in our bones...*

*In conclusion, my objective was to describe how 'The Letters' tell us things about the EDI academy that the academy won't reveal about itself. To be clear, the intention here has not been to encourage the institution to write 'better' letters, or to signal that the letters by the institution do not shift over time, are not resisted, cannot be used as a leverage for accountability or to say that the letter-writers are 'good' or 'bad' or not 'well- intentioned'. But, in unpacking 'The Letters' as social practice, we can expose how that intimacy of the performative letter in the neoliberal university can be a trap. Moreover, 'The Letters' are just one manifestation of how works circulates in the EDI academy...*

*... The purpose here is to trace what these letters do, are or become. Stanley describes these tracing as focused on the dialogical, perspectival, emergent and sequential. The epistolarium can lay bare when someone starts or stops writing, the conditions of ones writing, why they write and shifting reasons over time, who writes back, under what conditions, what letters turn into correspondence and why. So, I end with a question for us all, 'What are the possibilities and risks of gathering our epistolarium? For those committed*



*to equity, but called into EDI in harmful ways, what shall we do with 'The Letters'?*



## Project Outcomes

Two resource materials were developed based on the RED Project: *Equity Audit* and *Space Matters*. These resources are available in separate documents.

### EQUITY AUDIT

This is a cursory audit that SNAC+ conducted to respond to the question, *what is the status of EDI at the University of Lethbridge?* The audit focuses on three themes based on responses and insights from the consultation sessions – faculty and leadership, plans and policies, and programs and services.

### SPACE MATTERS

We identified the physical spaces that have the potential to foster inclusion and diversity at the University of Lethbridge. These are available as of February 2021.

## About the Authors

Glenda Tibe Bonifacio, Saurya Das and Caroline Hodes founded SNAC+ in 2016. Glenda served as the principal coordinator of the RED Project. Glenda, Saurya, and Caroline are faculty members at the University of Lethbridge.

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