

**The University of British Columbia, School of Social Work's**

**Equity and Diversity Strategic Plan:**

**Faculty Perceptions and Experiences**

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This report includes feedback from faculty members at the University of British Columbia's School of Social Work. Through an analysis of participant responses, key themes emerged and are categorized under five sections: leadership, governance, and strategic commitment; faculty recruitment and retention; student outreach, admissions, and support; curriculum and pedagogy; and climate and collegiality. Recommendations from participants for policies and practices to better address and improve equity issues are also provided in this report. Last, the parallels between the key themes and recommendations from the faculty interviews and those that surfaced in other reports by the UBC School of Social Work's Equity Task Force are outlined in this paper.

### **Interview Process**

Eight participants were interviewed for this report. The information was gathered through four one-on-one interviews and four written responses to the interview questions. One-on-one interviews ranged from forty-five minutes to one hour.

### **Participant Responses and Key Themes**

#### **Leadership, Governance, and Strategic Commitment**

- One of the participants commented that the School of Social Work's commitment to equity is "uneven at best". Another participant also described such an "even commitment" amongst faculty at the School in acknowledging and addressing equity issues. There are attitudinal barriers and a "tendency at the faculty level to assume that

because we are about social justice that means we are an equitable School; therefore, there is a failure to recognize the problems.

- As one of the participants included, the lack of any written equity policies represents the lack of commitment amongst the faculty, as well as the lack of acknowledgement that inequity issues exist within the School. Despite the development of an affirmative action approach, including five spots during admissions reserved for Aboriginal students, information regarding this policy is inaccessible as it is difficult to find in written form. It is not stated on the School of Social Work website, nor in any Social Work student handbooks.
- One of the participants noted that the university's (UBC) mandate for excellence "overshadows the practice of equity in that it is defined simplistically, and operationalized in a very simplistic way". The "corporatization [and] increasing bureaucratization of the University" seems to be "narrowing the definition of equity and [using] a more positivist analysis rather than the inclusion of qualitative views" of equity and diversity. These forces are influencing the ways in which the School addresses equity issues.
- One of the participants stated, "We are directed by accreditation standards in this regard and found to be compliant with respect to the requirement that we have a plan". However, according to several other participants, this has not been sufficient in fully acknowledging and addressing inequity and barriers that still exist within the School for faculty and students.
- Several of the participants believed that there is some commitment to equity at the School due to leadership from a group of faculty members, but strategic commitment from the

entire School is lacking. One of the participants said that some faculty members “can see the issue in all of its complexity and are committed to making progress in this area”.

- Several of the participants spoke about the lack of linear progress and the inconsistency in following through with addressing equity issues at the School. One of the participants described this as “the see-saw effect”.
- Several of the participants commented that sessional instructors did not have as much opportunities to be involved in, and be informed about how the School is addressing equity. One of the participants also noted that there has been minimal discussion about equity in the Field Education and Curriculum Committees during their involvement in it.
- One of the participants noted that the School is not a place that recognizes the value of elders in either a formal or informal way. We do not have the presence of emeritus faculty in our midst. At one time, retired faculty were a part of the School’s community life. Now there is very little evidence that their presence is valued. Other departments on campus have encouraged the ongoing participation of emeriti and recognize the contribution that these faculty members can make, particularly in the mentoring of new faculty.
- In addition to the absence of emeritus faculty, an ageist culture has been developing. Faculty speak openly about the need to encourage ‘older’ faculty to retire and to replace them with younger more energetic people. These comments often reflect an ignorance of the work done by the older faculty, currently and over time. Discussions about age have also occurred during hiring processes. Older faculty, as well as others have become concerned about a growing lack of consultation about a number of decisions made about the School. They value the traditional model of university governance which includes

substantial, genuine consultations with faculty about decisions made about the School and about themselves. Some reports having been given assignments without consultation that they consider more appropriate for junior faculty to be assigned. As well, they report not having been consulted about decisions in areas where their individual or collective experience may have added value to the decision.

