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**Consultation Findings and Subsequent Recommendations  
for  
Equity and Diversity Office at UTSC**

Before the creation of the Equity and Diversity Office, the equity concerns and ideas of students, staff and faculty were, for the most part, serviced through spaces like the Anti-Racism and Cultural Diversity Office, the Sexual and Gender Diversity Office, and the Ombudsperson. As a means to better support the tangible development of a more inclusive campus, SCSU lobbied that the University of Toronto Scarborough to create our own Equity and Diversity Office (EDO) in 2013. After agreeing to the recommendation and receiving funding from Main Campus, there was a subsequent visioning process whereby individuals from a variety of departments across the campus came together to develop the responsibilities and priorities of the EDO. Some of SCSU's recommendations included 'equity-auditing' responsibilities and facilitating ongoing anti-oppression training for staff and faculty at the Scarborough Campus.

During the Summer of 2013, UTSC established the Equity and Diversity Office, and hired our first ever Equity and Diversity Officer. Over the past few years, programming has been organized, complaint mechanisms have been established, and anti-bias training modules have been developed and executed - all by the Equity and Diversity Officer and 4 work-study students.

In light of the recent vacancy in the Equity and Diversity Office, the Scarborough Campus Students' Union conducting a series of consultations with students, staff, and faculty for a full understanding of their expectations of response to the actualization of the Office between 2013 and 2016. This report will ideally serve as a basis for realizing some improvements of the Equity and Diversity Office.

**Consultations**

A group of 5 students collectively met to discuss the strengths, weaknesses, and potential for the Equity and Diversity Office. Following the group discussion, SCSU's President and Vice President Equity co-facilitated a series of 10 one-on-one consultations with staff and faculty

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across the Scarborough Campus. Students, faculty and staff that were consulted had a variety of interactions with the Office.

The agenda was as follows:

- Land Acknowledgement & Equity Statement
- Introductions
- History of Equity & Diversity Office
- Facilitated Questions
  - How were you introduced to the Equity and Diversity Office?
  - Do you think it's important to have an Equity & Diversity Office on Campus? Why/why not?
  - Do you think the Office effectively welcome/encourages students, staff and faculty to reach out?
  - What aspects of the Equity & Diversity Office do you think could be strengthened (e.g. increased resources, programming, staffing)?
  - What type of qualities do you think the Equity & Diversity Officer at UTSC should have (e.g. skills, experiences, and/or identity)?
- Further Discussion

## **Key Areas of Concern**

### *Equity Issues in the Classroom*

Students and faculty addressed that equity issues are not limited to societal issues and our campus community, but are also within classrooms. Further, participants were concerned with the lack of processes of accountability measures to ensure that both instructors and students are in teaching or learning environments felt that the classroom inclusive. Some academic and administrative departments have invited the Equity and Diversity Office to facilitate workshops on unconscious bias, which was a meaningful integration of the Office into hiring practices. With respect to departmental academic meetings, there was an incentive to directly involve the EDO by inviting them to the meetings. A participant mentioned that, '*having the EDO's presence would integrate these conversations onto the agenda, and [make equity an active] practice*'. Since there aren't distinct incentives to integrate equity in their pedagogy. By integrating the Equity and Diversity Office into meeting spaces, faculty and students will be better equipped with the language and a platform to get folks to think about issues of equity and inclusion.

On another note, those who were consulted identified specific academic-based practices that reinforce inequities faced by marginalized people. Research supports the anecdotes some participants chose to share with SCSU, in that those who are women of colour and/or other marginalized faculty have a harder time moving up; a structural barrier are the biases that come along with numerical responses of course evaluations. Rather than taking a more proactive

approach by supporting the progression of faculty who face equity issues, they are prevented from receiving promotions based on results that are skewed because these faculty, '*don't look the way a student expects us to look*'. Inequities are faced by a variety of members of the UTSC community, and it is important to consider the ways in which the Equity and Diversity Office supported classroom discrimination, and what it can do to strengthen the levels of supports available to faculty and students.

