

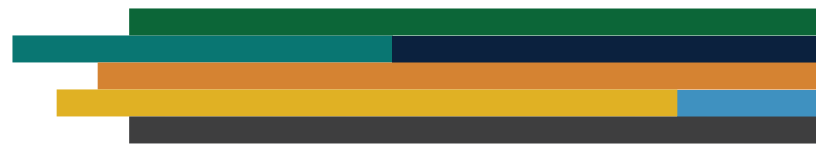


# CONVERSATION

## RACE MATTERS

2020 | ANTI-RACISM  
SUMMIT  
REPORT

This report prepared by:  
Kofi Campbell and Ethan Candler





04	Welcome Message from Kofi Campbell, Ethan Candler, and Gina Hickman
06	Executive Summary
08	Introduction
12	Historical, ideological, and institutional context for racial justice in the higher-education sector
14	Summit discussion topics and delegate notes <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Whiteness and power</li><li>Leadership and administration</li><li>Academic Processes, Teaching and Curriculum, Service Structures and Processes</li><li>Funding, resources, and access for your EDI/anti-racism Office</li><li>Representation</li><li>Data</li></ul>
38	Students
54	Sector-wide Anti-racism Task Force
64	Acknowledgements
66	Constraints: Institutional, Social, Political

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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Design and layout: Tiffany Murphy.  
Editing and project management: Cort Egan.

# CONVERSATIONS ACTION

## RACE MATTERS



# WELCOME MESSAGE FROM CONFERENCE ORGANIZERS

The ConversAction Summit, co-hosted by Renison University College and the University of Waterloo, brought together senior university leaders from across the country for a focused two-day discussion of racism in the Canadian higher-education sector, and to create an action plan for furthering anti-racism work in our sector. As people who hold social power and privilege through our access to post-secondary institutions, and by virtue of being appointed to various faculty or administrative positions, we invite all readers of this report to reflect on our collective responsibility to undertake the work of dismantling and reforming the violent and oppressive systems from which we have benefited, and which nevertheless continue to oppress us as well.

In the time between the announcement of the summit and today, events have demonstrated even more urgently the need for vigorous anti-racism work across all sectors of our society. We have witnessed the current global movement for racial justice and against institutional violence sparked by the state-sanctioned police murders of George Floyd and others in the United States, along with numerous police murders of Black and Indigenous people in Canada, notably Regis Korchinski-Paquet and Chantel Moore. We have seen calls to address long-standing inequities, exposed by a global pandemic. And for the first time in our lifetimes, we have witnessed actual inroads being made into the dismantling of many oppressive systems and institutions that have forever seemed invincible. Politicians themselves are speaking of defunding the police, and national leaders have acknowledged outright the institutional nature of racism in Canada. Universities across the nation are looking critically at their own programs and operations and are starting to take meaningful steps to address

racism. Topics such as abolition and community-based approaches to policing have entered the lexicon of the mainstream. Even just a few years ago, all of this seemed untouchable. Dr. Angela Davis, professor emerita at UC Davis and famed activist and icon of the Black Liberation movement, when asked in a recent interview with Democracy Now! if she feels that this moment is a tipping point in the fight for racial justice, said “Absolutely. This is an extraordinary moment. I have never experienced anything like the conditions we are currently experiencing.”

This current moment, born out of the most brutal of histories and the most egregious realities of contemporary racism, is one that we must seize. Delegates at ConversAction undertook to do exactly that. Post-secondary institutions are uniquely situated to be leaders in anti-racism efforts, largely due to the years of foundational advocacy work by BIPOC students, staff, and faculty, and the preliminary actions already taken by some colleges and universities in the form of working groups, task forces, and institutional data gathering. A plethora of institutional reports and advocacy documents, gathered largely through community/student organizing, exist at many colleges and universities. And, in light of the current widespread awareness of systemic anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism, and the rise of anti-Asian racism during the pandemic, post-secondary institutions and the administrators who lead them have been provided a rare opportunity to take meaningful steps toward dismantling systems and structures of oppression that have erected barriers for, and caused harm to, BIPOC students for decades.

The time for action is here. Our students, and BIPOC members of our institutions at all levels,

have been shouting into the void, begging to be heard for what seems an eternity. Now, our institutions have pledged their commitment to hearing us, and have promised change. What is required now is the will – the will for those institutions to transform all of their pretty words and flowery equity statements into action, and the will for those of us who have been on the front lines of this fight to demand that they live up to those words, and to hold their feet to the fire when they fail to do so. What is necessary is for us to come together as a sector, to speak with a singular and powerful voice against those forces which stand against meaningful anti-racism work, and to hold ourselves and each other to account.

The delegates at ConversAction identified many challenges to this work and, more importantly, used their expertise to develop and offer solutions, and to craft a shared vision of a way forward. They spoke clearly of the need for a sector-wide approach, informed by the expertise of BIPOC leadership and devoted to providing system-wide access to expertise, support, experience, and resources. The primary recommendation arising out of the conference is the creation of a sector-wide anti-racism task force to drive our collective work forward in a way that is powerful, sustainable, and capable of surviving inevitable transitions at individual institutions. We owe it to our students, to our institutions themselves, and to our society to create campuses where all voices can be heard equally, and where everyone can be fully themselves with the expectation of safety and belonging. To imagine a future in which Black and Indigenous students, staff, and faculty are welcomed and empowered rather than silenced and dismissed. To reimagine colleges and universities as places of discovery, enlightenment, and community for all students, where critical intersectionality, anti-racist

principles, and decolonization underpin every aspect of decision- and policy-making. We believe that together, this is achievable.

Thus, it is with great excitement and hope for a collaborative anti-racist future for higher-education in Canada that we present the report of the ConversAction Summit. In this report we delve into some of the most significant barriers to implementing and engaging with anti-racism work in the Canadian post-secondary sector, and we envision a path forward in which a sector-wide anti-racism task force can help facilitate the dismantling of those barriers. We thank all of our delegates for their participation in this vital work, and the energy and hope they injected into our two days together. We invite you all to read and engage with this report in a spirit of openness, and we look forward to our collective work in the fight against the continuing scourge of racism in our institutions.



## CONFERENCE ORGANIZERS:

*Kofi Campbell*

Vice-President: Academic,  
Renison University College

*Ethan Candler*

Medical Student at the University of  
Alberta, previously Advocacy Director  
and Coordinator of RAISE at the  
University of Waterloo

*Gina Hickman*

Director of Equity,  
University of Waterloo

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Racism continues to be a persistent reality in Canadian institutions of higher education. Despite a growing awareness and public acknowledgment of this fact, little has changed on our campuses. Conference attendees came together to identify reasons for this continued presence of racism on our campuses, to brainstorm solutions, and to chart a strategy for concrete action and change. A wide variety of specific problems and strategies were identified, as can be seen in this report's table of contents. Chief among these were: the enduring presence of colonialist and white supremacist attitudes as foundational to the operation of our institutions; the absence of diversity at all levels of those institutions, and the resulting exclusion of anti-racist knowledge and practices from all levels of institutional decision-making; the lack of proper resourcing of EDI and anti-racism work, when such work is taken seriously at all; the lack of real and sustained engagement with students, who represent both our largest constituency and our most vulnerable, in institutional anti-racism efforts; and the lack of a sector-wide plan of action, and a national community of expertise and support, to drive this work forward in a sustainable manner.

The creation of a sector-wide anti-racism task force was the primary recommendation arising out of the *(e)Race(r)* Conference, the first sector-wide anti-racism summit which took place in 2016. At ConversAction, such a task force was cited repeatedly as a necessity for this work to continue effectively. Institutionalized racism is too ingrained and persistent for any of us to have a hope of tackling it in isolation. A sector-wide task

force would allow us to pool our knowledge and experiences, and develop a national repository of best practices, data, and expertise. It would provide stability to anti-racism efforts even as individuals move into and out of specific roles, and as the priorities of individual institutions change over time. It would provide unprecedented unity, and therefore strength, in our advocacy in relation to governments of all levels, and our communities. And most importantly, it would provide a structure of accountability, where individual institutions are not shamed, but can tell their own stories of progress in relation to a larger combined national effort. Overwhelmingly, the delegates at ConversAction committed to making this task force a reality, in order to serve as a driving force in the necessary work of turning various ongoing dialogues into concrete, sector-wide action.

On the facing page are the Calls to Action which emerged from the discussions that took place over our two days together. We invite you to engage with the fullness of this report, including the comprehensive notes of the delegates themselves, whose words we have centered so that readers may trace the contours and evolution of our discussions. The voices of students are strongly represented here, and both their suffering and their hopes emerge clearly. We hope that you will encounter and digest these words in a spirit of openness, and with a willingness to engage in the hard work of enacting concrete change. There is no doubt that together we can make real progress. It is time for us to turn dialogue into action.

## Calls to Action

1. **Create a Sector-wide Anti-racism Task Force:** we recommend that the sector move immediately to establish an anti-racism task force, which can unify the anti-racism efforts being undertaken across the country, and turn ongoing dialogues into more concrete action.
2. **Institute Proper Funding and Resources for Institutional EDI work:** If we as a sector are serious about this work, we must immediately begin to support our EDI offices and leaders in a way that enables them to do the work required of them. Institutions with 20 000 students cannot have two employees in an EDI office and expect them to be effective. Likewise, this work cannot be done off the side of someone's desk; there must be clear, focused leadership with a clear mandate to operate throughout the institution. And of course, the work of the task force will ultimately need to be operationalized at the institutional level. Likewise, the task force will need to rely on strong institutional supports to drive it. This will require well-resourced and well-staffed EDI offices at the institutional level.
3. **Engage Students Now, Often, Consistently, and Safely:** students are simultaneously our largest constituency, and our most vulnerable. We must immediately invite them into these conversations, we must include them from the beginning of processes, and we must involve them at all levels of decision-making at our institutions. Furthermore, we must do so in ways which ensure they can participate as safely as possible, and we must honour, and allow ourselves to be guided by, their lived-experiences and intimate understanding of racism and anti-racism work.
4. **Institutional Diversity and Representation Must be Addressed Now:** all of us must find ways to diversify our on-campus communities now. We must immediately ensure that our leadership structures, and indeed all levels of our institutions, are representative of a plurality of voices and experiences, so that issues of racism and oppression are addressed at multiple vectors within our institutions, and so that anti-racist thought is ubiquitous in all of our institutional planning, prioritization, and execution.
5. **Government and Community Engagement:** As a sector, we must lobby all levels of government to actively join us in fighting the scourge of racism, and demand that they help fund and resource our anti-racism efforts. We must reach out to our communities, including the media, local industries, community organizations, and individuals, to develop a web of relationships and active engagement that can encompass and support anti-racism efforts from the local to the national.



# INTRODUCTION

## About the ConversAction: Race Matters Summit

On November 7th and 8th, 2019, over 200 delegates representing Canadian institutions of higher learning, from coast to coast, convened in Waterloo for the ConversAction summit, with the aim of strategizing and implementing effective anti-racism strategies within our sector. Co-hosted by Renison University College and the University of Waterloo, the ConversAction Summit was conceived with the aim of maintaining the momentum created by the *(e)Race(r)* Conference hosted by Dr. Laura-Mae Lindo and Wilfrid Laurier in 2016. The findings of *e(RACE)r*, laid out in its post-summit report, are robust and still hold very true in today's socio-political climate, and ring loud in light of recent events and the resurgence of the *Black Lives Matter* movement internationally. Attendees and institutional leaders alike shared their motivations and desire for concrete progress, and crafted a bold vision for action with a preliminary blueprint for a sector-wide anti-racism strategy that would begin to address the structural and institutional racisms faced by people of colour within our sector, with a particular but not exclusive focus on anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism.

At the ConversAction Summit, we took as our starting point the report and recommendations arising from the *(e)Race(r)* Conference (<https://downloads.wlu.ca/downloads/student-life/diversity-and-equity/documents/eracer-summit-report.pdf>). As those of us who have engaged in this kind of work for a long time know well, part of the frustrating nature of anti-racism activism is that it is often full of starts and stops, and the need to bring different groups up to speed before moving forward. By taking the *(e)Race(r)* report as our starting point, we signaled clearly that we intended to continue moving forward, rather than repeating work that had already been done, and recreating conversations that had

already taken place. And so, for a second time, we brought together senior university administrators, particularly Vice-Presidents: Academic and their teams (such as Vice-Presidents and/or Associate Vice-Presidents and/or Deans responsible for Teaching and Learning, Research, Student Life, Equity and Diversity), as well as faculty, staff, and especially student leaders in anti-racism work; in other words, those who have the ability and authority to return to their institutions and enact real changes based upon our discussions. This summit was action-oriented. While there were many opportunities for education, the goal was to have participants work collaboratively to develop solid plans to further anti-racism work on their campuses and across the wider Canadian university sector.

Prioritizing the lived experiences of Black, Indigenous, and racialized people while being intentional about discussing trauma around racism, attendees took part in a series of discussions and strategy planning sessions, which led to the creation of an overarching action plan endorsed by a wide consensus of those present – the creation of a sector-wide anti-racism task force designed to actively champion anti-racism work in our institutions. Delegates argued strongly that a sector-wide task force would provide critically-needed continuity and leadership in this work, as well as a pool of knowledge and experience and talent, and opportunities to learn from and support each other. As importantly, it would liaise with other groups focusing on this work in more specific ways, and work to help operationalize initiatives like the *Scarborough National Charter on Anti-Black Racism and Black Inclusion in Canadian Higher Education*. The creation of such a task force was the primary recommendation arising out of the *(e)Race(r)* Conference – at ConversAction, we committed to making this happen.



## Principles used in organizing ConversAction

- 01** Student-centric thinking, and the recognition that students are the largest, and most important stakeholders on campus.
- 02** Provide significant growth and educational opportunities for student attendees; help to develop their advocacy skills within their respective institutions.
- 03** Build relationships across the country and sector to facilitate the development of an anti-racism task force.
- 04** Approach this work in a relational and compassionate light, prioritizing the well-being, consideration, and just treatment of Black and Indigenous people and people of colour doing this work, and highlighting their lived experiences as valid metrics and data points.

## The Structure of this Report

Over the two days of the Summit, many free-flowing conversations took place alongside the more formal, organized sessions. This report captures all of these conversations in both general and specific terms, providing a coherent background context for each discussion before highlighting some of the more specific and recurring themes that emerged over our two days together. It focusses both on the various barriers that we have experienced thus far in attempting to take action on institutional racism, and on some of the possible solutions presented.

We use a thematic approach specifically to highlight the major recurring themes of conversation throughout

the Summit, and to engage in a deeper discussion about the ways in which these themes and associated sub-themes relate to, and inform, anti-racism work in post-secondary institutions generally. In these ways, we hope to preserve the authentic messaging and rich discussion that took place throughout our time together.

We begin by contextualizing the historical and current climate within post-secondary institutions that impacts the ability of Black, Indigenous and other racialized folks to meaningfully engage with those institutions, and of the institutions, in turn, to take concrete actions on anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism, as well as structural and systematic racial oppression. Ultimately,

the aim is to help elucidate the factors that have led us to this moment, to cultures of white supremacy, and to a colonialist logic.

We then move on to a discussion of the resulting institutional and academic impacts of white supremacist and colonial ideologies within our post-secondary institutions, and how they manifest within the structures, procedures, and the very consciousness of our campuses. The impacts of racism and colonization are deeply entrenched within higher education, and reflecting upon how we all act (or don't) in relationship with these forces, is the first step in facilitating necessary anti-racist actions within our respective institutions.

