

EQUITY INFRASTRUCTURE REVIEW

RECOMMENDATIONS

Preamble

The University of Toronto's commitment to equity and diversity is grounded within a deep understanding of the role and mission of the university. Initiatives and policies that create and support greater inclusion and enhanced understanding of diverse backgrounds, experiences and beliefs must be developed and implemented in ways that are consistent with fundamental principles of freedom of inquiry and freedom of speech. In carrying out this commitment to equity and diversity, the University is extremely fortunate in having access to a number of highly skilled Equity Officers working from offices situated within a variety of administrative portfolios. As the University's understanding of equity issues has matured, we have expanded our notion of equity to include, for example, Family Care, Health and Wellbeing, Quality of Working Life, Community Safety, Multi-faith initiatives and Student Crisis response.. To this date, however, we have not assessed whether the infrastructure underlying these equity offices is aligned appropriately with our overall vision for equity at the University. Therefore, in November of 2003, the President asked the Vice-President Human Resources & Equity and the Vice-Provost Faculty to undertake a review of the Equity Infrastructure. The review committee was subsequently expanded to include the Vice-Provost Students and, more recently, the Vice-Provost Academic.

The first stage of the review involved comprehensive interviews with the Equity Officers and with faculty and staff whose broad areas of responsibility include an equity focus. Based on this feedback, draft recommendations were prepared for wide consultation with members of the University of Toronto community – individual faculty and staff, student groups, employee associations and unions - who have a specific interest in equity issues. The Equity Officers were also invited to provide feedback on the draft recommendations.

Given that our focus is on equity, excellence and **diversity**, it is not surprising that the feedback we received was diverse and not necessarily consistent. The recommendations set out below incorporate, to the greatest extent possible, the views of the respondents. As with any change to the status quo, however, we understand that it will be important to assess the effectiveness of the proposed changes over time

1. EQUITY STATEMENT

Context:

The University has a number of policies pertaining to Equity Issues, however these policies were developed at different times, for a variety of purposes and lack overall coherence. The University has no overarching statement, in policy, with respect to equity.

Recommendation 1(a):

The University should analyse existing policies which address equity issues, should undertake an assessment of options and best practice, and should develop an Equity Statement that articulates a clear vision to guide the implementation of equity initiatives across the University. The development of the Equity Statement should be informed by broad consultation with members of the University community;

Responsibility for sponsoring the development of the Equity Statement should rest with the Equity Advisory Board.

Context

Implications pertaining to equity are associated with many other policies at the University. It is important for policies to be reviewed with respect to equity on a regular basis.

Recommendation 1(b)

In the process of ongoing review of Policies, the Governing Council Secretariat should request that the responsible Officer or Board pay close attention to equity issues.

2. EQUITY AND U of T's ACADEMIC MISSION

Context

Our Academic Planning process, Stepping Up, articulates clearly that equity, diversity and excellence are essential components of the University's Academic Mission. We have examples of excellent best practice within Divisions; many faculty and students focus on equity within their own scholarship and are viewed by the external community as experts; our Equity Officers have generated excellent reputations beyond the boundaries of the University. For the University to achieve its goals, however, requires commitment and involvement from every level within the institution. One means to facilitate this commitment and involvement is to establish a broadly based advisory body to assist the University in identifying and developing relevant and appropriate ways of addressing equity issues.

Recommendation 2:

The Vice-President, Human Resources and Equity should establish an Equity Advisory Board, with the following membership:

Vice-President, Human Resources & Equity (Chair)

Vice-Provosts Academic and Students

Representatives of P&D

Faculty and students whose area of scholarship includes a focus on equity

Student Representatives

Faculty and Staff Association and Union representatives

Relevant stakeholders from the (Tri-Campus) Community

Equity Officers

The mandate of the Equity Advisory Board will be to:

Provide advice to Senior Academic Administrators on equity related matters at a policy or project level;

Assist with the promotion of the University's Equity Statement;

Assist in strengthening the relationship between the Equity Statement and Academic Mission of the University;

Assist in strengthening ownership of equity and diversity at every level of the University.

3. ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES

A. Structure and reporting

Context:

The University's Equity Officers hold highly diverse positions, within different portfolios, creating an administrative and accountability structure that is not transparent. Some officers are primarily involved in case work; some provide support only to students; most would like to play a stronger role in education/awareness/promotion. Their scope of responsibility varies widely, as do the reporting arrangements. Some of the positions may be viewed as fitting within the traditional equity umbrella; others are more broadly related to equity. Not surprisingly, therefore, there is lack of clarity within the University community as to the range of services provided by these diverse Equity Officers and offices. To complicate the picture further, two institutional positions are identified as addressing equity issues but the incumbents are **not** considered to be Equity Officers: namely, the Ombudsperson and the Coordinator of Aboriginal Student Services and Programs. The Director of the Transitional Year Project is also viewed by many members of the University Community as addressing equity issues, but she is not considered to be an equity officer. In sum, positions broadly supporting equity initiatives should be identified as such and the reporting arrangements clarified.

Recommendation 3 A:

The University should identify all positions which are encompassed within the broad equity portfolio, develop a clear organizational chart

and identify key areas of responsibility. This information should be widely available to the University community.

