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Report of the Chair of the Equity Committee, 2020–2021

July 10, 2021

The Equity Committee sought to identify ways we could reduce long-standing systemic inequities that the pandemic exacerbated.

As chair, I organized a webinar titled “The Stakes of ‘Diversity’ in Higher Education Today” with Professor Matthew Shenoda, Associate Provost for Social Equity & Inclusion and Professor of Literary Arts and Studies at Rhode Island School of Design (RISD).

Held on November 5, 2020, the event drew roughly 140 UTFA members. The webinar was an integral step in UTFA’s efforts to foster deep and meaningful dialogue to combat embedded formations of anti-Black and other forms of racism—historical and structural—that negatively impact academic life on our campus.

Professor Shenoda offered strategies to advance a more just and equitable university community through his critique of the traditional manner in which equity, diversity, and inclusion have been rhetorically advanced by university administrators. He offered a three-pronged method to think through these weighted terms, how centralizing academic, intellectual, and curricular engagement can transform spaces and policies as they relate to today’s most pressing issues of anti-Blackness and race on campus.

Renewed by this webinar, the Equity Committee met later in the fall to map our long-term objectives as well as the need to consider immediate goals following the racial reckoning facing university campuses after the murder of George Floyd as well as incidents of anti-Black racism, anti-Indigenous racism, and racism in general that have occurred in Toronto and Canada.

We held vigorous discussions on how U of T’s senior Administration can improve efforts to combat racism and implement equitable policies. We also discussed the Administration’s insufficient response to anti-Blackness, which consisted mostly of sensitivity training for white faculty.

The Equity Committee sought a tangible and impactful strategy. Through UTFA, we intend to lobby the Administration to implement cluster hires of Black and Indigenous faculty—with the understanding that

new faculty will require structures for support, retention, and building research capacity. We invited Professor Michael Freitte (University of Windsor) to the Equity Committee's second meeting (held in March 2021). He shared his experience of negotiating and navigating cluster hires to help us understand how this initiative could successfully be implemented at U of T.

The Equity Committee will plan additional events as part of our ongoing equity agenda. We also plan to update UTFA's website to reflect our renewed commitments, particularly in describing forms of inequity, such as resisting white supremacy and anti-Blackness.

We passed the following motion after discussing the law school hiring controversy:

UTFA's Equity Committee strongly encourages UTFA Council to urge the U of T Administration to resolve the Law School Hiring Controversy Association Grievance. This resolution must be consistent with the MoA's core principles of academic freedom, collegial governance, non-discrimination, freedom from external interference, and due process.

Recently, UTFA President Terezia Zorić reported on the status of UTFA's ongoing advocacy in relation to pay equity, employment equity, and salary discrimination, relating that while UTFA has made advances, there is still much work to be done. President Zorić recommended that, following the disclosure of equity data from the Administration, the Equity Committee strike a subcommittee to review the data to support ongoing Association grievance work. The Committee will take on this important work in the coming months.

I also serve on OCUFA's Status of Women and Equity Committee, where I keep abreast of emerging equity developments and policies at Ontario's post-secondary institutions.

Kass Banning
Chair, Equity Committee

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