### *Under-Resourcing*

Everyone we consulted reminded us about the importance of the Equity and Diversity Office, and how positive of an impact the programming, investigative support, and facilitated training sessions had on the campus community. The issue with that, as noted by many participants, was that the Officer was overwhelmed by the considerable level of responsibilities handed to them with so little resources and power to execute. Though Toni exceeded expectations to support staff, faculty and students - being a '*passionate and considerate leader*' -, there was no denying that with only one full-time staff-person and 4 work-study students executing all products of the Office, it was completely overwhelmed. The programming, partnerships, public outreach, and counselling was far too much for one person to manage. EDO has a severe shortage of resources; when a faculty member discovered the Office was even lacking in administrative support, they noted '*if Chairs [of academic departments] have them, why doesn't this office?*'

### *Supporting Racialized Students*

Most of the consultation participants mentioned how diverse our demographic of students are with respect to gender, sexual orientation, migration status, and particularly our diverse racial identities. In turn, there was a paired acknowledgement of the importance of responding to the uniqueness of our needs as marginalized students. UTSC needs to be accountable to the diverse community, which could look like prioritizing support for racialized students. If the Equity and Diversity Office can ensure that they are responsive to students, along with staff and faculty, the UTSC community will be better able to access the necessary support.

In particular, a few participants raised concerns about the mental health issues disproportionately faced by students navigating social inequities. A faculty-member said it perfectly - '*EDO helps the people who suffer in silence*'. The impact of suffering in silence truly reinforces the need to have an avenue of support for our campus community.

Finally, a point that was brought up by a few of our participants was the importance of faculty and staff also knowing there are avenues of support available for them. There was not much knowledge about how employees of the University can structurally integrate the Equity and

Diversity Office into their academic or administrative practices, and this was struck as an area of concern by the participants.

### *Other Concerns*

Staff and faculty who are employed by the University have a longingness to feel needed and supported in their work, rather than having the sentiments that they aren't anything more than '*just a headcount*', with respect to fulfilment of diversity quotas. One faculty understood it as a misinterpretation of diversity with inclusivity. Another few participants noted that in instances of racial inequities on campus or in the workplace, they were supported by the Equity and Diversity Office, but were met with resistance by the Human Resources Department. Thus, those who were consulted questioned the willingness of the University to truly support marginalized members of the Scarborough Campus community.

A few faculty-members that we consulted, as well as some students who were invited to meet with the SCSU about the Equity and Diversity Office, did not know it existed or did not interact with it. Those groups identified this as a concern, and felt that communication between faculty and students was an integral for those '*in need of support challenging discrimination on campus or in the classroom.*'

### **Responses to Concerns**

The folks who had frequent interactions with the previous Equity and Diversity Officer all recognized how resourceful Toni had to be, given the little amount of resources the Office was provided. The EDO used a variety of methods to respond to the needs of all students, prioritizing the needs of marginalized people on campus. For students, staff and faculty, the Officer made herself available to consult with those who requested her support. As noted by one of the participants, '*the Office helps people who suffer in silence*'. Marginalized members of the Scarborough Campus community are well aware of the hardships that go along with having to work twice as hard for half as much. Similarly, the Equity and Diversity Office is a University body that responded to investigative harassment, discrimination, and assault cases, that undertook all University-administered equity based programming, and that facilitated equity-based training sessions for a variety of groups and departments across the campus. It was noted by participants that though the guidance offered by the Office was helpful, isolated support was not enough since it was not paired with tangible, proactive solutions. Participants understood the Office did not have the capacity to enact structural changes, which many found troubling.

### **Recommendations for Strengthening and Improvement**

#### *More Staffing & Resources*

**Recommendation:**

1. That there be for more staffing and resources through the Equity and Diversity Office, including introducing more full-time staff-persons out of the Office.

The Equity and Diversity Officer had the responsibility of doing casework, discrimination / harassment-based investigations, programming, training for the UTSC community. As mentioned above, those who were consulted noticed that the Office was under-resourced given the level of work it was asked to take on. In response, participants gave a variety of ideas for strengthening the office in terms of staffing and resource improvements. The Equity and Diversity Office employed 4 work-study students, but there is a need for more staff so that the work can be divided to create a less overwhelmed Office. One person who was consulted noted that most departmental chairs as well as administrative staff at the Equity and Diversity Officer's level have an administrative assistant; that said, they believe this staffing complement is the least that can be offered to support the work out of the Office. Many others suggested that the Office have multiple full-time staff positions, such as an administrative assistant, an outreach/programming coordinator, and a caseworker for investigations. Ensuring students, faculty, and staff have the proper support is crucial, but the current staffing model used by the EDO does not allow for a tangible support system for the UTSC community. One participant noted the necessity of both the incoming Officer, along with the caseworker - if hired - be trained in mediation. Having clear portfolios to support case-work through the Office, is one of many strategies that could be implemented to lessen the burden students who face discrimination or violence may endure; there is less potential for people to be retraumatized by having to tell their story multiple times.