This broad understanding of anti-racism in higher education informs the next section, which itemizes the specific areas of post-secondary institutions in which concrete actions towards dismantling structural racism can, and must, be taken. There exist many specific calls-to-action with regards to racial justice, developed by students and staff at numerous post-secondary institutions (through the form of reports, advocacy campaigns, or student meetings) that will likely have significant overlap with the findings in this section. Administrators are highly encouraged to research what is taking place on the ground at their respective institutions, and to consider how the dialogues at ConversAction relate to their specific contexts.

The final section of this report highlights some key considerations in the development of a sector-wide anti-racism task force, founded in the rich conversation that took place at ConversAction. While this work must be more fully developed by the Black, Indigenous, and other racialized experts who will contribute to this initiative, this section nevertheless provides a set of guidelines and points of discussion that can serve as a springboard for those who will move forward in setting up and facilitating anti-racism work across the sector.



## A Note on the use of the term BIPOC

The Summit organizers understand that there are many issues with the use of the term BIPOC as a general designation for widely diverse and varied groups of people. During the two-day Summit, this term was very much in use and, as a result, we have made the decision to allow it to stand throughout the pages of this Report. No discourtesy is intended.



## A Note on Content

You will see throughout this report the use of personal pronouns such as “we,” “us” and “them.” We have made the deliberate decision to adopt the language of the conference attendees and delegates. You will also note that there is some repetition of some discussion points within the Report; again, this is by design. Many of the same themes arose again and again over the two-day summit; this highlights their importance and ubiquity, and we felt it was important to represent this. It is our desire, as much as possible, to accurately capture the language, content, and sentiments expressed over the two-day event.

# HISTORICAL, IDEOLOGICAL, AND INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT FOR RACIAL JUSTICE IN THE HIGHER-EDUCATION SECTOR

## Colonialism, anti-Black racism, and violence

All anti-racism work must begin with the absolute and irrefutable understanding that racism, in and of itself, is violence. There is a robust body of academic scholarship, as well as the lived experiences of racialized members of our academic communities, that make it clear that racism in all its forms - interpersonal, institutional, social, political - results in trauma, social exclusion, issues related to mental and physical health, curtailed career trajectories, careers cut short altogether, physical violence, and ultimately greater rates of mortality, including by suicide. These are all the results of racist violence.

The formation of post-secondary institutions has been, and campuses continue to be, greatly impacted by colonization and its legacy. Indeed, the historical and continuing complicity of the higher-education sector in structures of colonialism and racism is slowly becoming more openly acknowledged on our campuses. Still, society, and indeed many academics, generally think of institutions of higher education as especially liberal spaces of learning, where opportunities and access are particularly egalitarian and free from exclusionary racist practices. And yet students, faculty, staff, and administrators alike at ConversAction spoke clearly and repeatedly about the various forms of psychic violence enacted upon them by institutional structures and policies which are racist (whether overtly or covertly) and exclusionary, or which simply refuse to acknowledge their presence and take account of their specific needs.

The histories of colonial and white supremacist violence towards Indigenous peoples in particular are well-documented by Indigenous scholars and elders, including, for example, in the reports of the *Royal*

*Commission on Aboriginal People, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.* These documents do a more thorough job of elucidating the violent histories of this country towards its Indigenous communities generally than this report has the scope to do, but the continuing impacts of this colonialism in higher education cannot be understated. Barriers to entering post-secondary institutions for Indigenous students begin well before they even reach the point of facing the existing application processes, but summit delegates noted that hostile campus climates and colonized academic curricula are additive in their impacts. The institutional inertia experienced by many racialized and Indigenous folks at the conference, when attempting to address the systemic anti-Indigenous racism of colleges and universities, was also clearly articulated by members of other racialized groups. As expressed by many, institutions often “talk the talk,” but very rarely actually “walk the walk,” creating instead an environment in which existing procedures and policies supersede any efforts to keep Indigenous students from experiencing harm at the hands of the institution. Participants noted that, by refusing to display or empower Indigenous scholarship, Indigenous ways of knowing, and Indigenous-led student support services, institutions create distrust about whether they are *actually* listening and *actually* willing to make changes, particularly with regards to their public messages around “Indigenization” or their desire to “Indigenize the academy.” A concern iterated by multiple Indigenous participants is the blatant lack of nation to nation relationships when it comes to post-secondary institutions engaging with their Indigenous students, staff, and faculty.

Participants also noted a commonly-held understanding within the sector, of Indigenization and decolonization as simply two components among many that can be captured under the umbrella notion of “equity” work. Let us be clear that anti-racism work is not equity work, nor is it diversity work, nor is it human resources work. It is its own body of knowledge and practice that must be framed specifically according to its various institutional and social contexts – anti-Black racism work is different from anti-Indigenous racism work, despite their many similarities and opportunities for mutual support. And of course, even within those individual communities the differing contexts are important. Anti-Black racism work is quite different if it is happening in Canada or in the US or in Europe; it is different if the Black person is an immigrant or a citizen, or if they have a “thick” accent or not, or if they’re queer-identified or not, or if they’re neurodivergent or not, etc. Context matters, and the erasure of these differences is itself a violence; it is an effort to limit the number of voices who can speak to us from within a heterogeneous group,

and to portray that group as homogeneous. It is an attempt to force people into a framework that the institution can understand and control, rather than an attempt to actually understand and properly take account of those people. It is an attempt to ignore us, and a refusal to see us as we are, rather than as who they need us to be. It is the old colonial impulse to remove us from sight, to deprioritize us, as reminders of uncomfortable truths which must be rejected in order to form the myth of the thoroughly modern university or college.

This is the impulse we must fight at all costs. Consensus was clear among the delegates – it is time for us to stop trying to force ourselves into boxes made for us by our institutions, and instead to begin demanding that those institutions meet us, and speak with us, on our own terms as well. Anything else is simply retreading those old colonial pathways, and continually re-enacting those old colonial forms of violence. Our institutions have said they are ready to reject those ways of doing business. We must hold them to those words.

[RETURN TO TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)



# SUMMIT DISCUSSION TOPICS AND DELEGATE NOTES

## Whiteness and power

The discussions on this topic focused on the idea that our higher education institutions are structured around white majority rule, as faculty, staff, students, and especially administrative bodies, are overwhelmingly white, and have always been so. Because institutions have been constituted in this way since their inception, it is very difficult for them to envision other ways of organizing themselves and their power structures. In some cases, this means that change is seen as a threat to both personal and group structures of power.

Delegates noted that many things follow from these facts, including:

### 1. LACK OF EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION (EDI) SUPPORT

- Blatant lack of support for any real EDI work, including anti-racism. Most institutions make some efforts in this regard, but don't adequately support those they put in charge of this work. Resistance to supporting this work often comes from more conservative governance bodies, such as Boards of Directors of post-secondary institutions.

### 2. THE "MAJORITY RULE" DEFENSE

- Recognizing that we live in a pluralistic and diverse society, without acknowledging the differing needs of diverse people, is an uncritical way to approach "Diversity."
- Majority rule within systems and structures that are founded in colonialism and white supremacy simply perpetuate the same ideologies of oppression, which is why using a critical lens to analyze the needs of BIPOC folks is crucial. Majority rules means whiteness rules and BIPOC are left behind and silenced. We must be intentional in questioning whose voices are heard, whose votes are actually being counted, and who constitutes the majority.
- Do not submit minority rights for majority approval. Lead boldly, and support those minority rights because it is the correct and ethical thing to do.

### 3. FEAR OF CHANGE, OF POWER TRANSFER, AND OF CHANGING CURRENT IDEOLOGIES

- Feels like losing something, and is perceived as a threat by those who don't recognize the already unequal playing fields when it comes to BIPOC folks.
- Acknowledging minority rights is not like eating pie. More for me doesn't mean less for you.

#### 4. NICENESS AND POLITENESS BEING PROTECTED AND PRIORITIZED OVER THE VOICES OF BIPOC PEOPLE SHARING THEIR TRAUMA OR DEMANDING ACTION

- Tactic to tone-police and water down the emotions and trauma of BIPOC is inherently disenfranchising. How can we be calm when speaking of our subjugation?
- This is a silencing tactic.

#### 5. POWER

- We must reframe our understanding and analysis of power within an institutional context:
  - When many people who aren't versed in critical race theory or intersectionality hear the words "power" and "racism," they picture images of white hoods and burning crosses
  - Although these forces of white supremacy certainly still exist and impact the experiences of Black and Indigenous people in Canada, we must move beyond a superficial and dramatized understanding of power
  - Within post-secondary education, power manifests as the ability to make decisions, have one's voice taken account of, and feel secure and comfortable
- Participants noted repeatedly that BIPOC folks rarely hold any positions of power on our campuses, and this serves as a major constraint to anti-racism work. An over-representation of whiteness, white power, and male dominance in positions of power throughout the institution has resulted in privilege and whiteness always having the final say in decisions. Insufficient perspectives of BIPOC people, even at earlier stages of discussions and policy-making, and the maintenance of structures that uphold the status quo, because not committing to change benefits and secures power in the future for the white folks who already have it.
- BIPOC folks often exist in precarious positions within white and colonial institutions, lacking safety and security, and are therefore wary of rocking the boat.
- Problematizing BIPOC students, staff, and faculty who speak up is a safety issue. If you make us out to be the bad people, that makes it easier for others to vilify and threaten us.
- Similar perspectives create echo chambers once issues reach certain levels of power. We must disrupt decision-making processes before they get to too high a level, where maintaining the current system is often the priority.

[RETURN TO TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)



## 6. WHITENESS IN EQUITY

- White fragility and inability to discuss or address racism without defensiveness.
- Many institutions prioritize gender equity, but gender equity for whom? Where are the non-white women in leadership positions?
- Fear of too-progressive changes, and incremental reform is favoured in order to maintain the comfort of white people, which is prioritized over the safety of BIPOC.
- Maintains whiteness' monopoly on power within the institution, often hiring some BIPOC staff to do the work within a framework of whiteness or a frustrating work environment. If all of your EDI staff are BIPOC, but your VP: Diversity is white, that's a strong signal about your understanding of who should have power in your institution.

## 7. RELATED NOTES FROM DR. MALINDA SMITH'S KEYNOTE

*Merit is not the metric for success; whiteness is*

- Sameness but, in this context, whiteness is what we are really talking about.
- And whiteness doesn't mean being white, it means surrendering to the forces of white supremacy and not challenging the status quo in ways that benefit BIPOC folks. Ways to challenge the status quo:
  - Speaking up at work
  - Providing opportunities to BIPOC folks
  - Dedicating time and money to BIPOC-specific programs or initiatives
  - Challenging the supremacy of institutional policy in the university
  - Willingness to put self and success on the line for anti-racism



## Leadership and administration

One of the most important requirements for successful anti-racism work is, of course, bold and courageous leadership, a notion that was articulated repeatedly over the two days of the ConversAction summit. As already established, however, most senior academic leaders are white, and so the question of courageous leadership is also intertwined with the issues raised above in the delegate notes regarding “Whiteness and Power.”

The issues with leadership extend beyond questions of representation, however. Senior academic leadership has strong responsibilities to the institution, which can make it difficult for them to criticize the institution too strongly in a public setting without first resigning from their leadership positions. For administrators of colour, this creates a double-bind – representation of BIPOC people is clearly important in senior leadership, but what is the point of being a senior leader if one must temper one’s anti-racism work in ways that limit its effectiveness? There are no easy answers to this conundrum, but the question does refer us back to Malinda Smith’s assertion, noted in the section above, that at some point one must be willing “to put self and success on the line for anti-racism work.” This applies equally to white and BIPOC senior academic leaders.

### 1. NO CRITICAL KNOWLEDGE AROUND RACE AMONG SENIOR ACADEMIC LEADERS

General lack of awareness and ability to be critical when it comes to race relations. So many instances of foolish or poorly thought-out actions taken by institutional leadership that could have been avoided with general education around critical race theory, or indeed, by just consulting with BIPOC folk.

### 2. FEARFUL LEADERSHIP

- Fear of conflict among stakeholders.
- Fear of losing power and structures that benefit them.
- Fear of messing up; doing the wrong thing.
- Fear of negative public attention or scrutiny.

### 3. LEADERSHIP SO WHITE

- Equity leadership also tends to be white, not just senior administrators.
- “Diversity” leads to superficial programs.
  - Lack of intersectional analysis
  - Anti-racism isn’t central in equity, nor in larger leadership conversations, as it should be
- Expectation that anti-racism advocates will modify their tone and messaging to appease leadership, prioritizing white feelings over anti-racist action.

#### 4. NO CULTURE OF ACCOUNTABILITY, AND ANTI-RACISM WORK NOT BUILT INTO INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS

- Little institutional commitment to this work generally.
- Individuals aren't held accountable unless through public discourse and pressure.
  - Mechanisms of accountability in equity are weak and lacking follow-through from institutional leadership
  - Reports sitting on desks for months
  - Lack of published minutes/meetings
  - Closed door conversations to make important decisions
  - No real engagement or consultation with BIPOC community
  - Is your leadership team evaluated according to its progress in anti-racism work? If not, what does this signal about the importance of that work to your institution?

#### 5. BLATANT LACK OF BUY-IN FROM LEADERSHIP FOR THIS WORK

- Commitment and priority – anti-racism work gets neither.
- Don't see a problem and aren't willing to engage in learning or conversation.
  - Unwilling to relinquish power/reputation



## 6. MAINTAINING STAKEHOLDER RELATIONSHIPS

- Perceived necessity of prioritizing relationships in industry and private sectors through public institutions that harm BIPOC students.
  - Resource extractive industry relationships that inform institutional funding and in some cases curriculum development
- Conflict among staff, faculty, administration, and students in regards to anti-racism work, with opposition from stakeholders adding to the fear that decision-makers have when taking a stand for progressive action.
  - Development of community anti-racism training, courses, and ongoing education that can build broad understanding of the need for anti-racism work across campus is necessary
  - Mandatory course/training upon hire or tenure
- Must shift understanding of stakeholders when it comes to anti-racism. Stakeholder relations must be founded in community relationships with BIPOC folks on and adjacent to campus.
- Prioritization of the relationships with alumni, donors, and industry that may be opposed to anti-racism or prioritizing equity is problematic. By prioritizing the comfort and ideological stance of alumni, donors, or industry that don't support anti-racism or progressive agendas, institutions take the side of the oppressor and focusing on the comfort of these groups, over the safety and health of BIPOC students on campus. By not prioritizing the needs and safety of BIPOC folks, a clear message is sent of where the institution's priorities lie.

# Academic Processes, Teaching and Curriculum, Service: Delegate Notes

## 1. CURRICULUM

- Informed and developed with westernized and traditional university biases, leaving little space for Indigenized or racialized curricula.
- Incredible lack of racialized scholarship throughout post-secondary institutions:
  - Racist and colonial stereotype that “merit” comes first and identity comes second; however, these two things are intrinsically related and, within our oppressive society, not separable
  - Prevalent misconception that Indigenous and racialized scholarship is secondary, or of lesser quality, when scholars integrate and prioritize their identity within their work. Yet this work is necessary to develop anti-racist and Indigenized curriculum that can then further develop the understanding of the student and faculty body-at-large
- Anti-racism is seen as an add-on in programs, to the point of being relegated to optional workshops or tutorials.
  - Implementation of mandatory anti-racism and allyship workshops in every program is necessary to develop student body consciousness
  - This is related to the *e(RACE)r* report’s recommendations for anti-racism training for all faculty, staff and students across Canada

## 2. TRADITIONALISM

- Limits the possibilities of creating and designing new academic traditions that are inclusive and expansive with regards to BIPOC scholars.
- Traditionalism, in the context of a colonial system, really means the entrenchment of white supremacist ideology.
- As long as a mindset of prioritizing traditionalism within post-secondary institutions is upheld, Indigenization and other anti-racism efforts will always fail.