### **Faculty Recruitment and Retention**

- The overall theme in this category was that there has been some progress, but there are still many equity issues that need to be acknowledged and addressed at the School. The participant responses and themes below fall under this overarching theme.
- Several of the participants stated that there have been recent successes in diminishing the gender imbalance within the faculty, through the recent hiring of several new female faculty members, one lesbian professor, and an Aboriginal professor. However, several of the participants also discussed how there needs to be increased and continuous efforts to hire and retain diverse faculty members.
- One of the participants believed that there is not enough focus on hiring racially-minoritized faculty, especially foreign-born individuals. This participant noted that the faculty composition does not represent the racial and ethnic population in the Lower Mainland., and that age and ability are rarely addressed. This participant stated that the faculty needs to reflect client populations and the general population of the Lower Mainland.
- Several of the participants said that there has recently been a focus on recruitment and hiring of minoritized faculty, but not enough discussions around retention. Additionally,

the recent hiring is only a start. A couple of the participants stated that there seems to be a general attitude amongst many faculty members that the recent hiring of several minoritized faculty has ‘solved’ the issues of faculty recruitment. One participant said, “Faculty recruitment is [still] a problem, similarly as the broad level of the university, where experience and knowledge is understood and assessed based on traditional, mainstream and western criteria”. There is a “set of implicit attitudes and a mentality that create barriers to bring in people of different backgrounds or with different perspectives”.

- One of the participants stated that although it is mentioned in recruitment ads that minoritized members are encouraged to apply, there are no policies such as affirmative action, and barriers faced by applicants are not officially considered in the hiring process. Several other participants mentioned the lack of affirmative action policies in hiring faculty.
- One participant commented that despite the recent changes to the ratio of male to female professors at the School, at the university level (as well as at the School of Social Work), there is still a wage difference between men and women. Additionally, this participant stated that there are also differences in negotiating styles between genders when making requests of pay, which represents gender inequity on structural levels. These differences represent one of the ways in which systems, such as academic sites, favour socially-learned communication styles, enabling learned male communication and interaction approaches to succeed in such settings. This participant believed that to lessen this gender barrier, the University, including the School of Social Work, should have base salaries to decrease the wage gap.

### **Student Outreach, Admissions, and Support**

- Several of the participants mentioned that progress has not been linear. For example, one participant discussed how there was an equity policy for student admission, which came into effect in the early 1990's. This policy was for students who identifies as having barriers to access to education due to inequity. These applicants would write one page on how these barriers have impacted them, which were taken into consideration during the admissions process. However, this policy only existed until 1994, when a group of students went to the senate to try to eradicate the policy as they believed that decisions regarding admissions should be solely based on academic merit. This was a large setback. Then, in 1997, five designated spaces for Aboriginal students at the Bachelor of Social Work program, and soon after, the Master of Social Work program, were established. After this was accomplished, the next step was including work experience and the study plan in the Master of Social Work admission process. This enabled the School to consider other abilities and experiences, instead of focusing one hundred percent on grades. This was not without its challenges, however. According to one of the participants interviewed, there were some people amongst the faculty who believed in focusing only on Grade Point Average (GPA) when admitting students into the School of Social Work.
- Two of the participants discussed the additional points that are available to self-identified Aboriginal students and a designated number of seats reserved. However, one of these participants noted that this is not widely known enough, nor is it clearly stated on the School of Social Work's website.

- Several of the participants said that the School is starting to match/represent the Lower Mainland's percentage of minoritized peoples, but it is still falling behind in equal representation of Aboriginal students.
- One of the participants spoke about how in the early to mid-1990's, there was recognition that it was a very "White" School; therefore, in 1993, the School did a study in East Vancouver, which approached three communities: an Aboriginal, Chinese, and Vietnamese community. The goal of this study was to receive feedback on how to get a larger pool of applicants from diverse backgrounds. However, there have not been many studies since this.
- When discussing barriers that students and applicants face, one participant stated, "The barrier I can note most readily is related to class. Living and studying in Vancouver is beyond the reach of many". Another participant commented that there is "not enough support for single mothers around childcare and accommodation".
- Two of the participants commented that additional support and accommodations for students facing barriers is offered by individual faculty members, but noted that there is currently nothing in policy regarding this; thus, just as leadership and strategic commitment relating to equity is taken on by some faculty, extra support and accommodations for students in terms of inequity issues is also imbalanced and inconsistent.
- Several of the participants noted that the School of Social Work engages in minimal student outreach.
- Several of the participants stated that the School is not doing enough to promote and commit to improving equity. It is still a predominantly white student body, and there is