*More Integrated into Academia*

**Recommendations:**

1. That departmental chairs along with the Vice Dean Academics invite the Equity and Diversity Officer to departmental and chair meetings.
2. That academic departments use the Equity and Diversity Officer as a resource to integrate equity into curriculum development plans, and that there be a reporting structure implemented between academic departments and the EDO.
3. That each faculty be required to undergo mandatory anti-oppression training facilitated through the Equity and Diversity Office.
4. That it be made mandatory for an equity statement and the contact information of the Equity and Diversity Office to be included in each syllabus.

Each participant recognized how important it was for the EDO to exist, but some were concerned that many faculty members did not know this Office existed on campus. They felt as if the Office has done what they could to create a presence on campus with the capacity and

resources it had available. Though some staff-persons we consulted told us the Officer was invited to some of their meetings, some faculty said the EDO was never invited to their academic departmental meetings. One faculty participant specifically suggested that, '*chairs of academic departments should be in constant contact with the Equity and Diversity Office*'. Creating relationships between chairs and the Equity and Diversity Office is a tangible way to integrate equitable practices across departments, and it can concretely be achieved by inviting the EDO to their meetings every so often. With the proper resources, the Equity and Diversity Office can provide tangible support to faculty and chairs with respect to making necessary changes to their classroom environment and materials shared to prioritize inclusivity. Specifically, it was suggested that, '*the Office should give faculty tools to be able to teach equity and develop their courses by integrating equity*.' This could be achieved by including the perspective of Black researchers, responding to studies done on Muslim participants, or having required readings by Indigenous authors. Further, other structural changes can be done through changes to course evaluations, hiring practices, or by introducing anti-oppression trainings to faculty and chairs. A participant recommended that, '*equity-based standards should be created across departments to balance the playing field. There are about 83 tenured male professors and 13 female professors*'. Rather than relying solely on responses to course evaluations, fulfilling quotas to make the classroom environment more inclusive should be incentivized and rewarded. These are ways of leveling the playing field for faculty who are marginalized, as well as faculty who support students who are marginalized as well.

Lastly, including an equity statement in the syllabus, is a useful reference point to start the conversation around standards of inclusivity in the classroom and at the University of Toronto Scarborough. It can also act as resource of support for faculty, teaching instructors and students in the classroom, if the equity statement is paired with contact information for the Equity and Diversity Office. These suggestions are few of many ideas that will improve the level of respect between students and faculty, as well as among faculty.

### *Collaborations*

#### **Recommendation:**

1. That the Equity and Diversity Office have ongoing collaborations with a variety of departments, and actively seek new collaborations with equity-based committees.

Many of our student participants mentioned that the SCSU Orientation was some of their introduction to the Equity and Diversity Office, and that these collaborations should continue. Orientation is the first point of contact many first years have with the Scarborough Campus, so the EDO having a presence at the three-day event is an integral collaboration to prioritize. The Equity and Diversity Office has already created a presence on campus through various avenues, including its collaborations with different Offices, student groups and departments on campus. It was recommended though, that the Office make an ongoing effort to actively seek opportunities for new collaborations with groups doing equity work across the University of

Toronto. Specifically, the newly developed Black faculty committee, as well as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission committee were two suggested groups for the Equity and Diversity Office to develop relationships with. By working with these committees, the Office will be able to actively support the perspectives of communities who are often silenced to enact change.

### **Conclusion**

After having met with a wide variety of participants, it was made clear that we truly have a unified goal of fostering an inclusive campus community. This compilation of narratives is a starting point for the Scarborough Campus to continue being an anchor institution that sets the tone of where we would like to be as a society. Listening to the perspectives of our campus community by adopting the following recommendations is not only important, but imperative. The Scarborough Campus Students' Union would like to thank each participant for sharing anecdotes of discrimination faced on campus, and for offering insight on what they would like to see from the Equity and Diversity Office. We look forward to seeing the ways in which these suggestions may support improvements made to the Office.

### **Bibliography:**

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