### 3. BIPOC COMMUNITY STRUGGLES

- Invisible labour:
  - Disproportional work of BIPOC staff and faculty to support, mentor, and guide BIPOC students through the racist institution
  - Unrecognized, but the labour is disproportionate and maintains a racial hierarchy within faculty tenure and promotion processes
- Black professors are expected to support and take on Black students because the gaps in support for Black students means there's nowhere else for them to go.
- Expected to sit on committees, councils, and take on advisement roles, with rarely any financial or professional benefit.
  - Anti-racism work on campuses is driven largely by free labour because of BIPOC students, staff, faculty taking this on
  - All of this extra labour means that BIPOC members of our community fall behind in their work, which affects their evaluations and long-term career trajectories
  - We must compensate BIPOC community members that are expected to do this work because everyone else is white
- Disruptive and racist faculty are protected by tenure:
  - There is a great deal of tension and disagreement among faculty themselves as to whether equity and anti-racism work is needed

### 4. CORPORATIZATION OF EDI

- White, cisgender, able-bodied people running equity work limits what sort of anti-racism systemic changes can happen; no one with lived experience is making these decisions.
- EDI departments can act as a mask for racism and limit anti-racism efforts.

## Structures and Processes

The slow, convoluted, and opaque nature of academic governance mechanisms was noted often as a primary barrier to anti-racism work. How can a student navigate such a structure? Where does she even begin? As well, why is it that institutions of higher education submit anti-racism policies for general approval? Surely, as a society, we have moved away from the notion of submitting minority rights to a vote by the majority. Why then do institutions of higher learning poll their entire constituencies to determine, for example, if racism exists on their campuses, when the majority of respondents will never, for one day in their lives, have even had to consider that thought? In these ways, of course, institutional processes are used to silence minority voices (“most people don’t think we’re a racist institution”), to deny them access to certain conversations (“sorry, only Deans are allowed in this meeting. Yes, they’re all white, but that’s just the way it is”), and to forestall action (“Senate voted against hiring a VP to lead this work, so there’s nothing further I can do”). Yet those same bodies are not asked to weigh in before, for example, accepting a large donation from a company that is operating on traditional Indigenous territories against the wishes of those Indigenous communities. Structures and processes are important locations of power, and they must be re-examined and rebuilt from the ground up to strip them of the colonial and racist mentalities which prevailed at the time of their formation. Again, institutions of higher education have indicated that they’re now willing to do this work – we must hold them to that.



### **1. GOVERNANCE AND POLICY DEVELOPMENT NOTED AS PROCESSES THAT CONSTRAIN THE ABILITY TO UNDERTAKE MEANINGFUL ANTI-RACISM WORK**

- Participants understood collegial governance mechanisms as a furthering of colonial and Eurocentric structures of power and decision-making that strengthens cultures of whiteness and invisible power.
- Current practices of policy-making are ineffectual means of solving these problems
  - Very slow and laborious process
  - No teeth when it comes to equity
  - Used as a catch-all in solving problems of racism
  - Do they actually address the root cause of the issues?

### **3. LACK OF INVOLVEMENT OF STUDENTS THROUGHOUT THESE FORMS OF DECISION MAKING**

### **4. ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION, PARTICULARLY FOR BIPOC, IS OFTEN SEEN AS OPTIONAL AND EVEN WHEN IT DOES OCCUR, THE FEEDBACK IS TAKEN SIMPLY AS ADDITIONAL INFORMATION THAT CAN BE IGNORED BY DECISION MAKERS, RATHER THAN AS CRUCIAL DATA POINTS BASED ON LIVED EXPERIENCE**

### **5. LACK OF A DEVELOPED EQUITY AND ANTI-RACISM INFRASTRUCTURE**

- The very capacity to do anti-racism work is largely stunted, and in many cases non-existent.
- The pathways through which equity information and decisions get disseminated is incredibly hierarchical and contrary to a community-based and relational approach to addressing systemic racism.
- Hierarchy of reporting and executive leadership limits collaboration and consultation with the rest of the community.

## 6. COMPLEX AND INACCESSIBLE GOVERNANCE AND DECISION-MAKING

- Makes trying to change systems and processes within the institution confusing and challenging at the best of times, and impossible at the worst.
- Need to speak the language of bureaucracy for insights to be deemed as valuable or worthy. This again limits BIPOC participation in institutions due to the ways in which certain groups have been kept out of accessing universities or colleges, and therefore have not built generational knowledges and the language to engage with these institutions. Why does someone need to have a working knowledge of committee structure, Robert's Rules, and collegial governance to share how they've been harmed by certain institutions and have valid suggestions/ideas of how to provide redress and be proactive around fighting racism?







## Funding, resources, and access for your EDI/anti-racism Office: Delegate notes

One of the most common refrains at ConversAction concerned the ubiquitous and persistent underfunding of anti-racism work in the higher education sector, both at the institutional and governmental levels. Many universities now have some sort of office dedicated to EDI work; some even have Associate VPs and VPs assigned to this work. However, almost none of these offices is sufficiently funded, and in the vast majority of cases they are devastatingly underfunded. How can an Equity Office, with two people, possibly service 40,000 students effectively, not to mention faculty and staff? How can even a VP-level appointment be effective in any way, with a staff of two or three, to cover an entire institution? How can these positions be viewed as anything other than PR exercises if it's clear that they are not expected to, and certainly are not resourced sufficiently enough to, do the actual work they are ostensibly designed to do? If our institutions of higher learning wish to claim the mantle of EDI and anti-racism work, they must immediately begin putting their money where their mouths are, and live up to the promises they have made, often quite publicly. Current leadership structures, as noted above, are not sufficient, nor sufficiently educated on these topics, to take on leadership in anti-racism work. They must locate, empower, and fund appropriate leaders and offices so that the work that our institutions have promised will take place, can actually take place.

### 1. LACK OF EQUITY AND ANTI-RACISM INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPED

- There are many Equity offices with a staff count of 1 or 2, while the entire institution is relying on these staff to address every form of inequity in every unit, system, process, and policy of the school. Frankly, this is unrealistic and shows an incredible misunderstanding of how systemic inequality, racism, and oppression manifest and are perpetuated. There must be concerted efforts to make systems change in curriculum, PR, hiring/recruitment, services, financial management, governance, Indigenization, and so much more. To put this role on relatively small and underfunded offices is to ensure that they fail, and to signal that addressing these issues is not a priority for you.
- Even excluding the majority of people doing equity work on campus who aren't officially acknowledged in the institutional infrastructure (student advocates, faculty, and staff working on off-the-side-of-the desk work), those who are dedicated to doing this work are often incredibly underpaid, with their work environment understaffed and budgets under-resourced.
- Hierarchy of reporting and executive leadership limits collaboration and consultation with the rest of community.
- **From Patrick Case:** to whom does your Director or AVP of Equity report? If it's not to the Provost and/or the President, you're doing it wrong. In a hierarchical institution like a university, the strength of your mandate determines how seriously people engage with you and your work. Reporting to the Provost or President signals how strongly the institution actually cares about this work. Then give that EDI leader full access to all decision-making tables, and the mandate to work with everyone they deem relevant to their work

## 2. LACK OF ANTI-RACISM-SPECIFIED FUNDING STREAMS FROM GOVERNMENT

- Participants noted that provincial governments, with particularly frequent mention of the current Ontario and Quebec governments, have de-prioritized equity and anti-racism as a tenet of post-secondary funding. There has been a notable lack of funding and needs assessments for anti-racism in higher education. Students noted that the experiences of their BIPOC communities are entirely unattended to by government officials.

## 3. ONE-TIME OR SHORT-TERM FUNDING

- Resources for anti-racism work are often provided through one-time grants or project-based funding buckets through endowment funds, community foundations, or short-term funding packages. And in many cases, anti-racism work is entirely unfunded, and takes place off the side of very tired BIPOC faculty, staff, or student desks. This does two things:
  - It disallows sustained and systemic anti-racism work, because the precarity of funding, grant-writing, and short-term projects limits the reach and depth of anything that can occur. Surface-level projects such as one-time events/workshops or adding informational resources on institutional communications (email signatures, brochures) are doable within these limitations, but deep-rooted change is impossible
  - It also tells those folks attempting to do anti-racism work that those efforts aren't valued or prioritized in the institutional scope. This, in turn, tells BIPOC students and community members that their livelihood, safety, and success is secondary to maintaining other facets of the institution. And it tells everyone else that they can safely ignore these groups and the work they are trying to do, because the institution doesn't really care about it

## 4. CUTS TO FUNDING

- Austerity measures view anti-racism as an easy location from which funding can be slashed. It is perceived as a non-essential addition, secondary (at best) to the primary function of post-secondary institutions. It says to BIPOC students that their safety, security, and well-being does not matter, as long as the institution can carry on providing education. This poses a fundamental problem of perspective that we all must work to dismantle and shift, focusing on the urgent nature and need of anti-racism work, while making sure our BIPOC students know they are valued and cared for.



## 5. RESULT/NUMBERS FOCUSED FUNDING

- Contingent upon data showing “results” or “impact.” Things are only funded if they’re quantifiable and can make the institution/government look good on a webpage or in the press. Anti-racism work can rarely be quantified in this way.
- Institutions have long relied on numbers and quantifiable data to make decisions on funding and gaps in services. In the case of anti-racism and the experiences of BIPOC students, there needs to be a shift in perspective of what is deemed as valid forms of data and understanding. *Story-telling, recollection of experiences, and the sharing of trauma are all, and should be regarded as, valid forms of data collection.*
- Without appreciating and understanding individual experiences, systemic and intersectional issues of racism, xenophobia, and colonialism won’t be addressed sufficiently and BIPOC folks will continue to be harmed. Development of qualitative data processing must be done to more fully understand the extent, complexity, and areas of need in addressing systemic racism. Depending on numbers for resourcing decisions and evaluating impact is incredibly limiting; in the context of anti-racism work, where we know such numbers are difficult to collect and currently sparse, demanding them before acting is simply another way of attempting to shuffle the problem down the road.

## 6. POLITICS OF FUNDING

- Institutions and administrators fear to take too strong a stand in support of progress, for fear of conflict with Boards, donors, and other stakeholders.
- Some participants noted that the leadership of their institutions expressed some hesitation about publicly supporting or funding progressive anti-racism initiatives out of fear of the differing perspectives of conservative governments and communities, upon whose goodwill much of their funding and donations are contingent.
- We really must begin asking our institutions and the leadership of higher education in our country, what is it that motivates and inspires progress? Is it the desire to avoid conflict and public embarrassment with stakeholders, both progressive and conservative, or is it the desire to create an institution that cares for its students, staff, and faculty, and responds appropriately in times of need? As of right now, within the context of the racial reckoning taking place across our country, we must demand that leadership, government, and decision-makers within our institutions make the decision to be brave and take a stand against injustice. This means that, regardless of the backlash from certain stakeholders, we must act. It means properly funding equity offices, dedicating sustained streams of funding towards systemic anti-racism work through staff and permanent initiatives, and valuing and honoring the voices and experiences of BIPOC people.

## 7. RESEARCH FUNDING

- Institutions of higher education must offer funding to undertake this research that they keep saying is vital to have before they can act!

## 8. INVISIBLE LABOUR

Connected to the concept of invisible labour, in which there are many unspoken and unofficial responsibilities that BIPOC folks have within institutions:

- Faculty: expected to take on mentorship and systems-navigation roles for BIPOC students because white faculty don't have the lived experience to know how to fill this role. They are also expected to act as anti-racism and equity advisors or consultants, sit on committees, and be involved in their respective communities on campus and abroad. The expectation to emotionally process and support BIPOC students through the racism they're experiencing, while also experiencing systemic barriers themselves as faculty, means that the compounding impact on the success of BIPOC scholars is debilitating. If their scholarship exists inside of critical race or anti-racism research, they have increased pressure and scrutiny because institutions will often spotlight these folks as a way to show they're "doing good" in terms of anti-racism work. If their academic work isn't related to social issues or race, they're expected to ignore their racial identity for the sake of academic purity, and "unbiased" academic work.
- Staff: subject to the chilly work environment that exists for BIPOC folks in primarily white institutions, but without even the protection of tenure.
- Students: those students who are engaged in BIPOC support or advocacy work on campuses are often exploited by institutions that need to find ways to cover their public image, while not receiving structural support from the school. This can look like advertising student-run or volunteer-run services that aren't actually supported by the University as a place for BIPOC students to go for help. It can look like institutional processes or heavy bureaucracy that limits the ability for staff to actually help BIPOC students with issues of racism or race relations, pushing students who experience harm to rely on the support of other BIPOC students. It also looks like years of advocacy, begging, pleading, and meetings of BIPOC students with university administration before acknowledgment of the systemic racism they face, or action to address the harms they describe.

## 9. FROM MALINDA SMITH DATA SESSION

- Data is related to the underfunding of anti-racism work because we don't understand the extent of this knowledge and institutions don't provide the appropriate resourcing to fully address systemic racism.
- Underfunded equity offices.
- Anti-racism often funded through student associations.
- Funded through one time grants, without budgetary commitment.
- Without dedicated funding, this data collection won't be possible and this is one of the first steps for systems change.

## Representation: delegate notes

The question of representation is central to this work in a way that cannot be overemphasized. Kofi Campbell, a co-organizer of this conference, shared the following story about the moment he knew that he was going to continue on into a senior administrative role: “Very early in my tenure as an Associate Dean, I handled a situation in which a faculty member required students to use photo-editing software to edit an image of themselves to make it look as if they were a member of another race; to perform an act of digital blackface, in other words. Predictably, the students were quite upset; but what really struck me was that the two students who came to see me said that they would never have come forward if I was not in the role; they didn’t believe that someone else would have taken them seriously, or done anything about the situation. This was a chilling statement to me, because of course it caused me to consider all of those students who experienced similarly troubling incidents and simply suffered in silence, because they didn’t believe that an administrative group which didn’t include anyone from a traditionally-marginalized background would understand or heed their concerns. In that moment I understood clearly that representation is important, and that representation at the highest levels of our institutions is even more vital.”

The lack of representation on our campuses and its brutal consequences was a ubiquitous theme at ConversAction. Importantly, it was noted that this representation must occur at all levels. Institutions tend to hire BIPOC folk for jobs that are removed from the real decision-making tables and, most importantly, removed from real job security. To place a definite-term instructor or even an untenured faculty member into the position of leading anti-racism work is, of course, untenable. Anti-racism work leads to very difficult conversations, and requires the institution to take a hard look at itself in ways that it might not wish to, for reasons outlined throughout this report. In other words, doing this work properly requires the ability to speak truth to power; someone in a precarious position, who can be relieved of their job at a moment’s notice by the senior administration, *does not have the necessary freedom to do this work properly*. While it is important for BIPOC people to be represented at all levels of our institutions, that means at all levels, including the most senior leadership positions.

## 1. WHITE COMMUNITY COMPARED TO STUDENT BODY

- Institutions that are situated within primarily white communities can create hostile and sometimes dangerous experiences for BIPOC students attending them. Institutions must be clear and *public* in their commitment and support for all students. And they must have designated BIPOC student spaces, as these likely won't exist off campus.