currently not enough outreach or support to accept and retain minoritized and low-income students. For example, one participant stated, “narrowly defined criteria based on experience can be used to discriminate against students who are immigrants and recently arrived since only Canadian experience is desirable and valued. One example of a woman from China who had been a professor there had again lacked the ability to package herself and was not selected”. This participant expanded by saying that there are “implicit assumptions that PhD students need Canadian experience, to learn the Canadian way, and this reflects the Canadian centric and Eurocentric and North American-centric criteria of what counts as valuable skills and experience. Instead, we should be including the experience and perspectives that they bring into the curriculum”.

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### **Curriculum and Pedagogy**

- Several of the participants believed that staff, faculty, and students who identify as belonging to one or more minoritized groups do not see themselves reflected in the curriculum in most classes and that they are viewed as an “add-on”. Furthermore, these participants included that the curriculum still does not meet the needs of all students, especially students with difference backgrounds and interests.
- One of the participants stated that there is still a lack of immigrant and refugee issues/topics in the current curricula. This participant also noted that the School needs to improve the ways in which students are taught to work with racialized clients.
- Several of the participants stated that curriculum on Aboriginal issues at the School of Social Work still needs to be improved. For example, one participant added that there

needs to be further acknowledgement of the divide/differences between rural and urban Aboriginal communities. These participants noted that such improvements are necessary in both the First Nations Social Work program, and the mainstream program.

- Several of the participants mentioned the ongoing debate about integration versus separation of courses for equity-related topics.
- One of the participants commented, “It remains a challenge to include curricular material of broad application in an increasingly global classroom” and that “theoretical approaches derived from a Western heritage do not always fit with the experience of scholars from other traditions. This is not always reparable but it requires awareness and a willingness to inform ourselves of other paradigms within the scope of our competence”.
- One participant stated, “Feminism and anti-racism are interesting subjects to discuss for a lot of people but they often don’t examine day to day behaviours from these points of view”.
- One of the participants discussed how syllabi are supposed to outline equity perspectives, which faculty are reminded of; however, this is not always followed-up with.
- Several of the participants talked about the need for more course material on equity-related topics, which needs to occur in all classes, not just at times when there are minoritized students in the class.
- Several of the participants stated that the School of Social Work needs to commit to strengthening the ways in which pedagogy addresses equity issues. They commented that even if such topics are included in the curricula, the ways in which these issues are taught are equally important. One of the participants provided examples of ways to

incorporate other forms of teaching (pedagogical practices), such as art and theatre (i.e. Theatre of the Oppressed).

- One of the participants saw the School's curriculum as "very problematic". The participant expanded by stating, "The idea that students will learn everything they need to in one course is a problem. Curriculum is Eurocentric and North American-centric. Confusion that students expect that practical skills will be taught and critical thinking is not part of that and this is a problem. Students then resent that concrete skills not taught".

### **Climate and Collegiality**

- One participant stated, "Even within a department that touts itself as very committed to social justice there is very little understanding of the concept of 'women's work' or caring labour that has to be done to keep a social work department afloat. This work is mostly invisible, taken for granted and not valued". This impacts climate and collegiality.
- A participant discussed the "strong white male culture" in the School, "which creates a cold climate in a school that curiously prides itself on social justice and an ethic of care. White males predominate over programs".
- One of the participants added that "climate is one with of low morale with staff. Racialized staff rarely raise their voices and one wonders if this is related to inequity and silencing. [There is a] clear hierarchy that staff are not considered part of life of school".
- Climate among faculty is male dominated, white centric dynamics, sense of white entitlement

