

**Diversity Relations Officer-UTM
Summary Report
August 2000-July 2001**

Pardeep S. Nagra-November 2001

**Diversity Relations Officer
University of Toronto at Mississauga
Executive Summary**

The Diversity Relations Officer (DRO) continues to play a pivotal role in promoting, facilitating, enhancing and responding to diversity issues. As a baseline, the DRO accounts for seven key constituents, these include, students, staff, faculty, administration, programs/services, community networking/outreach, and university-wide initiatives through the Equity Issues Advisory Group.

There were three important diversity and equity initiatives carried out at UTM. An inaugural gathering of a UTM group of faculty, staff, and students in support of the Positive Space Campaign, raised the sensitivity towards the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgendered, and Queer (LGBTQ) community on campus. Through the support of the DRO, the Centre for Physical Fitness and Education sought to improve its engagement of space for Muslim women wishing to have enhanced privacy adapted the current facility to make it more inclusive by installing blinds and curtains. UTM established a Multi Faith Prayer Room in its Student Centre.

Once again, for the second consecutive year since the establishment of the DRO office there were no reported incidents of hate crime or incidents involving racism received by Campus Police at UTM.

An area of concern for the U of T community and in particular the UTM community was remarks made by a faculty member in response to a set of programmes to mark the December 6th incidents in Montreal. The response from administration, other faculty and students, allowing for academic freedom on such issues while clearly countering the views of the faculty member, was timely and professional, and undertaken in consultation with many university constituencies.

While the primary functions of the DRO are an integral part of the day-to-day activities of the office, they will continue to be included as priorities for the coming year. In addition, the following represent some of the key priorities for the DRO. In brief, the DRO will:

1. Assist the Office of the Vice-President Human Resources led by the Manager of Staff Development and the Employment Equity Advisor in developing and delivering pilot staff development programs at UTM.
2. Assist the Office of the Vice-President Human Resources in developing staff and faculty statistics on diversity.
3. Consult and support various UTM capital expansion committees; new Wellness Centre and new Library in considering physical markers in support and encouraging engagement of diverse student populations on campus.
4. Continue and expand the Positive Space Campaign at UTM, and encourage the formation of a student club for LGBTQ students.

Summary Report of the Diversity Relations Officer August 2000-July 2001

BACKGROUND

During the fall term of 1996, the Principal's Advisory Committee on Diversity and Excellence (PACDE) was established at the University of Toronto at Mississauga (UTM). The mission of the committee was: "To research and to identify systemic barriers and problems related to culture, race, ethnicity, gender and identity and to seek out strategies to address them". One of the recommendations stemming from PACDE was the establishment of an Equity office at UTM to facilitate and provide guidance and support on equity issues.

In the winter of 1999, the Office of the Vice President and Provost approved an APF request from UTM to fund the establishment of a Diversity Relations Office for a three-year period. The University of Toronto at Mississauga established the Diversity Relations Office through the hiring of a Diversity Relations Officer (DRO) in July 1999. The funding for the position is due to expire June 30, 2002.

In keeping with the institutional goals, the DRO is responsible for developing, implementing and evaluating programming directed to the maintenance of an inclusive learning environment and the addressing of issues of gender, sexual orientation, differently-able, culture, race, and equity for students, staff and faculty.

The primary functions of the DRO are to act as a confidential counselling resource for students, staff, and faculty in dealing with diversity issues or cross-cultural conflict; develop diversity programming initiatives for students and student leaders and clubs executives; work with the orientation team to develop diversity workshops for new students; work with Human Resources to support diversity sensitization workshops for staff; advise the Principal, Deans and other campus administrators relating to staff and diversity issues; liaise with Equity Issues Advisory Group (EIAG).

ACTIVITIES

The Diversity Relations Officer (DRO) continues to play a pivotal role in promoting, facilitating, enhancing and responding to diversity issues. As a baseline, the DRO accounts for seven key constituents, these include, students, staff, faculty, administration, programs/services, community networking/outreach, and university-wide initiatives through the Equity Issues Advisory Group.

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Over the course of the year the DRO was very active in many facets of university life at UTM. The DRO was active in providing in-services/workshops for New Faculty Orientation, Student Orientation, Residence Orientation, Student Centre Programmers, Club Executives, Student Services, and Student Leaders. The DRO also coordinated Staff Development for Student Services. As well, the DRO served and participated on various committees, which included Principal's Advisory Committee on Access Issues, and the development of the terms of reference, Volunteer Fair, Survival Day, United Way Campaign, Volunteer Awards, Student Leader Awards, Quality Student Service (Q.S.S.), Dec 6th Memorial, UTM Day, and hiring committees for the Manager of Health Services, Student Centre Programmer, Dean of Student Affairs/Assistant Vice Principal. Furthermore, the DRO provided counselling services to students with difficulties. The primary focus was to provide culturally appropriate and/or culturally sensitive intervention. The DRO also assisted in the mediation of complaints between students and faculty and staff.