## 2. LEADERSHIP SO WHITE IN POSITIONS OF POWER AND DECISION MAKING

- Upper administration is largely homogenous in racial identity, with a disproportionate percentage of white administrators. This was indicated time and time again as a significant constraint to making systems-level change in addressing anti-racism in post-secondary institutions. This is incredibly concerning because this implies that white folks, regardless of the diverse population they are serving, don't see racism as a large enough problem to confront and address within their institutional purview. This must be interrogated at every institution as this was identified often by a significant number of participants and is clearly a wide-reaching issue.
- University administrators can pander and want to “look good” to government and this has resulted in minimization of problems of racism and controversy on campus. The desire to cover up and polish the image of institutions so political leaders are inclined to look favourably on them is harming progress on anti-racism.
  - Though not within the purview of universities, there is a notable gap in representation at all levels of politics in our society and this plays a role in the funding decisions and governmental initiatives in higher education, with regards to supporting or leaving behind BIPOC students
- Governing bodies of institutions can be very conservative and white, and decisions flowing from these bodies are not made with the well-being and support of BIPOC communities in mind.
- The BIPOC community has “no voice at the table.” Committees for hiring, policy-making, and institutional changes aren't diverse and don't provide a breadth of perspectives, or sufficiently represent the needs of BIPOC folks in these decisions. Recognizing the need for the stories and voices of BIPOC folks to ring loud and clear during processes of decision-making is necessary to address systems of oppression that impact the experience of racialized students, staff, and faculty.

### 3. BIPOC VOICES LACKING IN ALL AREAS OF THE UNIVERSITY

- By upholding barriers of access to certain decision making and higher-level tables at the university to BIPOC students, staff, and faculty through policy, institutional processes, or lack of initiative for consultation, the voice of anti-racism is not centered and not prioritized. It has been seen time and time again by participants, that at homogenous and largely white tables, bodies, committees, and meetings, anti-racism work and the acknowledgement of systemic racism is relegated to the back burner.
- Participants noted leadership both at the institutional and political level showing a fear of consultation due to the potential for dissenting voices or “call-outs.” Excluding the perspectives within institutional decision-making that may be different from the status quo is in and of itself perpetuating the status quo which, as we know, is defined by systemic racism and oppression of BIPOC communities in post-secondary institutions.

### 4. STRUCTURES OF INSTITUTION

- The location of qualified BIPOC folks within the institution is incredibly telling, and participants made it clear that simply filling lower-level positions with racialized staff while maintaining the current leadership and systems that perpetuate systemic racism is insufficient.
- Increasing racial diversity at an institution, without critical reflection of where these diverse populations exist and how they are doing, will cause further harm to the communities that “diversity” purports to help.
- What “diversity” will often result in is the hiring of Black employees to be supervised by white managers who report to white administrators who are governed by a white board, then expecting them to address systemic racism within whatever unit of the institution they find themselves. Again, if you have primarily staff of colour doing your EDI work, reporting to a white VP: EDI, who reports to a white senior administrative structure, that is a problem.

### 5. HIRING PRACTICES

- “Good fit” hiring replicates historical structures of exclusion and perpetuates existing employment barriers. It functions as a preference for sameness: same hobbies, culture, music, humour, noise level, beliefs and, ultimately, skin colour.
- Understanding the ways that whiteness will permeate a work culture, from the macro to the micro interactions and experiences, provides a powerful case for representation and lived experience.
- Understanding lived experience as valid data points that must help guide the actions of administrators.





## Data

There was not a single session in which the question of data did not arise. Its importance lies in a simple question, which was asked almost verbatim by three different panelists, independently: “if we don’t even know who our students are, how can we possibly serve them properly?” The lack of race-based data regarding the Canadian higher education sector has been noted repeatedly in various fora, including several times in *University Affairs* (the publication of Universities Canada), on the CBC, by the Academica Group, in *Macleans*, and by many publications on campuses of higher education. Yet, universities by and large have dragged their feet on collecting this data, and in some cases have flat-out refused to do so. This despite the fact that, as a CBC news article on the topic noted as far back as 2017, “Experts, human rights advocates and recently the government of Ontario have endorsed the collection of race-based data as a means of uncovering inequality and better understanding the needs of racialized groups” (CBC News: “Why so many Canadian universities know so little about their own racial diversity,” March 21, 2017).

As with much anti-racism work, the hesitancy around collecting race-based data is based on fear: fear of what the data will reveal, and fear of what action will be demanded by those revelations. Yet, as Dr. Malinda Smith argued extensively at ConversAction, lack of data is one of the central barriers to effective anti-racism work in the academy, and it is absolutely vital that this data collection happen immediately. “Data,” she argued, “is the floor, not the ceiling.” The collection of this data is not to be seen as the end result of our anti-racism work; it is one of the base requirements of that work moving forward.

There are, of course, issues with data collection, as our Indigenous and South African colleagues know first-hand, as do many other groups. It must be done in a way that consciously repudiates the old colonial methods and purposes of data-collection, and those who are being surveyed must not only have a say in how it happens, but must be kept transparently in the loop at every step of the process. We must know, and tell, exactly why this data is being collected, and how, and who will guard and interpret it, and how it will be disseminated; and a whole host of other “hows” and “whys” must also be answered. But it clearly must be done, and the refusal to do so is more and more being seen as a direct attempt to stifle anti-racism work by depriving it of the data needed to move forward in robust ways.

How can an institution’s administration demand data in order to acknowledge the existence of racism, and then outright refuse to collect that data? How is that anything but an outright admission that they don’t want to see the problems because then they’ll have to deal with them? Or that they simply don’t care? How is it anything but a direct and deliberate obstacle placed in the way of actually addressing racism on our campuses? The time for obfuscation and disingenuous excuses (“It’s illegal to collect that data!” Spoiler alert: it’s not!) has passed. Our current historical moment demands that we move forward with anti-racism work urgently and persistently, and proper comprehensive data will be the firm foundation of that forward momentum. It is vital that we do not allow our institutions to abdicate this responsibility any longer.

## 1. RESEARCH ON RACE

- Relative lack of critical research and knowledge on how to collect racial data, as opposed to other forms of data collection.
- Lack of funding for race-related research.
- Institutions don't work to understand the experiences of BIPOC students in robust and comprehensive ways, but rather through admissions and graduation numbers, and mostly not even then.
- Providing space to have BIPOC voices heard and amplified without fear of professional or academic repercussions is necessary.
- Environment-building and relationship-building needs to happen so folks can feel trusted and safe to express and share their experiences; this is how institutions must proceed in trying to collect data.
- Without data and a clear picture of the racialized pipeline - experienced by students, staff, faculty, and student organizers - institutions won't be able to chart a path forward and end systemic racism.

## 2. REFUSAL OF DATA COLLECTION FOR MULTIPLE REASONS

- Whiteness and the politics of niceness deem race relations as impolite or intrusive.
- Don't want to allocate resources to hire those experts in this field.
- Because race is complicated, and it's a more complex process because of all the important intersectional considerations. But methodological expertise exists and there needs to be commitment to doing it. It's hard yes, but necessary.

## 3. RELATED NOTES FROM DR. MALINDA SMITH'S KEYNOTE

**Central issue and barrier to universities being able to do anti-racism work is lack of race data**

- Can't develop race pipelines and implement evidence-based programs without understanding the numbers of where and how racism happens.

- Misconception of racial inequity – it’s worse today than ever but, without data, administration can’t see this.
- This must happen to open the door for institutions to listen to the experiences of BIPOC students and value their lived experience as a valid metric of evidence, and an indication of need for change.
- The actual central issue is that much of administration doesn’t prioritize racial justice and anti-racism in a way that allows for permanent and meaningful change to be made.

#### 4. FROM DR. MALINDA SMITH’S DATA SESSION

##### **Data is the floor, not the ceiling**

- Sets the foundation of all anti-racism work, but important to understand equitable and just ways to use data.
  - Needed to understand the locations of the system that are inequitable in varying ways, and understand how inequities develop through progression and participation in the university
- Similarly foundational as the data, are good intentions that aim to support and help BIPOC students, staff, and faculty succeed and achieve in the academy.
- This is instrumental for any institution that wishes to take concrete anti-racism action.

##### **Data can tell a story**

- BIPOC folks rarely get to tell their own stories, so making space through data mechanisms, or curriculum, or decision making, etc. is important to addressing systemic racism.
- Allows us to understand where we are, where we need to go, and the places in which we need change to get there.

##### **Data is related to the underfunding of anti-racism because institutions don’t understand the extent of racism at an institutional level, and therefore don’t provide the appropriate resourcing to fully address systemic racism**

- Underfunded equity offices.
- Anti-racism work accomplished through student associations.
- Funded through one-time grants, without budgetary commitment.

## **We also need to understand that institutional values, and Westernized ways of knowing, impact what data collection looks like**

- Data can look all sorts of different ways, and the prioritization of numbers/quantitative data, while simultaneously discounting and discrediting qualitative and experiential data, is colonial in nature.
- Recognizing how we need to Indigenize the academy, while also developing data collection processes alongside Indigenous and Black scholars, is crucial to decolonizing how universities traditionally perceive data.
- Stories are valid.
- Trauma is valid.
- These conceptions of experience must be honoured and cherished as a first step in developing data collection.
- This is a subversion of traditional ways of doing things in universities, and requires strategizing around how to ensure that research offices acknowledge their limitations in prioritizing numbers.
- Working with the relevant stakeholders in designing data collection methodology.
  - Student associations
  - Faculty and staff associations
  - BIPOC community leaders/members. (If you don't know who these people are, there's a larger problem of connecting and being present to communities on campus)



## 5. SMALLER GROUP DISCUSSION REGARDING DATA / RECURRING THEMES, LED BY DR. MALINDA SMITH

- So much information collected from institutional analysis, and larger provincial and national organizations, around health, wellness, mental health, LGBTQ, satisfaction, stress level, service utilization, etc.
- For some reason, disaggregated racial data is left out of this conversation, which is incredibly short-sighted and poorly thought-out, because race plays a significant role in one's experience, particularly in a systematically oppressive and racist sector like post-secondary education.
- With regard to Indigenous culture, issues of self-identification raise particularly complex problems when talking about data.
- The notion of Canadian Exceptionalism is incredibly prevalent in these conversations—comparing data collection between Canada and the States shows that there's always large amounts of race data in the States.
- For some reason, Canadian institutions feel as though they are exempt from the conversation around race, based on really fundamental misconceptions about our history.
- The white-washing of history and the tendency for Canada to claim we don't have a race problem in the same way the US does - while BIPOC folks are being killed by police, have disproportional health outcomes and, while Indigenous folks have literally survived attempted genocide, is incredibly violent in itself.
- Must unpack this on broad scales and help the general population, and campus communities, truly understand the racist history of our country and work to create a better future for us all.
- Some limited initiatives in data gathering exist, focused on first-year students and enrolment data, but it tends to stop there.
  - This fails to recognize the compounding experience of systemic racism in the academy that goes on to inform the experience of BIPOC folks until they graduate
  - Racism in housing, personal experiences of racial or gendered violence, employment, curriculum, etc. are important considerations too
- Many institutions expressed that having racialized data would be really helpful for them to develop programming and services that meet the gaps identified by BIPOC students.
  - Responsible program implementation is contingent upon proper consultation with the population in question, and foundational racialized data is needed to do this
- In developing the research methodology, input and consultation with BIPOC folks is needed to be responsible in data collection, and should be founded on the concepts of community-based research.
- Prioritizing the safety and liberty of the research participants while allowing for expansive storytelling and qualitative data to be collected and utilized is paramount.

# STUDENTS

One of the main organizing principles of ConversAction was that students must be at the centre of all anti-racism efforts on Canadian higher education campuses, and so in our invitation for senior administrators to attend, we specifically asked them to include a strong student delegate presence. Students, of course, are our largest stakeholder group. They are also the most vulnerable, and their voices are most often excluded from, or minimized in, discussions on combatting racism. Student leaders on our campuses are far more attuned and connected to the issues facing our student bodies than senior administrators and faculty are, and can serve as invaluable representations of those large numbers of students, and as conduits between them and the larger institution. But, they can only do this work if we invite them into the conversation.

Discussions at the conference made clear that one of largest limitations on doing effective anti-racism work in the academy is the disconnect, and the often garbled lines of communication, between students and their institutions. Administrators lamented that they have a hard time engaging students with various initiatives, and students lamented the inscrutability of university processes and the inability to get face-time with institutional leaders. Clearly, the disconnect is real. If anti-racism work is to be successful on our campuses, we urgently need to bridge those distances, and to engage meaningfully with each other. Students know, better than administrators and faculty can, how racism affects every aspect of student success, from the application process to their relationships with institutions as alumni. They have direct experience and knowledge of what's happening in our classrooms, and how our policies and traditions perpetuate the exclusions of so many of their colleagues and determine their successes and failures. No institution can claim to be doing good anti-racism work if student leaders are not heavily involved in positions of leadership and influence in that work. Likewise, no institution can claim to be doing good anti-racism work if administrators at the highest levels (presidents and provosts) are not meeting regularly with student leaders, and especially leaders of BIPOC student groups.

ConversAction was structured so as to provide ample time for student leaders to meet and speak with and learn from each other, and to speak directly to administrators, faculty, and staff. On the first day of the conference, everyone attended Dr. Malinda Smith's keynote speech, and the end of day debriefing session. For the remainder of the day, student delegates worked together through a series of sessions and workshops. On the second day all delegates came together for the remainder of our time together. The second day began with a panel of students, elected from among the attending delegates, who were invited to address the institutional representatives and tell us in their own words what problems they encounter on a daily basis, and what they need from those of us who hold more power, and the ability to make changes, in the system. This was one of the most energetic and valuable panels at ConversAction. Afterwards, student delegates led all of the other attending delegates through a series of conversations based on the issues raised in the panel discussion.

The three sections below gather notes representing the most recurring themes that emerged from our student delegates' discussions and the sessions they led. The first section, "Thoughts on Challenges, and Strategies to Overcome Them," gathers notes from some of the sessions attended only by students. The second section, "Student Panel," captures the discussion during the panel in which students addressed the other delegates; these notes are organized according to the three guiding questions which shaped the discussion. The final section, "Student-led Session," compiles the most urgent points raised during the student-led discussion, organized around guiding questions submitted by our student delegates, who led the discussions individually at each table as well the larger group discussions that arose.

## 1. THOUGHTS ON CHALLENGES, AND STRATEGIES TO OVERCOME THEM: STUDENT DELEGATES

### Challenges:

- Lacking systemic mechanisms to expand anti-racism work beyond individual action.
- Lack of representation among leadership, staff, and faculty.
- Websites with limited information on EDI.
- Administration doesn't do anything until something bad happens.
- Not having a physical space.
- Lack of data. Some universities have even placed the burden for collecting this information on students themselves.
- Faculty can often be more resistant to change than administrators.
  - Lack of training, EDI, sensitivity training
- Senior administration is inaccessible and inscrutable.
- Having to 'convince' admin that equity work is needed.
- Huge disconnect between admin and students.

[RETURN TO TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)

### Strategies to Address Challenges:

- Collecting data to understand composition of students and their experience.
- Task force of people dedicated to, and aligned in, doing this work.
- Publish work done/in progress on anti-racism initiatives.
- Creating a community of advisors.
  - allyship among staff/faculty/mentors
- Pressure, through the collection of real data, and through the creation of a national task force.
- Building connections with student unions and other representative groups to facilitate data collection and knowledge exchange.
- Developing better ways to connect with other universities.
- Data collection at institutional level.
- Educational context: having more curricula teaching race issues, and better visibility for already-available curricula.
- U of Manitoba lobbying to include Intro to Indigenous Studies as mandatory.
  - Laurentian: 6 mandatory courses in Indigenous Studies required to graduate
  - More of this is necessary
- Accessible reporting mechanisms.
- Integrate equity/anti-racism work into existing structures.
- Equity training for everyone.