- One of the participants said, “I think that a big obstacle is getting people to talk about how we operationalize the concept of equity”. Another participant added that there is a “tendency to minimize and avoid naming issues to the real magnitude of the problem, such as racism and homophobia”.
- Several of the participants believed that barriers faced by faculty are largely invisible. For example, experiencing racism from students in course evaluations, or hearing students complain about minoritized faculty members in meetings, without addressing their issues directly with the professor. Additionally, a participant noted that when minoritized colleagues experience racism, there are times when it is brushed off as a coincidence that the critiques made were targeted at racially-minoritized and Aboriginal professors, instead of the acknowledgement of racism within the School.
- One participant noted that there have been improvements over the years. For example, spousal appointments and other accommodations were not available to sexual minority faculty until recently and adoptive parents only got parental leave two contract rounds back.
- Many of the participants acknowledged climate as being one of the key factors in improving equity within the School. Some of these participants stated that faculty, staff, and students who face fewer barriers seem to recognize and/or voice less concerns about inequity within the School of Social Work. However, there are some exceptions to this; there are some faculty who have experienced fewer barriers on a personal level who are able to see the inequity present in the School’s climate.
- Several of the participants added that there is still an underrepresentation of queer-identified students, especially transgendered individuals.

- Some of the participants noted that barriers seem to be seen by some faculty and students as individual, instead of systemic.
- Several of the participants talked about the challenges faced by faculty who teach equity-related topics, such as racism or heteronormativity. For example, if it is a minoritized faculty member, some students see issues brought up in class as the professor's own agenda. When a non-minoritized faculty teaches these classes, some students view that professor as not understanding the issues.
- One of the participants mentioned the recent attempts to strengthen an equitable and inclusive climate within the School through the changes to student orientation. This participant noted that this needs to be explored further, which questions such as, how do we sustain this? And to have ongoing evaluations about climate.
- Several of the participants discussed how the School's curricula and pedagogy also impact climate, and that there is a strong connection between these areas when establishing equity within the School. These participants stated that until recently, there has not been enough attention focused on equity in climate.
- Several of the participants believed that the climate is "getting better", but that there is still "a long way to go". One of these participants noted that it is challenging to mobilize collective action; therefore, critical mass of various equity groups is needed so that people can work collectively.
- One of the participants said that the issue of "safety" is "overstated". Students need to be prepared for work environments, and "safety" should not be about pacifying defensive behaviour from privileged students. This participant also commented that for minoritized

faculty, there are times when it feels unsafe to teach; for example, when receiving racist and defensive feedback from students in course evaluations.

- When discussing a specific incident where racism was evident in a conversation about a faculty member that was not present at the time, the participant interviewed distinguished who was tenure and who was non-tenure. Additionally, this participant noted the minoritized identities of the faculty members present. This anecdote illustrated how (a) non-tenured professors may feel more silenced, due to the possibility that standing up for other colleagues and/or naming racism, and other “-ism’s”, may affect their chances of making tenure; (b) that racism and other forms of oppression still strongly exist within the School of Social at UBC; and (c) racism (and other forms of oppressive comments and attitudes) include internalized racism, as comments were made in this discussion by other minoritized faculty as well. It is imperative that these issues are addressed, through both changes in policy and practice, as without acknowledging the reality that inequity is present and that minoritized voices are still be silenced in the School, there will continue to be an unsafe climate. Furthermore, if such attitudes exist amongst the faculty, it will impact the learning environment in the School and students will get the message that such behaviours, comments, and attitudes are acceptable. It also teaches and demonstrates hypocrisy, for a School and profession that espouses social justice.
- One of the participants noted that “many of the issues of inequities are also related to the notion of professionalization. Professionalization is a complex and tricky way that some people are kept from getting through the door; whether in terms of political views, client - centred approach, ethical issues”.