Equity Officers on the St George campus with prime responsibility for student matters should report to the Vice-Provost-Students, or designate. Where their activities also pertain to UTM or UTSC they will maintain a dotted line reporting the appropriate Vice-President and Principal, or designate. The reverse shall hold true for Officers at UTM and UTSC.

Equity Officers on the St George campus with responsibility for faculty and staff related issues should report to the Vice President Human Resources and Equity or designate, with dotted line reporting to the President and/or Provost, or designate, as appropriate. Where their activities pertain to UTM or UTSC they will maintain a dotted line reporting to the appropriate Vice-President and Principal or designate. The reverse shall hold true for Officers at UTM and UTSC.

B. Coordination and leadership

Context

Although each of the existing Equity Officers demonstrates excellent leadership with respect to her particular areas of responsibility and expertise, the current structure, with individual offices and a loosely structured Equity Issues Advisory Group coordinated by a rotating Convener, is not conducive to the provision of collective leadership. Moreover, it is increasingly the case that equity issues are intersectional and must be considered across traditional boundaries of gender, race, sexual orientation and so on. There is, therefore, a need to identify an individual who will act as a catalyst for and a facilitator of collective leadership. This individual can also assist in facilitating and coordinating our ability to meet an ever increasing demand for awareness raising and education within our Divisions and Departments.

Recommendation 3B (i):

A senior Equity Officer should be appointed as Special Advisor on Equity Issues to the Vice-President Human Resources and Equity, and provided with appropriate staffing in support of this added responsibility. The Special Advisor on Equity will be responsible for optimizing the provision of leadership on equity issues through the facilitation of access to the expertise within the individual offices.

Although we are recommending the establishment of an Equity Advisory Board, there is still value in the Equity Officers meeting on a regular basis with the Vice-President, Human Resources and Equity and the Vice-Provosts Academic and Students to discuss

emerging issues, new initiatives and so on. It is also appropriate for the Officers to be able to meet directly with the President at least annually.

Recommendation 3B(ii)

The Equity Officers will meet with the Vice-President Human Resources and Equity, the Vice-Provost Academic and the Vice-Provost Students at least three times per year. The Officers will also meet with the President on an annual basis.

C. Complaints

Context

Members of the community with specific complaints may access a number of different officers, for example, Sexual Harassment, Race Relations, and LGBTQ. Some complaints are systemic; others are personal/individual. Frequently the issues are multifaceted and complex. Best practice is to attempt initially to resolve the issues through informal resolution and mediation. Such an approach requires a very high level of skill and can be very time consuming for the officers involved. One possibility is to establish a roster of specially trained faculty and staff, located on all three campuses, who, with the agreement of the complainants and respondents, are prepared to lead informal resolution and mediation processes for individual cases.

Recommendation 3C (i):

The University should identify a roster of volunteer faculty and staff who have been trained in informal resolution and mediation strategies. Upon request, these individuals will assist the relevant Equity Officers in addressing complaints.

(N.B. This recommendation is not intended to replace or interfere with existing provisions under employment policies, collective agreement or the Student Code of Conduct)

Context

As noted above, complaints may be systemic in nature and may be multifaceted. It is important that potential systemic issues, especially those identified during the informal stages of the complaint process, be identified as such and brought to the attention of the relevant Senior Administrators.

Recommendation 3C (ii):

The Vice-President Human Resources & Equity, the Vice Provosts Academic and Students, and the Vice-Presidents of UTM and UTSC will be briefed at least twice per year with respect to complaints that may have systemic implications.

4. EDUCATION ABOUT AND PROMOTION OF THE UNIVERSITY'S COMMITMENT TO EQUITY

Context

Implementation of the University's vision of equity, excellence and diversity is the responsibility of every member of our community. The University's Equity Officers have a responsibility – and the expertise - to assist us all in the process of changing attitudes and creating wide spread understanding and support for inclusive practices in every facet of University activity. A recurring lament of the Equity Officers, however, is that they are unable to engage in proactive policy development, awareness and promotion to the degree that they would like due to existing work pressures. One solution is to appoint an individual whose prime responsibility will be to devise and oversee the implementation of an institutional strategy for equity and diversity training.

Recommendation 4:

The Vice-President Human Resources and Equity and Vice-Provost Students should appoint a Coordinator of Diversity and Equity Education who will be responsible for working with members of the equity offices, human resource professionals, student life professionals and staff development to devise a strategy for equity and diversity education and training.

5. TRI-CAMPUS ISSUES

Feedback

While UTM and UTSC have Equity Offices to deal with Student Accessibility, it is not clear to whom faculty and staff should turn when faced with an equity issue. Equity Officers on the St George campus struggle to find ways to meet the needs of UTM and UTSC. However, it is clearly not feasible within our current budget constraints to replicate the various offices on St George at UTM and UTSC

Recommendation 5:

UTM and UTSC should be encouraged to support the establishment of an Equity Officer position on each campus. The incumbents would be an initial, local point of contact and, as appropriate, take responsibility for liaising with relevant officers from the St George campus with respect to specific issues.