## 2. STUDENT PANEL

Questions posed to the panellists:

### How have we messed up as institutions?

- Institutions have failed to ask why they should do this work, beyond PR reasons, and why they have failed so far.
  - The question “why?” is a powerful tool to understand student engagement
  - Why are students not coming out? Why are students not engaged?
  - How many times have students tried to come out, had meetings, and not been engaged properly?
  - When universities reframe and restructure how to promote equity and inclusivity on campus through asking “why” and engaging BIPOC people in formulating answers, our collaborations with universities become more effective, and then we can properly start asking “what to do?” and “how to do it?” But we need to understand the “why?” first!
- One of the areas where universities have failed is consistently not including students in these discussions from the very beginning, and at all stages.
  - Oftentimes, as racialized bodies we feel excluded in different ways and in different layers
  - When it comes to policy, curriculum, etc. we are almost always excluded
- Institutions fail to ask: are we including knowledge/power that comes from racialized scholars?
  - Who is producing this power?
  - Whose power is prioritized?
  - This questions is rarely asked, because we are not prioritized – maintaining the status quo and not rocking the boat are prioritized
  - Institutions do not recognize racialized scholars and students as people who are as competent as others, so they question the value of the knowledge and scholarship that they produce
- Administrators have failed to reach out to students.

**Institutions often point to their good intentions as a way of rationalizing unjust actions and practices. What are the impacts that these systemic failures have on students?**

- Retention rates.
  - Universities don't track retention rates of racialized minorities on campus
  - Racialized students, because our experiences are not accounted for in institutional planning and because we are therefore inherently excluded from institutional thought, often drop out because we do not feel supported
  - We don't talk about how to incorporate the methodology of intersectionality and identity politics into student services. If these discussions do happen, they happen behind closed doors and not in open, transparent, accountable spaces
- As noted above, institutions don't engage our knowledge base in this regard, and they rarely go beyond the scope of what western scholars teach.
  - When we have students that question these ideals, they are labeled as problematic
- The business model for universities is dehumanizing, marginalizing, and silencing to students, especially BIPOC students, and it has a huge impact on student mental health.
  - You have to recognize that student activists are making a huge sacrifice. This work does not come naturally and it is not easy to speak up and draw attention to oneself, and it results in tremendous pressure being placed on those who are most vulnerable in the system. The administration should be appointing and supporting people to lead this work, and not placing the majority of the burden on students!
- We must understand that the system is not really failing BIPOC people, because it was never set up to help us. This system is working in exactly the ways that colonialism and white supremacy set it up to work, namely by excluding those from certain groups.
  - It is keeping racialized students, especially BIPOC students, oppressed and marginalized because they were never supposed to be a part of the system as it was created
  - What comes along with that acknowledgement should be an understanding that the system must be fundamentally changed
  - Because the system isn't really interested in supporting us currently, student activists generally don't receive space, funding, or other resourcing from the institution to do the work they are already doing. Yet the institutions keep sending students to us for support, which is a clear acknowledgment that they don't care to deal with those issues themselves. This has to change
  - The mental health toll is tremendous! Doing this work exposes us to endless brutal experiences of racism and xenophobia
- There is a clear and common narrative of students asking for support from other students, when those supports should come from administrators.

**The impact of racism on campus is detrimental to racialized students. One of the things that students discussed in our sessions was fear, and this feeling of perpetually being unheard. You keep talking but you are never heard, and what you are saying is never reflected back to you in action. What do you want administrators to hear today?**

- It is brutally discouraging not seeing ourselves reflected within institutions in any meaningful way.
  - Not having staff and faculty and administrators and leaders that look like us
- One way that institutions can begin to reframe their work is for them to finally acknowledge that true meritocracy is a fallacy.
- We need universities to stop trying to gaslight us about our experiences, and to honestly encounter and account for lived experiences.
- We continuously hear and see the same people on campus supporting these issues, because they are the one, or one of a very very few, Indigenous staff or faculty, or Black staff or faculty. Hire more of us, and support us!
- Educate yourselves!
  - Go to other academics who know this work
  - Have a firm understanding of how aspects of your privilege impact our oppression
  - Even if you increase diversity among faculty, who is there to support them? Understand their experiences? How can you help support their success, rather than have them leave the same way BIPOC students eventually do?
- Stop taking things personally, and be open to criticism.
  - It takes a lot of courage to critique the system, at potential risk to our careers as scholars and students. Acknowledge and respect that
  - A critique of the system means that we are all in it together
- Stop pretending that racism is an unfortunate exception. These are not isolated incidents, but part of larger patterns of systemic racism. You know this by now.
  - You only hear about a few because it takes such a loud voice to speak up when these things happen, and we're used to not being listened to or taken seriously, so it's hard for us to report when these things happen
  - Treat these reports and concerns seriously! Stop trying to convince us we're wrong, or don't understand the situation, or are taking things too seriously
  - We need to step back and look for sustainable measures which put in place safe ways of communication
- BELIEVE RACIALIZED STUDENTS



### Some questions posed by the audience to the student delegates:

#### Question:

What happens in the grand scheme of things if institutions are upended? Unless we choose, as administrators, to consolidate our efforts, then individual institutions are opening ourselves to vulnerability with the possibility of losing funding.

#### Responses:

- What you're really asking is, "why should we stop being racist organizations if it might cost us money?" Does hearing the question reframed that way underscore its brutality? We have to change every part of the university, especially around loci of equity and around conversations of who is involved, whose voice is prioritized. That is what needs to happen.
- Our Equity Office has two people. Lack of funding is something we are quite used to and we've managed to keep working. Are you less resourceful than we are? Focus on how you can better use your funding to make your campus a better place. The excuses for not doing anti-racism work should never be about money.

#### Question:

You noted that the university is doing what it is designed to do. Thoughts on how to change this existing model? Do you think it can be done?

#### Responses:

- Representation matters, and the lack of representation is really acute at higher level positions of leadership. Unless we have a strategic and conscious effort to create representation at all levels, we will not see change, because no one willingly gives up their own power without significant pressure from those who don't have power. Especially in a university setting, there is huge resistance to change. Representation means bringing people to the table when it comes to decision making.
- The discursive and radical effect of what is said here will be measured by the actions taken up post-conference by all of you.

**Question:**

What can racialized faculty and people in leadership positions do to affect change? How do they manifest their power within a space to influence change? What would you want from racialized leaders?

**Responses:**

- “Our presence is our resistance.” Just being in those positions is a good beginning, but not enough.
  - Within those leadership roles, acknowledge how far you have come
  - Often, we add additional pressure on ourselves to engage in community building and advocacy work
  - As racialized leaders, impact change when and where you can and recognize that it is not just your burden to hold. Find supports. None of us can change the system on our own
  - Need to build alliances and community together
  - As leaders, we often don’t take enough credit for the work we are already doing
  - Help support those voices that are already supporting us
  
- Racialized folk in academia already have an uphill battle.
  - Community is lacking
  - We, as racialized leaders, are often taking care of ourselves
    - That means you have to learn to say no sometimes, and to prioritize your well-being, because racism is not going away anytime soon
    - We need to make sure that we are healthy and well enough to continue doing this work
  - Managing to help folks understand how to navigate spaces is key
    - the importance of mentorship: relationships which can help people figure out in what ways these systems work
    - In that way, help the next generation of leaders to be able to navigate the system. Build intergenerational knowledge

### 3. STUDENT-LED SESSION: DELEGATE NOTES

**Discussion question 1: Are there actionable items in progress that administration is working on at your institution that students may not be aware of? If so, what are the barriers stopping students from knowing this?**

The greatest obstacle listed here regarding communicating initiatives widely to students, listed at almost every table of delegates, was:

- Word goes through student reps, news (online), community announcements, etc., but that isn't working; we need advice on how to do this effectively. Communication within larger institutions in general is a barrier.



### Suggested causes and solutions:

- Top-down approach doesn't work.
- Not prioritizing student representation in change consultations (hiring, strategic planning, etc.). Not recognizing student groups as important resource. Policy writing happens behind closed doors and students are often brought in at a stage where it has already been drafted and aspects will not change. Include student voices from the get-go in policy changes. Don't include them at the END when it becomes too late to change anything. Students are not viewed as valuable stakeholders. Also, having one student on a committee isn't representation. If more students and student groups are involved, word will get out more comprehensively. There should be more student reps on most committees.
- Students do not know how the University works.
- Confidential meetings are an issue; students need to know what is going on, rather than decisions being made solely during "in camera" discussions by leaders and decision makers.
- Lack of trust between university departments. Territorial: ie. administrators/faculty not sharing their ideas with one another.
- More widespread use of social media is important, as is classroom dissemination.
- Most importantly, find students where they actually hang out and go to them in their own spaces, where they will feel more comfortable and expressive. Meet in the Black Students' Association space, rather than in the Provost's office.

### Discussion question 2: What are better ways for institutions and administrators to build relationships with students and student organizations to address these barriers, and to enable meaningful anti-racism work?

- Remove the expectation that instilling change should/will come from students, and shift the responsibility to admin/faculty/staff.
- Create multiple and varied ways for student feedback (ex. anonymous evaluations, social media platforms, internal websites, etc).
- Make sure that equity offices team up consistently with students, and employ multiple students as staff members.
- Provide opportunities for BIPOC students to have a voice in influencing policies, especially those related to equity, human rights, and anti-racism. Compensate them for their time (even in the form of curricular credits) and offer them appropriate training. Understand that one student, who belongs to the least powerful group on campus, is not enough at these tables – multiple students should be invited, both to provide multiple viewpoints and to act as supports for each other.

- Don't always ask students to your intimidating senior admin spaces; perhaps go to open invites of student events already happening, or arrange to meet them in their own spaces (which you should be providing) where they may be more comfortable and at ease.
- Meet with student groups proactively and regularly to learn about challenges, gaps, and lived experiences; stop relying on overworked BIPOC faculty and staff to do this institutional work. Create spaces for #ConversACTION with all of these groups on your campus. If such groups don't exist on your campus, do something about it – offer them resources to help them organize. Provide resources and then step back to let us have leadership and ownership over how the resources are used.
- Do not just rely on those students who form your regular student government, who have much larger agendas that tend to swallow up BIPOC issues. Meet with BIPOC groups specifically. In fact, start inviting leaders of students BIPOC groups to all tables where the regular student government is invited.
- Immediately create a more representative faculty body, which resembles the student body more closely. Increased representation can serve as a solid foundation for equity and can encourage better relationships with our institutions.
- Don't assume that various groups are speaking to each other. Use your leadership positions to enable and prioritize those conversations.
  - Who is speaking at your events and training sessions? If it's an all-white panel, you need to understand what systems of oppression you are not just perpetuating, but actively sanctioning
  - Trust and relationship-building mean doing things without expecting anything in return, just because it's the right thing to do and because you are genuinely interested in repairing years of harm
- Make your EDI culture highly visible; centre this in campus life, and operationalize EDI change outside of check-box, admin processes, and PR opportunities.
- Build an active BIPOC alumni system.
- Campuses should invest in trauma-informed care training for all personnel.
- International students are at highest risk. Improve the quality of their life via:
  - Prioritizing on-campus jobs to international students to provide livable wages
  - Allowing better job flexibility (increase working hours limit to provide livable wage)



**Discussion question 3: How can students hold their administration accountable?  
How can administration institute measures to hold themselves accountable?**

- Bimonthly/quarterly meetings to inform students and student leaders of actions taken or not taken.
- Establish realistic, but not overly-long, timelines/deadlines, along with tangible goals/outcomes and metrics, and match actions to the goals that have been set.
- Keep a paper trail.
- Make all documents public.
- Create a report card to show how admin has progressed. Make reports public so you have to actually follow through.
- Also keep a paper trail of student complaints and interactions to hold admin accountable and prevent potential gaslighting. Keeping all incidents recorded centrally; this will help make the point that these aren't isolated incidents.
- Make it easier for students to lodge complaints; do not leave the responsibility for follow-up on students.
- Hold administration accountable for diversity among their own ranks.
- Student newspapers should publish report cards on senior admin performance.
- Make EDI work part of the performance evaluation of senior administrators.
- Retention data.
  - If students of colour are dropping out, use data to understand why
- Engage the public – this is often the only thing that will make administrators act.
- Employment equity facilitator on hiring committees.
- Try to quantify the student labour hours so admin understands the impact on their other work, and the “in-kind” financial value of their contributions.
- Mandatory equity training across all levels of the University.
- Ensure that there is an appropriate onboarding process, with appropriate EDI training, for every position at the university.

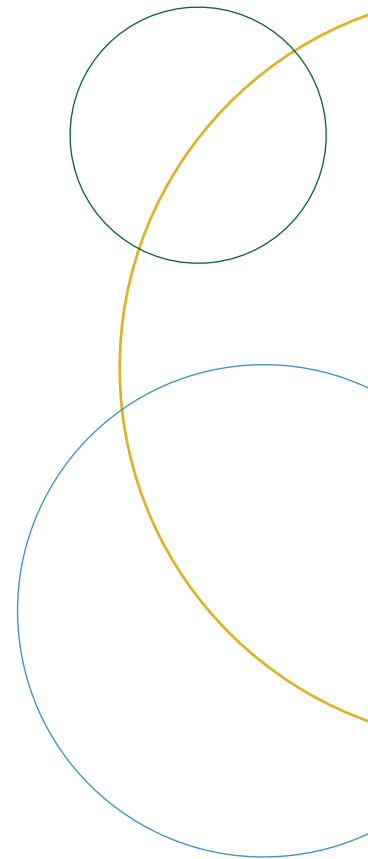
- Faculty need to gather and mobilize against their unions when those unions fail in this regard.
- If universities are serious, come together in unity and decide to upend the current structures – collective action is always more effective than individual efforts.
- Admin must use honest language. Call it racism when it happens. Stop using code-words or vague descriptions (ex “An incident occurred on our campus,” vs “A racist attack happened on our campus.”)
- If you’re only getting a small number of complaints/reports, understand that this doesn’t mean there’s not a serious problem. Ask yourself why people aren’t reporting.
- Build relationships with students outside of formal structures.
- Give funding and other supports to student activists and their programs.
- Reach out to student advocacy groups who already have an established relationship and trust with racialized students.
- Open community meetings.
- Collect data.
- Help ensure transfer of knowledge and experience within student groups, so every group doesn’t have to start from scratch.
- The EDI leader needs to report directly to Provost/President and be on the Executive Team.
- Senior admin must set a strong example so that others will see that they’re actually serious, and will buy in. Faculty is the largest group that needs to be brought on board.
- Students should have a RACISM STRIKE if necessary. They should walk out of classes at least once a year to protest for systemic changes that are needed.
- NEED A PLAN.
  - That is consulted upon widely
  - The plan has action items and measures of success
  - The plan is resourced and reported on at least once a year
  - Each action item is reported on in terms of completion and impact
  - The plan and its progress is reported on via mechanisms that students regularly access, such as social media, student union, student newspapers, etc

#### **Discussion question 4: What actions will you as administrators take to address the points of the panelists?**

- Ask tenured faculty to take a more active role – there are more of them, they have more interactions with students, and they are less vulnerable than staff.
- Fast-track our plans for an info-sharing portal. Report back to Provost and President.
- Have a campus climate survey and take it seriously. Name the issue.
- Increase awareness of student racism towards racialized faculty or coded complaints (“can’t understand accent”) – work on navigating that space.
- Look at recent developments around sexual violence work (education, policies, access to supports) for ideas.
- Training for faculty and TAs around managing classroom racism and supporting marginalized students.
- Separate and robust policy/approach for racism.
- Inclusive orientation week programming.
- Adopt equity-based decision making processes.
- Ask questions and understand the experiences of our students, then share with colleagues.
- Open up the recruitment, hiring and promotion processes – make it a priority in collective bargaining.
- Take on more active mentorship role.
- Believe students.
- Better funding for equity offices.
  - Increased, staff, funding, integration across offices on campus



- Improve admin-level education on EDI issues, via workshops and training, whether mandatory or otherwise. It's not just a matter of knowing more, but also knowing differently. Universities privilege intellectual knowledge, not knowledge of the heart or bodily knowledge or experiential knowledge. The report from the *(e)Race(r)* Summit talks about how helpful including Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing can be to the fight against racism. If we want to understand and “believe” the experience of racialized students, we have to expand our ways of knowing beyond the traditional university ways of knowing. We have to recognize and value other ways of knowing.
- Create nation-wide body to end/improve isolation across Diversity/Equity offices across Canada.
- Ensure student representation on university task forces/working group committees.
- Find ways to hire BIPOC people at higher positions.
- Speak out more.
- Treat all complaints seriously.
- Care more about students than risk-mitigation.
- Address racism across and between all groups, not just focus on one group.
- Form a student advocacy committee.
- Make even the small victories known to news outlets and media platforms.
- Tell students when their feedback has been taken and implemented.
- Address, talk, educate about racism before very large scale racist events happen.
- Listen.
- Form a BIPOC faculty group for collective action.
- No need to re-invent the wheel. Learn from what others are doing that is working; one of the big benefits of a national anti-racism task force.
- Visibility of our intent – find ways to signal that we are open to ideas and different perspective.
- Stop demanding that racialized students present their trauma as motivation for change. We know racism exists, we don't need more proof.
- Learn to be okay with discomfort and start calling things out. We've been cultured into being silent but some things matter more than others' comfort.