### **Recommendations from Participants**

- Ensure ongoing dialogue and workshops about how to achieve equity.
- Ensure ongoing dialogue on what “safety” means, what it looks like in the classroom and overall School climate, and to whom.
- Establish an agreement to discuss the issue with every set of admissions and at every hiring and with every new course development.
- Continue to monitor the representation of our student body and staff/faculty composition.
- Encourage the ongoing participation of emeriti and recognize the contribution that these faculty members can make, particularly in the mentoring of new faculty.
- Ensure that ‘older’ faculty are not pressured to retire, as this contributes to an ageist culture at the School.
- Continue to monitor equity concerns through measures such as the UBC School of Social Work Equity and Diversity Strategic Plan.
- Include the Equity Office and the Ombudsman Office for students in orientation.
- Have all stakeholders be equally represented in contributing to any changes proposed in equity policies and practices.
- Collaborate with other Schools that demonstrate exemplary practices in including curricula on Aboriginal issues and admitting Aboriginal students, such as NVIT.
- Increase student outreach.
- Develop a written equity policy to direct faculty. This should include expectations and a plan to implement these procedures.
- Develop affirmative action in hiring processes, as well as in recruitment and outreach to students.

- Develop specific policies, such as an anti-racism policy, and around climate and environment.
- Ensure professional development for all professors in decolonizing and anti-racism.

### **Conclusion: Connections in the Key Themes and Recommendations**

Below are the connections made between the themes and recommendations in the UBC School of Social Work Equity and Diversity Strategic Plan's previous papers, and the themes and participants' recommendations from this report.

#### **Leadership, Governance, and Strategic Commitment**

- Put equity and diversity-related topics on the agenda at the School of Social Work's committee meetings.
- Strengthen strategic commitment in equity and diversity practices at the School through written documents, such as reports, reviews, evaluations, official policies, and guidelines.
- Ensure collective decision-making and consultation amongst all faculty and staff members.
- Increase the School of Social Work's involvement and collaboration with the University of British Columbia campus-wide.
- Increase the efforts, support, and time from all faculty and staff.

#### **Faculty and Staff Recruitment, Hiring, and Retention**

- Develop affirmative action policies or guidelines.

- Remove explicit and implicit expectations that members of specific minoritized groups will educate other faculty members and teach courses on equity-related topics.
- Foster relationships with other programs and centres at the university to recruit potential candidates.
- Establish relationships with community groups and agencies to recruit candidates who may be interested in teaching and researching at the School of Social Work.
- Encourage the ongoing participation of emeriti and recognize the contribution that these faculty members can make, particularly in the mentoring of new faculty.
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### **Student Outreach, Admission, and Support**

- Develop affirmative action policies or guidelines.
- Increase outreach strategies.
- Have specific guidelines on how all faculty members can support and accommodate students, to increase consistency of support provided to students within the School.

### **Curriculum**

- Discuss equity and diversity-related issues in the curricula during faculty meetings and the Field Education and Curriculum Committee meetings.
- Teach critical-reflection and anti-oppressive practice from a social justice perspective in every course delivered, rather than only focusing on this in courses specially addressing equity-related topics. This can be achieved by increasing attempts in moving beyond token inclusion and moving towards fully integrating the material in all courses. This

will teach students and remind faculty that everything taught can be related to equity and that equity-related topics are not separate, and therefore should not be compartmentalized.

- Incorporate an equity and diversity section in each course syllabus, which delineates equity and diversity-related objectives of the course, and the methods and assignments by which these objectives will be achieved.
- Develop and offer more upper-level courses on specific equity-related topics; for example, LGBT2IQ and Immigrant and Refugee issues.

### **Pedagogy**

- Demonstrate congruency in curricula and pedagogy.
- Apply pedagogical practices that promote equity, diversity, and inclusion. For example, collaborative learning; group work; active student participation; self-directed learning to support students in their academic; professional, and personal growth; and art and theatre.
- Increase consistency amongst faculty in pedagogical practices, with room for varied styles in teaching.
- Ensure constant program evaluation.

### **Climate**

- Continue to develop and implement strategies and initiatives in addressing equity and diversity in all areas (leadership, governance, and strategic commitment; faculty and staff recruitment, hiring, and retention; student outreach, admissions, and support; scholarship; curriculum; and pedagogy).

- Ensure that equity and diversity initiatives are taken-up by all faculty and staff, rather than only by minoritized and underrepresented faculty and staff.
- Ensure supportive and receptive responses if minoritized colleagues complain of discrimination.
- Address “chilly climates” towards minoritized and underrepresented groups, stereotyping, and silencing.
- Value knowledges brought by minoritized faculty within curriculum, research, and pedagogical practices.