

Report of the Diversity Relations Officer August 2002-July 2003

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University of Toronto at Mississauga Final Report - Executive Summary

The Diversity Relations Office performs an essential and valuable role in the highly diverse and rapidly growing campus of the University of Toronto at Mississauga and remains an important and visible service. The activities undertaken over the past year reflect the uniqueness of the Office in its specific commitment to the UTM community, while also extending its boundaries to initiatives on the St. George and Scarborough campuses and in the external community.

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

Highlights of the past year include supporting an Ethno Cultural Initiatives Fund application to have a visiting scholar that reflects diversity to teach “Race and Ethnic Relations” (Sociology 332H5F) and provide additional learning opportunities and exchange of ideas for staff and faculty. In addition, the formation of OUT@UTM, a student led association supporting the development of an LGBTQ community at UTM was a huge success, and has created and added a new face to the diversity of UTM. Other highlights include the development and implementation of a first year student survey. The survey helped identify specific diversity statistics including gender, aboriginal/native ancestry, sexual orientation, disability, and faith/religion to help shape programming and effective service delivery.

Four of the six key priorities were either implemented or work has begun. Two of the remaining priorities were postponed due to greater levels of time and resource allocation they however, remain as key priorities for the growth of the Diversity Relations Officer position. They include, the development of an information based website for Office services and programs and increased collaboration with UTM student leadership, including residence dons, student administrative council, and student union.

Report of the Diversity Relations Officer August 2002-July 2003

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 initial funding for the position expired June 30, 2002. Bridge funding is being provided by UTM Student Affairs as long-term/permanent funding solutions are sought.

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.

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.

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) is committed to creating an environment of equality, equity, and mutual respect, where the attributes, talents, experiences, and contributions of all persons are valued and acknowledged. The primary goal of the Officer has been to facilitate diversity rather than manage or administer it. Over the course of the year the Office continued a lot of its base activities that support various committees including: orientation; volunteer fair, QSS –quality student services, December 6th Remembrance, and U of T's 175th Anniversary Equity Conference. In addition, the DRO participated in various workshops towards promotion and education of the office, these included: residence don training, residence orientation, sex education centre, new faculty orientation, and presentations to search committees. Supportive counselling and mediation of individuals in crisis was also provided by the DRO.

Other notable activities of the DRO are listed and highlighted as follows:

➤ Outreach

The DRO helps support external institutions and initiatives, and continues to have a visible presence at other universities, colleges, high schools, junior schools, & boards of education. In addition the DRO has been a panellist a number of times on the CTS-Faith Journal program, and Halton Multicultural Council workshops. The DRO is also an active member of the Positive Space Coalition of Peel.

Report of the Diversity Relations Officer August 2002-July 2003

➤ Ethno Specific Community Publications

UTM is home to a diverse student population, which is also reflected in the various student organizations. In particular, there continues to be a greater participation of students within ethno-specific organizations. A popular medium and key source for sharing information and awareness of cultural community happenings and news are local ethno-specific newspapers. A number of student organizations have expressed an interest in having these publications available for reading and access. The DRO has assisted in facilitating initial meetings and researching locations with the support of the Student Centre Events Co-ordinator.

➤ E – Nough

E-mail continues to play an important and vital role in day to day working environments and communication amongst and between students, staff and faculty. Although the majority of the use of e-mail in communication continues to be positive, there continues to be inappropriate use which can be classified as harassment. Through the lead of the Sexual Harassment Office and support from the DRO and Student Affairs Office, a pilot web based initiative has been undertaken at UTM to provide support and guidance to members on e-mail harassment.

➤ Positive Space

Since the initial launch of the Positive Space campaign at UTM there has been limited programming to assist in developing support for the needs of LGBTQ staff and faculty and students both structurally and systemically. Through the lead of the Co-ordinator of LGBTQ Programs/Services and Resources preliminary work was started to develop a permanent committee representative of staff, faculty and students develop a comprehensive Positive Space campaign at UTM.

➤ Equity Town Hall

Planned on the heels of the various Town Halls throughout U of T for the Provost's Green Paper, the Equity Issues Advisory Group (EIAG) conducted local Town Halls specifically dealing with equity issues to help further inform discussion and planning related to the Green Paper. Although attendance at UTM's Equity Town Hall was marginal, the discussion provided valuable information to help shape EIAG contribution to the green paper.

➤ UTM Athletic and Wellness Center

The DRO continued to provide guidance and support as a committee member to the various planning processes of the proposed Athletics and Wellness Centre to meet the needs of the diverse population of students and staff.

➤ Diversity Week

The Erindale College Student Union hosted a number of activities to help promote and highlight various dimensions of diversity during Diversity Week. The DRO assisted in the planning and brainstorming of initiatives and mobilization of resources.

➤ Ethno cultural Initiatives Fund – Visiting Scholar

The DRO played an integral role in supporting the opportunity of having a visiting scholar that reflects diversity to teach a course and provide additional learning opportunities and exchange of ideas for staff and faculty. In addition, the DRO played an important role in promoting the course "Race and Ethnic Relations" (Sociology 332H5F) and setting up a lunch and learn for staff and faculty on the topic "Religion and Politics" hosted by the visiting scholar Dr. Dipak Malik.

Report of the Diversity Relations Officer August 2002-July 2003

➤ UTSC Equity/Diversity Officer

The DRO assisted and provided resources and background information to help guide the creation of a similar position at the Scarborough campus of U of T.

KEY PRIORITIES

The DRO listed six priorities to enhance the goals and objectives of the office. Four of the priorities were either implemented or work has begun. In particular, the formation of 'Out at UTM', a student led association supporting the development of an LGBTQ community at UTM was a huge success, and has created and added a new face to the diversity of UTM. The support from the Office of Student Affairs and the Vice President and Principal were key in fostering a welcoming environment, which included a reception at Lilehurst.

The First Year Student Self Identification Survey was highly successful with an approximately 90% completion rate. The survey helped identify specific diversity statistics including gender, aboriginal ancestry, sexual orientation, disability, and faith.

The staff development program, as part of the Diversity Demonstration Projects continued with emphasis on staff development for supervisors/managers. The overall effectiveness of this in-service was poor due to the service delivery model and facilitation. As a result the staff development for front line staff was delayed and further delayed due to scheduling difficulties.

The Library Resource Diversification initiative has begun with a particular focus on African/ Caribbean holdings. Initial meetings have been held to clarify the logistics of combining donations with purchases of books.

Two of the remaining priorities were postponed due to greater levels of time and resource allocation to the above four priorities and other activities discussed earlier. They however, remain as key priorities for the growth of the Diversity Relations Officer position. They include, the development of an information based website for Office services and programs and increased collaboration with UTM student leadership, including residence dons, student administrative council, and student union.