# SECTOR-WIDE ANTI-RACISM TASK FORCE

By the end of the *(e)RACE(r)* Summit, the first national conference focused on anti-racism work in the Canadian higher education sector, delegates had agreed upon five “Calls to Action.” First among these was the call for a national sector-wide anti-racism task force, and this call formed a major part of the impetus for the organizing of the ConversAction summit; the name of our gathering was arrived at as a summation of our desire to move from conversations and dialogues to action and implementation, and this primary recommendation seemed the most important. The question of whether there is still a need and a desire for such a task force is one that delegates discussed frequently over our two days together at ConversAction, and it was the subject of deliberation at each of the sessions, regardless of that session’s individual focus. The overwhelming consensus was that such a task force was not only still desirable, but that it is in fact necessary to the success of anti-racism efforts in our institutions of higher education.

Several compelling reasons were offered. First, of course, is the simple reality of racism’s enduring and deeply imbedded nature in the histories and current realities of our higher education institutions and our society at large. Fighting that entrenched racism is a massive undertaking, and no single institution is equipped to do so on its own – if any of us was capable of going it alone, we would have won this battle already. Clearly, we have not, and so combining our efforts and our resources can only make us all stronger and more effective in this fight. A sector-wide task force would also allow us to combine knowledge and experience, rather than re-inventing the wheel at our individual institutions. If, for example, one institution is just beginning to turn its attention fully to addressing its response to the recommendations of the TRC, why start envisioning that response from scratch, rather than turning to others who are further along in this process, and who may have developed excellent initiatives, best-practices, policies, relationships, etc? If one institution has done a deep dive into its own policy framework, or into curriculum redevelopment, through anti-colonial and anti-oppressive lenses, how can other institutions benefit from its hard-earned knowledge, and figure out what works well, and what seemingly benign decision turned out to have unforeseen implications, rather than making the same mistakes that institution did, and potentially doing harm to its vulnerable populations through ignorance? A sector-wide task force can gather and collate knowledge and experiences such as this, and serve as a resource that we can all draw on to do this work in efficient, effective, and non-harmful ways.



And of course, those people charged with anti-racism work, like others in the system, move into different positions on a regular basis, and therefore valuable institutional knowledge can be lost, and work may have to be restarted, or relationships rebuilt; maybe the new person doesn't know where to start, and therefore the work falters. A sector-wide task force would ensure continuity regardless of who sits in which particular chair at any given institution, and an approach which encompasses regional representation can make sure that even if one institution in a given province pulls back from this work, people at that institution can still find support in the task force in a way that accounts for their regional or provincial realities. That level of continuity is crucial; it would ensure that this work always moves forward, rather than stalling at regular intervals as individuals, or individual institutions, move in other directions.

The most important way in which the sector-wide task force would serve the fight against racism in our institutions is perhaps in the area of accountability. The sad reality that those of us who do this work have had to embrace is that institutions focus more on anti-racism work when there is public pressure to do so; left to their own devices, institutions tend to be risk-averse and deeply hesitant to rock the boat and stir up potential controversy. And of course, anti-racism work is always controversial. A sector-wide approach would provide strength in numbers and unity. If we are all doing this work together, no single institution is forced to face the potential controversies on their own; a serious benefit of the task force for senior administrators will be the ability to brainstorm together and speak with one voice, informed by the expertise and experience of BIPOC folk who do this work, about its importance and necessity for the betterment of Canadian society. A hundred university Presidents (representing 1.3 million students nationally) speaking together is a force that cannot be ignored or silenced or easily threatened with repercussions; it is a constituency that commands attention and that must be taken seriously.

Delegates also spoke clearly of the need for the task force to have a strong web presence as another means of providing an accountability framework. Such a web presence would allow institutions to share their anti-racism goals and strategies, and to update the wider public on their progress and successes. The purpose of the web presence is not to shame individual institutions, but rather to demonstrate the determination of the sector to tackle racism in a unified way while allowing individual institutions to share their successes, both as a way of underscoring the importance of this work, and of educating others on potential strategies. Delegates described the web presence as a method of positive reinforcement, and as a way of encouraging all institutions to take part in the task force's work. Ultimately, we hope that shame will be brought about not because one is progressing at a different pace than others – each institution has different realities to face and will therefore approach this work with differing priorities and philosophies - but rather because one is not doing the work at all. Public accountability is meant to ensure that we keep moving forward together as a sector.

The overwhelming consensus at ConversAction was that all institutions have failed to accomplish our anti-racism objectives partly because we have tried to do so in isolation, and racism is far too big a blight for any of us to tackle individually. Together, we can do so much more – we can learn from each other, support each other, and begin to speak with one voice to those outside the academy who also have the power to help us in our fight. It is time to move forward together, and to elevate our fight against racism to the next level.





how do we  
**LEGITIMIZE**  
Our knowledge?

they are not **SAFE** spaces

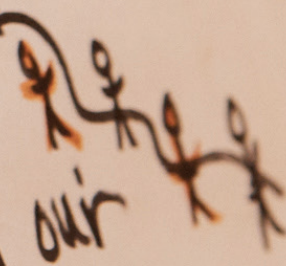
"Complicity of silence is a problem  
I am compelled to do this work"

→ what about my...



textbooks  
pathologize

In Faculties of Social work,  
we're not  
walking our



## Task Force Work: Delegate notes

### 1. PRIMARY CONCERN:

Representation, lived experience, and expertise must be prioritized and honoured in the formation of the task force.

- Need to account for the experiences of all intersectional categories of racialized people to represent needs of different communities.
- Any white people involved are there in supporting roles, not leading roles.
- Student representation and voice is absolutely necessary.

### 2. MANDATE AND VISION

- Need to be very clear that anti-racism means systemic change, and transition of power from where it is now hoarded.
- Indigenous ways of knowing, and the ideology and practice of decolonization, must underpin the work of the task force because without Indigeneity ringing loud and clear, it is not anti-racism work and further perpetuates a settler-colonial agenda of domination.
- Compensation and acknowledgement for this work in various forms.
- Mandate has to be broad enough to be valuable for every institution – not only U15.
- Task force would be a resource and provide recommendations, expertise, etc., but the work must be taken up and accomplished by the individual institutions as well.
- Working with the understanding that students are the largest, and most important, and most vulnerable, stakeholder at the university.
- Recognize that anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism runs deep into the foundation of this country, and because of the specific and particularly violent ways in which Black and Indigenous people experience structural racism, they need to be the leaders of the task force.
- Create guiding documents with information about the anti-racism framework this task force would be working from, so everyone has a shared understanding.

- Vision should be a working document, reflexive and living, as this work is tumultuous and challenging and changes are bound to happen. Must be able to be flexible and nimble.
- Act as an umbrella and liaison group for the sector, interacting with other initiatives such as the *Scarborough National Charter on Anti-Black Racism and Black Inclusion in Canadian Higher Education*.

### 3. ACTIONS TO TAKE

- Environmental scan of equity and anti-racism work happening at post-secondary institutions across the country including:
  - Basics, like finding out information about number of staff at equity offices, and are there any dedicated anti-racism staff?
  - Whose portfolio does equity fall under, and what does this say about the reach of that work and ability to effect change?
  - Any accountability mechanisms for anti-racism?
- Compile the existing anti-racism and decolonization documents to acknowledge that we don't need to reinvent the wheel here; lots of good work has already been done.
- Parse through and compile list of initiatives/calls to action that schools have been given, or developed themselves, over the years.
- Communities of support: local, regional, and national:
  - Create community of practice with people with expertise in various areas of race relations that can be called upon, remunerated, and given opportunities to work across institutions of higher education in Canada
  - Data collection and methodologies experts are necessary
  - Policy wonks and anti-racist policy researchers are necessary
  - Anti-racism education and awareness professionals are necessary
- Establish best practices for anti-racism work that can be compared to current practices at institutions as one form of measurement and accountability.
- Develop best practices for anti-racism infrastructure that outline how equity administration should look, to whom they should report, and amount of resourcing necessary in relation to size of student body.

- It's necessary to have a structure that engages on a regularly scheduled basis with presidents and provosts, perhaps at their annual meetings.
- Develop guidelines for institutions to fund and resource student groups doing anti-racism and racial justice advocacy work without stepping on toes or overstepping, leaving the power and control in the hands of the students.
  - Relinquishing this financial power/control is crucial for creating spaces for authentic and genuine student advocacy work to flourish for the betterment of the BIPOC student experience
- Develop policy statements on current issues in higher education to help guide institutions in their operations.
  - Eg.: cluster hiring
- This is the decision of individual institutions, but the task force could make a public statement and keep these institutions accountable regarding whether or not various initiatives are happening, in development, or completed. We must be careful that this doesn't become a mechanism of shaming.

#### 4. ACCOUNTABILITY

- Develop teams of people at each university who can help represent the needs and voices of BIPOC folks at decision making tables – these teams can act as checks and balances throughout respective institutions.
- Develop a strong web presence, and publish goals and action plans with timelines and regular updates that are accessible via website or monthly/quarterly newsletter etc.
  - Acknowledge missed benchmarks or objectives with an explanation of why it happened and how it is being addressed to make sure it won't happen again – keep information public
  - Also acknowledge who is involved with this work, including contact info, faces, and title
- The idea of questioning and critical thinking must be institutionalized at all levels, and we must have task force representatives throughout the country, in all regions.
- Get sign-off from the President and Provost of each institution as a public nod to their commitment to this work.
- Ensure accessible communication that is broadly available across campuses and the internet – dedicated web page, institutional news publications, etc. Include social media, student publications, etc.

- Develop accessible mechanisms for feedback/complaints/suggestions as anti-racism work progresses, with ability to reply, resolve issues, and provide personalized explanations as a way to stay accountable to BIPOC communities that may be concerned.
- Performance evaluations for senior administrators must include criteria dealing with equity and anti-racism competencies, as well as engagement with sector-wide anti-racism efforts – there isn't a developed framework for anti-racism competencies for university and college administrators, but this is something the task force can take the lead in developing, along with its member institutions.
- Develop multiple, strong positions for student representation on the task force (with appropriate compensation either in course credit, payment, or other forms of remuneration) and work on a framework for better student representation within institutional decision-making processes - can't rely on a small group of student representatives, or those in student unions, to get a holistic student perspective.
  - Curriculum, policy committees, governance structures, institutional planning processes – the task force must focus on finding ways to get students involved in all of these areas, and more
- Have regular in-person information/consultation sessions regarding how this work is progressing.

## 5. DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

- Resources for compensation and for actually getting work done – research, PR, communications, etc.
- Each institution buys-in and has membership. Provide small fee to get work started.
- Skepticism around involvement of government, due to the transient and unpredictable nature of political agendas and the increasing anti-EDI rhetoric from some provincial governments.
- Acknowledge the importance of relationship-building in anti-racism advocacy work, so foster an environment of intentionality going into every meeting, discussion, consultation, and prioritize developing these open and ongoing relationships, particularly with student groups.
- Recognize that the qualified people that would be appropriate for this task force are likely tired, over-committed and burning out – how will this be mitigated? Money is one thing, but recognizing one's humanity and limitations is important in doing considerate and justice-based work.

- Collaboration will be necessary with other large post-secondary governing/advisory bodies:
  - Universities Canada
  - CAUT
  - Canadian Federation of Students
- Metrics and measurement of this work – appropriate tools must be developed.
- Composition of task force:
  - Regional, provincial contingents to provide geographically specific and tailored resources and recommendations
  - Student group representation
  - Black and Indigenous led – very important
  - Although a task force of this nature has the right intentions, we must recognize the complexity of doing anti-racism work within white supremacist institutions and how barriers, challenges, and forms of oppression will manifest differently at each individual school
- In the same way that schools have varying configurations due to geography, demography, academic history, research strengths, and government influence, so too will systemic racism look different in each place. As such, the impact and credibility of the task force’s work will be different at different institutions.
- The role and mandate of this body must be clarified very early in the process.
- Because the folks on the ground at each individual school will understand where and in which ways racism manifests, this group should provide guidance, research, funding, and knowledge to empower those who are involved in institution-specific anti-racism work.
- The task force must have robust representation from institutions of all sizes and categories, to properly allow for integrated knowledge and storytelling, while developing resources broad enough to apply in a multitude of educational contexts.
- Another helpful consideration may be type-specific working sub-groups in addition to the overall task force – colleges, U15, smaller universities, etc.
- As well, regional working sub-groups should be considered – western Canada, Prairies, Quebec, Ontario, Maritimes, or even province-specific groups that can work within the political context and climate of said region/province.






## 6. RELATED NOTES FROM DR. MALINDA SMITH'S KEYNOTE:

This work must be taken up by everyone, and has to be at the forefront of all work that institutions do and must be included at all levels of the University.

- Task force must be multi-faceted and have large purview to encompass what needs to be done.
  - Curriculum, student services, policy making, funding, alumni relationships, and so much more



*We must move past barriers at this moment. Barriers have been identified, as have solutions. There is a plethora of racial justice scholarship that outlines very clear paths forward. Let's make the determination to work together and create real change.*

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ConversAction was a highly successful conference, for many reasons. We wish to earnestly thank all of the Canadian universities, their administrators and student leaders for participating in these important conversations and commitments to work. We thank them for sharing their energy, their expertise, their enthusiasm, and their trust. We understand and appreciate that many of the individuals tasked with undertaking this labour are facing racial injustices, along with other barriers, in their careers and in their lives. We acknowledge the inherent injustice in repeatedly petitioning those most impacted by systemic inequity to also lead the change. We thank you for investing your time, your strength, and your experience in us to once again bear this burden; we hope that your trust in us has been well-placed.

We cannot name all of the delegates who attended, but we will bring focus to their institutions: Brandon University; Brock University; Capilano University; Concordia University; Humber College; Huron University College; Kwantlen Polytechnic University; Laurentian University; McGill University; McMaster University; Memorial University of Newfoundland; Queen's University; Renison University College (co-host); Saint Mary's University; Trent University; University of British Columbia; University of Guelph; University of Manitoba; University of New Brunswick; University of the Fraser Valley; University of Waterloo (co-host); Vancouver Island University; Western University; and Wilfrid Laurier University.

The Speakers and Panelists who provided not only a depth of knowledge and personal experience, but helped to articulate a clear and meaningful path forward: Dr. Malinda Smith; Dr. Laura Mae Lindo; Dr. Christopher Taylor; Pat Case; Dr. Kathy Hogarth; Dr. Sobia Shaikh, Lori Campbell, Gina Hickman, Dr. Kofi Campbell, Ethan Candler, Omi Ra, Bunisha Samuels, and Mohammad Sharifi.