The DRO took an active role in participating in various university-wide initiatives including Residence Don Training, Faculty of Social Work-Student Orientation, Deans and Principal's Orientation, Faculty of Physical Education and Health – Leadership Training Series, International Day for the Elimination of Racism, the Faculty of Law – Reading Week Program Orientation, and the Critical Incidence Response Team.

Furthermore, the DRO engaged in building strong alliances and relationships with external stakeholders, including local and “feeder” schools, community based groups and community organizations. The DRO was active in many public speaking engagements, including keynote speeches on various themes including Black History Month, International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, and Stay in School & Careers Day. In addition, the DRO is a member of the Peel Multicultural Council, Halton Multicultural Council and the Positive Space Coalition of Peel.

HIGHLIGHTS

There were three important diversity and equity initiatives carried out at UTM. An inaugural gathering of a UTM group of faculty, staff, and students in support of the Positive Space Campaign coordinated by the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered, Queer Resources and Programs Office, raised the sensitivity towards the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgendered, and Queer (LGBTQ) community on campus.

Through the support of the DRO, the Centre for Physical Fitness and Education sought to improve its engagement of space for Muslim women wishing to have enhanced privacy adapted the current facility to make it more inclusive by installing blinds and curtains.

UTM established a Multi Faith Prayer Room in its Student Centre. In addition, the DRO disseminated Multi Faith Calendars to all faculty and staff.

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Once again, for the second consecutive year since the establishment of the DRO office there were no reported incidents of hate crime or incidents involving racism received by Campus Police at UTM.

An area of concern for the U of T community and in particular the UTM community was remarks made by a faculty member in response to a set of programmes to mark the December 6th incidents in Montreal. The response from administration, other faculty and students, allowing for academic freedom on such issues while clearly countering the views of the faculty member, was timely and professional, and undertaken in consultation with many university constituencies. In addition, there were unsupportive views expressed when an invitation was forwarded to staff, faculty and students to join in the Celebrations of Lesbian and Gay Pride Day with the U of T Pride contingent. Both of the above incidents involved correspondence using UTM's all faculty and all staff list to which all faculty and staff are subscribed. As a result of this, the all faculty and all staff list are now moderated and ongoing conversations among staff are welcomed to move to a separate distinct unmoderated list. The University should consider reviewing current equity-related policies to incorporate the inappropriate use of e-mail communication.

KEY PRIORITIES

While the primary functions of the DRO are an integral part of the day-to-day activities of the office, they will continue to be included as priorities for the coming year. These include conducting diversity-training workshops for students, faculty, staff, and administration, aiding instructors, staff, and students in preventing/resolving misunderstandings with students, and serving on committees to provide insight and focus on diversity issues.

As noted in the summary of last years report, UTM is preparing for an approximately 45% growth. This growth has implications on future students, staff, faculty and infrastructure, and existing resources to plan for the efficient fruition of the plan. As a result the DRO will play a critical role immediately in various aspects in the growth plan.

In brief, the DRO will:

1. Assist the Office of the Vice-President Human Resources led by the Manager of Staff Development and the Employment Equity Advisor in developing and delivering pilot staff development programs at UTM.
2. Assist the Office of the Vice-President Human Resources in developing staff and faculty statistics on diversity.
3. Assist in the facilitation of in-services to hiring and search committees on supporting a broad and encompassing definition of diversity in seeking excellence at UTM.

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4. Consult and support various UTM capital expansion committees; new Wellness Centre and new Library in considering physical markers in support and encouraging engagement of diverse student populations on campus.
5. Continue and expand the Positive Space Campaign at UTM, and encourage the formation of a student club for LGBTQ students.
6. Assess/Evaluate UTM in relation to components of Council of Ontario Universities – Keeping Equity in the Decision-Making Process 2000 report.
7. Explore First Nations issues as they relate to UTM.
8. Secure funding for the DRO position's renewal, which currently expires June 30, 2002.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Diversity and equity continue to be the top priorities currently and for the future of the University of Toronto. The delivery of diversity and equity initiatives must address: personal and interpersonal issues – the biases and attitudes that we bring to the workplace or institution of learning; organization culture – the underlying assumptions about what is important to the institution; and systems and programs – recruitment, hiring, retention, and promotion of staff and faculty, recruitment of students, delivery of services to create an inclusive learning environment; accountability – responsibility for making progress on diversity.

The current time of change and growth for the University as a whole and at UTM and UTSC campuses in particular will require an unprecedented demand on the human resources of staff and faculty. The DRO will play an important role in supporting the University goal of diversity and excellence during this period in the hiring of staff and faculty and the delivery of programs and services. It is critical for UTM to have adequate funds and resources to prepare immediately for the future growth. We must facilitate “front loading” for areas that need to prepare for the growth. The neglect of this need may result in unrealistic demands on staff and faculty, leading to “burn-out” and low staff morale.

Increased consultation with the Equity Issues Advisory Group (EIAG) has been welcomed. The University must continue to seek out opportunities at all levels for the involvement of the EIAG. These Offices represent a valuable and important core of resources and skills to assist in the furtherance of equity at the University of Toronto.

Pardeep S. Nagra
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