[RETURN TO TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)





## **WE ALSO WISH TO THANK THE MANY VOLUNTEERS WHO GAVE GENEROUSLY OF THEIR TIME:**

### **Volunteers**

Emily Burnell; Gabriel Geiger; Sarah Harawa; Grant Leach; Ayesha Masud; Ivy Muriuki; Cynthia Nomanee; Yasmin Tokmurzina; Julia Williams; Lifang Wang

The planning committee met regularly for several months leading up to the Conference, and their commitment to this event, tireless energy, attention to detail, and rich insights contributed significantly to the success of the Conference. Thank you for your individual and unique contributions.

### **Planning Committee:**

Kofi Campbell (Co-Convenor); Gina Hickman (Co-Convenor); Ethan Candler (Student Leader); Karrie Cornies; Andrea Daley; Cort Egan; Chris Hiller; Omni Ra; Nancy Schnarr; Hanan Thibeh; Trish Van Katwyk; Ally Vonk; Shella Zagada

Throughout the planning process, we called local groups to provide us with thoughtful suggestions and recommendations: Waterloo Indigenous Student Centre (WISC); Indigenous Student Association (ISA – Wilfrid Laurier University); Racial Advisory for Inclusion, Solidarity and Equity (RAISE)

We would like to thank the staff of the Inn of Waterloo and Conference Centre, particularly the kitchen, banquet and front desk personnel, with a special thank you to Dominique Mercer, the event coordinator, for giving this conference such focused attention.

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# CONSTRAINTS: INSTITUTIONAL, SOCIAL, POLITICAL



Dr. Laura Mae Lindo, one of the chief architects of Wilfrid Laurier’s *e(RACE)r* Conference of 2016, led an interactive session on Day I of the ConversAction conference, that challenged delegates to identify constraints to anti-racism efforts. The following pages capture the words and phrases that delegates used to identify Institutional Constraints; Social Constraints; and, Political Constraints. We have reprinted each word and phrase as they appeared on the sticky notes provided; the word clouds which precede each section provide a quick overview of the data captured.

[RETURN TO TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)

# CONSTRAINTS: INSTITUTIONAL



[RETURN TO TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)

Limited  
resources

Knowledge  
expertise

funding

- Institutional inaction
- De-centralization of equity and racial justice work
- Lack of structure for having these conversations
- Change in student demographics /no change of faculty/staff
- EDI as “sexy”
  - Everyone wants it
- \$
- Lack of representation
- Lack of research
  - No mechanism to study or explore
- Hiring reproduction of sameness
- Who is “Leader”
- Consistent under-funding
- Lack of prevention-based priorities (training, education, onboarding)
  - More reactionary initiatives
- Denial
- White male dominance
- Lack of systemic change
- Fear to lose power and authority
- Power of data
- Universities are very “traditional” institutions
- BUDGETS!
- Limited resources
- Lack of diversity “at the table”
- Under-resourced EDI department and HR department

- Inequitable resources
- Diversity on Board
- Unclear how this aligns with unit mandates
  - No clear leadership direction
- Lack of trust and desire for change
- Shifting priorities
- Silo's
- Lack of representation at leadership level
  - No voice at the table
- Long history of white male leadership
- Fear of mistake
- Budget processes
- Training for hiring
- Lack of resources
- Resourcing structure focus on programs
- Hiring only one Indigenous person – rather than hiring VP Indigenous and let them hire their own team
- Changing leadership/priorities
- Government “oversight” and sometimes competing agendas
- Lack of will for change
- Lack of representative bodies
- Structures/pathways for information/action
- Communication
- Reporting structures/decision making authority
- Lack of policies
- Cooperation across stakeholders
- Understaffing in the Equity Office
- Lack of real commitment to the issues
- Competing priorities
- White leadership doesn't see/know
- Resources
- Governance system is bi-cameral with government appointed board
- Distribution of power at a senior administrative level
- Funding and staffing: Where to get the expertise?
- Divergent policies
- Institution is trying but effort is inconsistent
- “Lack of resources”
- Understanding of various systems, involvement of staff
- Lack of data
- Structures of oppression inhibit real and beneficial equity strategizing
- Resources
- Understanding
- Complex hierarchy
- Awareness – lack of apathy
- Admin vs Faculty & Faculty vs Students:
  - Where is/are the priorities
- Disinterest from leadership
  - “we don't have these issues”
- Funding
- EDI not seen as core mission
  - Add on
- Folk who do the work are underpaid
- When racial equity work is done it's seen as an agenda that BIPOC folk are pushing rather than equitable work
- Resources
- \$
- Lack of actual commitment from senior leadership
- Performative actions w/ no tangible outcomes
- Silos of university are permanent
  - “My first idea”
- City is not inclusive or safe
- EDI must be the frame
- Current leadership repeating itself

- Moving away from competitive pool +
  - Assumption that we are further along
  - Lack of resources (increased growth, decreased resources)
  - Focus on responses to negative media reports
  - Cuts to operational budgets
  - Lack of diversity in leadership
  - Institutional lethargy
    - 200 years of whiteness entrenched
  - Resistance to data collection at admission
  - Competing demands for time and \$ resources
    - Decreased valuing
  - White dominance and white feminism
  - Lack of data
  - Unwillingness to have difficult conversations
  - Superficial commitment to diversity amongst leadership
  - Recognizing BIPOC faculty being those who do unrecognized anti-racism work
    - Listening, advocating, mentorship
  - When people appropriate the language of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion without accountabilities to BIPOC experiences and outcomes
  - Lack of diversity among faculty, staff, and students
  - Lack of knowledge about EDI
  - No/little commitment to EDI
  - Lack of accountability
  - White centrism
  - Collective agreements
    - They need to be indigenized
    - Eg. Bereavement, Leave Articles
  - Hiring practices (targeted to people who look like committee members)
  - Lack of openness to meaningful conversations
  - Sanctioning/minimizing with racialized students
  - Student codes of conduct mis-used
- Worry about media reporting negative stories
  - Preaching to those who already care about these issues
  - Student body is privileged and having a lack of awareness
  - Our Board of Governors are all of European Descent
  - Equity awards for Institutions that one silo'd and not specific
    - Ie. Gender equity should be called white gender equity
  - The institutions does not recognize RACE or RACISM AS A PROBLEM and they refuse to collect data
  - Cis-white straight able bodied running, overseeing equity
  - Lack of expertise
  - Source of Academic Research/Research Focus
  - Systemic barriers are so pronounced
  - Policy gaps/police awareness
  - Talking about importance and no having action to support

*Lack of openness  
to meaningful  
conversations*

## Resistance to collecting relevant data / lack of expertise as to how to do this

- Embarrassment that institutions are not farther along on this work
- Student union has a majority rule approach
- Whose voices are heard?
- The fact that at/in Higher ed. diversity often does not include racialized folks and there aren't many in power to enact change
- Need more courses on anti-racism
- Diverse challenges from diverse stakeholders – competing demands
- Resources and commitment
- Decentralization
- Equity seeking folks shut out of opportunities
- Pressure to address government priorities – which are not EDI
- Unwillingness to hold people accountable for racist behaviours
- Lack of funding for anti-racism initiatives
- 19th century institution not built for 21st century students
- Risk aversion
- Need to restructure to achieve transformation
- Resistance to collecting relevant data/lack of expertise as to how to do this
- White power and incompetence
- # of people doing the work is not enough
- Money, time people
  - Usual excuses
- Lack of leadership “buy in”
- Lack of data
- Not sure where to start
- Lack of inclusion in the process
- -Ring fencing EDI knowledge in EDI offices
- “ADD + STIR” initiatives are easy
- Hiding behind policy and structure
- Lack of system-wide strategic approach (integration vs add-on)
- Not taking a socio-ecologic approach
- Framing of equity issues as “conflict” especially interpersonal conflict
- Tradition
  - Especially regarding budgeting
- Faculty association
- Fear to raise counter-narratives in coursework
- Colonized ideas for interpretation delivering equity supports
- Bureaucracy
- Tenure and promotion
  - Disproportional workload of racialized and indigenized
- Lack of data collection
- Focus on “diversity” and “equity” leads to superficial programs
- Very white professoriate
- Conscious and unconscious bias



- Silos
  - Competition between institution is a challenge
- Change doesn't influence other departments and institutions
- Whiteness is more than colour it is ideology
- Representation does not mean participation
- Lack of critical race theory in the faculties
- Commuter campus – no time for students
- Silo-ing TRC and EDI work
- Lack of integration and foregrounding
- Money to develop EDI informed recruitment initiatives
- Time to work collaboratively with all stakeholders
  - Students
  - Faculty
  - Staff
  - Community
  - At the program level
- Fear
- Lack of vision
- Collective agreements structure/lack of support for EDI
- Lack of commitment to change
- Composition of Board of Governors
- Lack of training for faculty/admin/support staff (Respectful workplace only – not anti-racism, info on systemic racism, gender bias)
- People are successful in the status quo and will fight to defend it as is
- \$ (work is not resourced)
- Hesitation among senior admin to look bad upon identifying their shortcomings
- Lack of data
- Cultural acceptance
- Expectations don't evolve
  - Hire the same people
- Ability to do traditional jobs differently
- White women/men with little intersectional EDI analysis in positions of EDI leadership
- Poor evaluation of racialized and Indigenous professors
- Homogeneity
- Board of Trustees/Governing Boards = very conservative and not representative
- Recruiting students and faculty from under-represented groups into climates of hostility and ignorance
- Denial of the impact of racial discrimination
- Disparities between demographics of faculty and student body
- Lack of processes to attract diverse candidates
- Can't focus on more than one issue at a time
- Damaging institutional reputations
- No culture of accountability
- Lack of processes to enable change
- “surface” knowledge of senior leadership
- Resources
- Genuine intention
- Incentive/disincentive systems
- No pathways to leadership for people of colour
- Faculty/staff mostly white
  - Students of colour and Indigenous students don't see themselves
- Our academic definitions of merit and scholarship don't include equity/inclusion identities and work
- Hiding behind “freedom of speech”
- “head in sand” attitude
  - No problem here
- Easier to stay the course
- Make a policy, put on website, problem solved
- Narrative of “merit” and “excellence” goes unquestioned
- Unresponsive administrators

- Anti-racism euphemized, siloed, not integrated in leadership conversations
- White fragility
- Policies for policy sake – no commitment to actual change
  - Corporate approach to equity and diversity
- Lack of senior leadership/resources devoted to action
- Lack of collegiality toward a common idea of being inclusive
- Assumption that presence (vastly increased) of international students = “diversity”
  - But no supports in place
- Hierarchies and history
- Violent structures
- Overlapping departments job descriptions
- Same mindset trying to solve the problem, same mindset that caused it
- Institutions resist change – and it can be important (tenure, collegial governance)
- Structure of departments
  - Limited racial diversity leads to perpetuation of limits of discipline
- Senior leadership doesn’t see the problem
- Complaints/concerns shunted into a fairly slow policy process (can’t keep up with social media!)
- More concern for PR than student experience
- Problematizing students, staff, and faculty of colour
- Neo-liberalism
- Valuing gender equity over racial equity and justice amongst senior leaders
- Sheltering of professors with racist views
- Institutional awareness
- Openness to others views
- White male dominance – lack of willingness to hear or change
- Funding model that do not prioritize/ problematize inequities
- Western academic traditions
- Lack of diversity in leadership positions
- Lack of resources dedicated to work
- Number of people doing the work
  - Offices of I
- Resource priorities
- Lack of institutional will
- Climate persists and makes institutions unbearable or difficult for racialized staff, faculty, or students
- Fear around consultation, which feeds cycle of no consultation
  - Results in flawed policy and backlash
- This is not our problem, we do not have a racism issue
- Decentralization of operations – central policies/decisions do not filter effectively to units
- Lack of students’ involvement in institutional policies
- Universities are inherently colonized spaces/ structures
- “Austerity” – façade
  - Not enough money to go around
- Diversity on hiring committees
- Are the policies supporting the groups they are meant to?
- Competing social priorities
- People at the top of the ladder (?) are unconvinced of the need for conversations about racial justice
- Lack of intercultural understanding and opportunities
- Lack of integrated demographic data
- Unlearning and reimagining
- Lack of resources for anti-racism tools
- Silos to decentralization
- Representation on boards and administrative structures

- Institution protects faculty who violate students so it doesn't look bad
- Lack of bite of policies
  - Re: "diversity"
- Sometimes no stable body to hold accountable
- Resources are placed elsewhere
- Culture of schools is very white
- "new girl network"
  - Broken pipeline of leadership for racialized and Indigenous folks
- Not naming racial violence experienced by racialized and Indigenous folks
- Funding limitations
- Same groups doing the same things and expecting change
- Processes that limit diverse voices
- Unwillingness to identify how this might fit into structure and priorities
- Fear of punishment and institutional reputation
- Disconnect between policy and application
- Admin believes equity is a risk management strategy
- Knowledge expertise
- Resources
  - Time
  - \$
- Lack of knowledge of anti-racism in leadership
- Assumptions behind tenure decisions
- Distrust
- If no one's in charge of something it may not happen
- People at the head of the institutions are homogenous and unaffected by racial inequities on campus
- Need to co-create in a traditional hierarchy
- Disconnect between admin and students
- Insufficient commitment at the senior levels of the institution
- \$
- Commitment – follow through
- Conflicting priorities
- Money – "bums in seats"
- Underrepresentation
- Lack of diversity at senior level
- Hiring committee structures
- Failure to resource the equity office or work
- Reliance on Eurocentric governance structures that rely on colonial histories
- Concerns regarding liability and risk
- Funding
- People not "getting it"
- Knowing the right thing to do

*Lack of  
intercultural  
understanding  
and opportunities*

# CONSTRAINTS: SOCIAL



[RETURN TO TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)

Unwillingness  
to change

People don't  
know how to  
talk about racism

Different  
values of  
"what matters"

- Myth of Meritocracy
- Ongoing colonization
- Fear of negative media attention
- Refusal/Resistance to grappling with histories of slavery/colonialism and their ongoing legacy
- Fear of own alt-right colleagues
- Lack of diversity at the top of institutions
- Culture of whiteness wove in/built into institution
- Power dynamics
- Old white boys club
- The idea that racism is not a problem
- CA's lack of data
  - Enables denial
- Within group conflict and inter-group conflict
- Time to build relationships with community stakeholders
- Fearful leadership
- White liberal guilt/"post-racial" discourse / denial
- Hear no evil/see no evil culture
- Lack of institutional commitment
- Lack of resources for any new initiatives
- People don't know how to talk about racism
- Prioritizing every other thing
- Defensive stance – focus on minimizing risk
  - Opening up issues seen as creating liability
- Eurocentricity
- Brave space as well as safe spaces
- Complacency

# Fear of ruffling feathers

- Culture of secrecy
- Exhaustion
- Administrations willingness to engage
- Support at the top
- Knowledge
- Current systems
- \$
- Commitment
- Brave space – safe space
- Financial resources
- Funding
- No social opportunities to have the conversations
- Epistemological and ontological biases
- Risk adverse commitments
- Internal politics – even the people working for diversity clash amongst themselves
- Focus on making people comfortable vs Brave
- Priorities change per household
- Complacency
- Siloed social clubs of students
- Experience/exposure
- Different levels of understanding/experience. Not understood/recognized by all
- My whiteness
- Champagne socialism
- All white leadership
- White Deans and Associate Deans
- Understaffed Equity Offices
- Lack of diversity among staff
- Keep getting asked for business case for diversity
- Staff who don't feel safe to be vulnerable to address whiteness and fragility
- Push and pull factors
  - “ignorance is bliss”
- Lack of understanding and awareness at the top and through the ranks about over/underrepresentation
- White supremacist thinking from managers/supervisors resistant to implementing initiatives
- Lines of reporting/authority and lack of consultation
- Data challenging to collect
- Service to community as a university mandate: which community?
- Historical injustices that constrain access to higher education institutions
- Education
- Fear
- Fluctuating groups of people, time
- Communication
- Leadership
- Those in positions of power don't have lived experience
  - Unknown = invisible

- All voices not equal: who is heard?
- Power and control
- Relative privation: There are “more” important issues to deal with
- Knowledge
- Hierarchy that limits collaboration
- Lack of understanding one’s positionality
- Non recognition of privilege
- Discomfort with acknowledging racism
- Must operate in bilingual environment (Français, English) to be inclusive of all comments in Quebec
- Talking to like-minded people and preaching to the choir
- Few people of colour in general, as in positions of power specifically
- No/limited support for coming up with solutions
- Leadership
- Lack of “safe” places or sense of safety for reporting racism
  - Denial that it exists
- Unconscious biases
- Uncomfortable to have these conversations
- Unwillingness to change
- Non representation of diversity at table
- Complacency
- Silencing of Black and Brown voices
- You/she/he is difficult to work with
- Research on the benefits of racialized faculty who do equity research
- Attachment to and love of power structures
- Fear of loss of power
- The work is risky
- Too many think that talking about race is somehow racist in itself
- Department cultures of “collegial governance”
- Denial
- Powerful people benefit from the status quo
- Fear of making mistake
- Tension with “traditions” of university
- Lack of representation
- Exasperation among students and other activists who burn out, someone else steps in and starts over
- Externalizing racism as a “social” problem, larger than “us”
- People that are ingenuine in their concern to help
  - Just nod ad smile or out right eye roll
  - Makes you want to stay quiet, save the embarrassment and social isolation
- All of the marginalized (racialized and Indigenous) folks are doing all the “heavy lifting” being ignored, demonized, othered
- Historical power structures
- Institutional memory (with erasures about institutional racism and anti-racism efforts)
- Different values of “what matters”
- Lack of structure to raise concerns
- Governance through creating silos
- Culture vs Cultures
- Denial
- Failure? And/or reluctance to name the issues of race and racism
- “too big” to address
- Invisibility resistance and the labour of BIPOC faculty who are experts in “racial literacy”
- Financial access to Education
- Labour history in the community
- Resources are not allocated due to competing priorities
- Fear of ruffling feathers
- Inability to recognize issues/problems
- Under staffed
- Fear
- White power, privilege, and dominance
- Whiteness at the top
- Lack of data
  - How to balance need for information and privacy laws/rules
- Turnover rate among leadership
- Our colleagues/coworkers don’t think there’s a problem
- Resources

- Lack of data
- Apathy
- EDI hides racism
- Backlash
- Resources
- Segregation among racialized/Indigenous groups
- Internalized oppression among BIPOC
- Individualization of systemic problems
- External community views
- Preconceived notion about race
- Appealing to the dominant majority who lack basic understandings
- Backlash (anti-racism = anti-white)
- We cannot use the terms RACE, RACISM, or anti-Black racism as they offend those in power
- Lack of distributed capacity to do work
- Ideological
- Discursive
- Possessive investments
- Epistemology of ignorance
- Normative whiteness
- Equity is siloed rather than integrated
- Language differences
- Hierarchical structures that limit innovation and creativity
- Environment
- Tokenism is one constraint
- Student Body who don't use their privilege
- University claims can only meet needs of 1 group at a time
  - Eg. Pits Black need against Indigenous needs
- Lack of resources
- Individuals acknowledge that racism 'may' be a problem but they don't believe that they themselves may be racist or biased
- Fear of decreased social position
- Different understandings of power
- Fear of change
- Idea of resource scarcity – budget cuts
- Cis-gendered white people
- \$
- Lack of consensus
- Lack of desire to do the work
- The “work is daunting”
- Lack of support resources
- Lack of resources
  - No \$
- Denial
- Awareness
- Fear of being disadvantaged
- Risk aversion; don't see self in problem
- Fear (misinformed) that talking about marginalized groups marginalizes dominant groups
- No data
  - Fear of asking for it
- Shifting of university priorities ... to “student experience”
  - Who gets left out
- ‘Risks’ in speaking out
  - Positions
- University bureaucracy
- My supervisor
- Preference for sameness
  - White power attracts white power
- Divided political views with little middle ground
- Lack of criticalness of like-minded people
- Lack of a voice/seat at the table for marginalized/racialized populations
- Emotional tax of racialized women and men
- Competing priorities
- Uncomfortable talking/taking action on race issues
- Impoliteness of talking about race



- Tradition
  - History
  - Fear
  - Ignorance
  - Stagnation
  - Lack of racialized communities of practice
  - Not having the lived experience
  - Fear of repercussions
  - Discomfort/White fragility
  - Willingness to make space of “others”
    - Sense of losing something
  - Perceived threat
  - Complacency with status quo
  - In Quebec politics of exclusion based on religion and immigrant status
  - Social supports available to folks in community who experience racial discrimination. Once someone graduates there are no policies that will protect people in community
  - White fragility
  - White egos
  - Rising conservatism
  - White women as gatekeepers
  - Preference of sameness
  - Overrepresentation of white in leadership
  - Power
  - Safety-sense
  - Disbelief in racism
  - Board of Governors and VPs
    - Who are not supportive of racial justice efforts
  - Lack of data = Invisible, Denial
  - Fear
  - Senior Executive is white
  - Lack of bold leadership and trying to be politically white
  - Monochrome institutions
- Fear of “destabilization”
  - Bias (unconscious or not)
  - Lack of representation in social capital structures
  - Isolated and separate equity issues
  - “There are no resources”
  - Ignorance/silence about racism from white faculty, students, admin
  - Institutions don’t actually want to change
  - Lack of institutional will
  - Faculty Association
  - Collective Agreements
  - Many students, faculty, staff lack racial literacy
  - Imagination
    - Haven’t known any other way, repeating mistakes
  - Senior leadership doesn’t see the problem
  - Internalized racism amongst students, staff, and faculty
  - “Merit” in hiring
    - Who defines merit and what is it?
  - “We are diverse already”
    - See our promotional materials



*Fear of  
decreased  
social position*

# CONSTRAINTS: POLITICAL



[RETURN TO TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)

*Inequities  
in resource  
distribution*

*lack of funding  
for anti-racism  
initiatives*

*Lack of diverse  
representation  
at powerful  
leadership level*

- Political system privileges predominantly white areas
- Fear of losing power; fear of questioning privileges/advantages
- Board governance
- Political leaders that promote anti-diversity
- Legislation that empowers some but leaves others behind
- Obsession with a pretty face (Trudeau)
- Government funding is for one-off projects— not sustained
- Leadership (president) thinks the institution is doing well in terms of Equity and Diversity
  - White genocide
- Academic vs administrative
- Ford, Trump, Higgs (New Brunswick)
- Government funding is results-focused and jobs focused
- Limited consistent funding
- Majority Rule
  - What does that mean for “minorities”?
- Representation
- Priorities—allocation of resources
- Political systems + structures
  - Built to resist change
- Cuts lead to “narrowing” of disciplines
- Region is very white compared to student body
- Policy development
- Culture of backlash

- Policies
  - How our language becomes politicized
- Provincial funding cuts that impact universities
  - Resources taken away from racial justice work
- Fear of cultivating disagreement with government because of funding, perception of elitism/bubble
- Politics of free(dom) of speech
- Provincial climate and student choice initiative
- Assessment systems
- “other priorities” that take precedent
- Funding systems
- Regionalism
- Political representation
- Systems of public consultation/community engagement
- Lack of political will
- Perceptions of free speech
- Conservatives + PPC
- “our students, donors, alumni, are too conservative, they won’t like this conversation”
- Leaders benefit from the power imbalance
- Funding sources not geared at equity work
  - Can change as governments change
- Rising regionalism connected with anti-immigrant
- Political ignorance
- Lack of political will
- Lack of diversity in representation
- Focus on political and not people
- Strength of “the system”
- Politics of institution perpetuate whiteness
- Cut to programs that support diversity
- The “we will only do it” if a particular party gets in ...
  - “hurry up and wait”
- Decision-maker occupy privileged positions and identities
- Lack of will to do the work in a “disruptive” and real way
- Disconnect between political governments and universities
  - i.e. All the legislative idiots that fail to consider equity offices
  - i.e. Sexual violence
- Sole focus on labour market alignment
- Equity is “there”
  - i.e. An office ...
- Employment equity
- Priority level
- Lack of knowledge
- Resources
- Lack of brave politicians
- Political constraints
  - Provincial leadership Ford doesn’t care and is cutting funding and mandating thing like freedom of expression policies which effects racialized and marginalized students
- Labour movement
- Governance structure
- Inequities in resource distribution
- Funding model and reticence of gov’t!
- Lack of mandate to get the training done
- Funding: Who gets the \$?
- Leadership: power and legitimacy: What makes you legitimate and recognized/valued?
- Senior leadership (white) wants to “look good” to provincial government = minimizing problems, controversy
- Commodification of education
- Bottom-line thinking
  - Economic drivers
- Having the right people at the table
- Influence of the American foreign policy

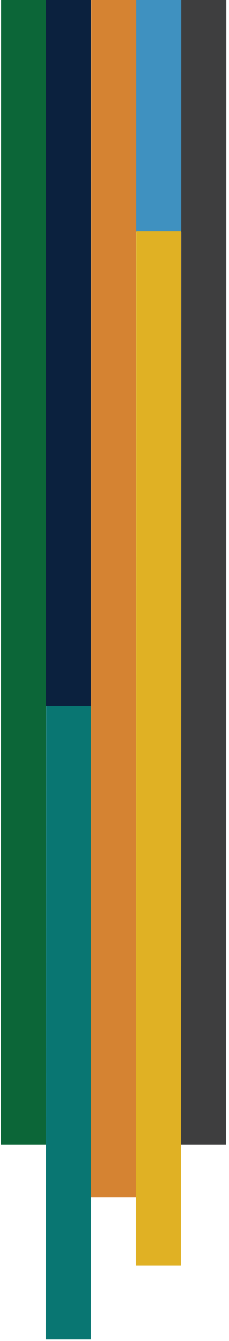
- Ideologies that reinforce and benefit from status quo, current disparities
  - Minority governments
  - Funding/financial resources
  - Lack of deep discussion about anti-racism
  - Identity politics for politicians to win a seat
  - Conservative government (provincial)
  - Economics of the region
  - Politicians all uphold and represent status quo
  - “pipeline”
    - Does not allow for different perspectives to get in
  - Nobody is held accountable
  - Conservative community
  - Over-representation of white politicians
  - Changing leadership stops traction
  - Process within universities that limit diverse voices
  - Competing demands
  - Policies
  - Colonial governments will always protect colonialism
  - Racism voices by political leaders
  - Lack of funding for Indigenous students
  - Faculty members strongly divided on important of diversity to institution
  - Policies
  - Racist provincial government
  - Ideas around Canadian National Identity
  - “hardening” positions that “we’ve already addressed racism”
  - Why is free speech more important than equity? (especially when the government mandates Chicago principles)
  - Ethnic clusters
  - President of Colour disrespected by Board Chair
  - “free speech” translates to “I can say terribly racist things and you can’t stop me”
- Institutional conservatism + risk-aversion
  - Change in gov’t values
    - Ie. Student choice initiatives
  - Political systems prefer the status quo and fixing problems means challenging this
  - Legislations
  - Underrepresentation
  - Immigration
  - Political rhetoric of whiteness being “under threat”
  - Use of inclusive language to promote exclusion
  - Bill 21 (Quebec)
  - FUNDING
  - Ford Gov
  - Funding for Critical Research
  - SMA 3
  - Same systems still in place, just rearranging parts
  - Resources
    - Funding

*Changing  
leadership stops  
traction*

# Absence of political interest or will to address racism

- Faculty vs staff tension
  - Inequity
- Policies that challenge the hate carrying discourses of “free speech”
- TRC represented as interest in making change in equity – just a farce
- Universities are microcosms of society so whatever is happening outside of them will influence the inside
- Ford Gov’t
  - White supremacists in political power
- STEM influence in the schools
- Pattern of resistance manifested in belief academic administrative leader do not have power to change
- Changes of government/changes of priority/instability
- Powerful but clueless leaders
- Refusal of upper admin to hire POC into upper admin positions
- Conservative power
- Whose in government influences resources and priorities?
- Budget cuts #FordSucks
- Governance mechanisms
  - Eg. systems of selecting/electing committee reps for decision-making bodies
- Democracy doesn’t offer positive result in white supremacist societies
  - Democracy not real
- Resources – money/funding to do anti-racism/equity work well
  - This is connected to political will
- Stepping on toes
- Short-term perspectives
- Lack of funding for anti-racism initiatives
- Lack of Will
- Political structures rep. Eurocentric models
- Quebec Government
- Anti-migration movement + policies
  - Esp Alta, Qc
- Politics in “democracies” is inherently disadvantaging “minority” concerns
- Lack of unity between provinces in general, and between Quebec and the rest of Canada specifically
- Limited power in the hands of those who are most affected by racism
- Neoliberalism
  - Underfunding of universities creates a culture of “not enough”
- Problematic bills in Quebec
  - Eg. 21, religious symbols
- Provincial Funding and Financial support
- Lack of racial/anti-racism literacy of government
- Rising Conservatism
- Political malice
- No funding
  - Taking away of funding
- Resources
- Short term political programs not long term
- Lack or absence of actual nation-to-nation relationships
- Active and violent dismissal of anti-racism
- Cuts to University funding
- Lack of funding for racialized students

- Reliance on external/philanthropic financial contributions/fundraising
- Representation
- Ford Government
- Lack of research
- Student politics seem to be also divisive
- Doug Ford is in our faces
- Lack of funding
- Whiteness of leadership
  - Change doesn't benefit the leaders
- Partisan approach to problem solving
- Liability
- Absence of political interest or will to address racism
- Lack of funding
- First past the post voting
  - Wanting to vote for change and feeling like it doesn't count
  - Those in power choosing to stay there
- Narrative that free speech is being threatened by "SJWs"
- "appeasing" industry
  - Esp extractive industries that oppress Indigenous
- Lack of access to funding
  - Other BC institutions receive grants specifically for Indigenization work
- Lack of political representation
- Political constraints to equity
  - Current provincial leadership
- Senior administrators only act on priorities identified by the president and no administrators wants to appear disruptive
- Gerrymandering
- QC government uninterested in challenging racial inequities/misconceptions (can mean no \$ or not a lot)
- I. Calling out people in power without getting fired or marginalized
- Funding (provincial)
- Lack of diverse representation at powerful leadership level
- Question about charter rights
- "We are progressive but, we know about diversity already"
- Lack of awareness of political state
- Fear that being anti-racist could cost votes/constituent support
- Worried that we might rock the boat? Fear to name it
- Lack of/unclear strategic priority for equity work
- Costs of social capital for advocacy
- Sanitized our language removing any articulation of difference
- In QC
  - Bill 21
- Explicit racism is legislated
- Big brother always having final say
- Changing priorities
- Apathy to vote
- Competing priorities
- Lack of diversity at leadership level – so no voice to anti-racism
- Over-representation of dominant groups in decision making positions
- No recognized legislative or policy framework for anti-racism besides human rights
- Changes to funding for universities
- Governing support of backlash/ 'white genocide' claims
- Neo-liberalism
- Lack of viable leadership
- Lack of political will to provide resources
- Government getting involved in University policies
- Views towards immigration



**RENISON**  
UNIVERSITY  
COLLEGE

AFFILIATED WITH THE **UNIVERSITY OF WATERLOO**

240 WESTMOUNT ROAD NORTH  
WATERLOO, ON, CANADA N2L 3G4

[uwaterloo.ca/renison](http://uwaterloo.ca/renison)