

**Draft Minutes of Diversity & Equity Committee Meeting**

February 10, 2020

Jane Wolff (Chair)

Fadi Masoud, Danijela Puric-Mladenovic, Noor Alkhalili (GALDSU), Shannon Simpson (Guest)

Jenny Hill (Committee Secretary)

**Call to Order**

Jane Wolff called the meeting to order at 11:07 am.

**Welcome and Introductions (Jane Wolff)**

Jane welcomed Jenny and Danijela to the committee.

- Jane asked Shannon for guidance about how best to use the Dean's fund of \$1000 per semester for Indigenous programming initiatives.
- She advised Shannon that as a start, the committee has organized its upcoming workshop with John Crutch for March 11<sup>th</sup>.

**Minutes from the previous meeting**

- In the absence of a quorum, the group did not vote to approve last meeting's minutes.

**Conversation with Shannon Simpson**

Shannon suggested that Indigenous and non-Indigenous students be canvassed to find out what kinds of events or support they would value and pointed out that their interests and level of knowledge will likely be different. Her experience at First Nations House suggests that making or crafting, hands-on cultural, or out-of-doors events might be more compelling than lectures. Programming could be geared towards supporting Indigenous students and engaging other interested participants.

Jane asked that Shannon provide examples of methods for surveying students and will follow up in early March.

## Student Enrolment

Shannon knows 3 students who identify as First Nations within the BAAS and M.Arch. programs. There may be more. Figures for Visual Studies and Forestry are unknown, though there may be Indigenous students in Visual Studies.

Shannon raised several questions related to Indigenous enrolment. First,

1. Is architecture a subject of relevance to the Indigenous community?
2. Do Indigenous students enrol in architecture programs at comparable rates to other disciplines?
3. Are enrolment numbers at Daniels lower than that at other university programs?
4. How might we improve upon our Indigenous student enrolment numbers?

## Student Support

A key step toward increasing Indigenous enrolment involves connecting with students before they enter university. Shannon referred to the Bolton Camp summer program that Liat Margolis leads as a good way to encourage applications. She also emphasized the importance of having supports for Indigenous students in place before students arrive at university and providing ongoing support once they are here. Undergraduates who came to Daniels for a small, highly focused First Nations experience as high-schoolers may not be prepared for the large, international cohort they encounter upon enrolment. The shift in scale and culture may produce alienation and difficulty.

As an example, Shannon discussed the importance of having staff members in the Office of the Registrar and Student Services who understand Indigenous culture and issues so that student needs could be met without confusion. For instance, it's important that ORSS understands questions of band funding in order to respond appropriately to financial questions from Indigenous students. She also noted the importance of having Indigenous content in courses so that students find subjects connected to their own experience and backgrounds.

## Curriculum and Programs

Jane noted that the level of engagement on Indigenous issues varies among Daniels disciplines and programs. Fadi and Jane noted that Liat Margolis has raised awareness and championed Indigenous issues in the MLA program and that other MLA colleagues have followed suit. Danijela spoke of there being a 'natural linkage' to Indigenous teaching in the disciplines of forestry and conservation. It is important to identify champions within the bigger programs, including BAAS and M.Arch., as they represent the largest part of our community. Noor opined that student learning is enhanced when topics are incorporated into their studio work. She also noted the oversubscription to Doug Anderson's course on Indigenous landscapes this term and asked for more such offerings.



Shannon advised that the evolution in high-school education about First Nations means that many of our students likely know more about Indigenous history and culture than many of our faculty members. It would be helpful to develop a resource list including reading material and potential speakers who are Elders and knowledge keepers. The Indigenous Initiative Office would like to work compiling such a list, but it does not currently exist.

Jane noted that the Diversity and Equity Committee could begin to compile a reading list for the design disciplines. The Standing Rock Syllabus might be a useful existing resource.

### **Showcasing Current Practices**

Fadi suggested forwarding information about Indigenous and other diversity-oriented programs and initiatives (for instance, Bolton Camp) to the UofT Bulletin to raise awareness of our efforts. This would help Indigenous youth see themselves as part of our community.

### **Searches and Hiring**

The group discussed commitment to Indigenous issues as an important quality to consider in the current search for a new dean. Fadi suggested asking the Provost's office to address this directly with. Noor emphasized the importance of cultural diversity among faculty members to provide role models for students.

### **GALDSU Health and Wellness Questionnaire**

Noor informed the committee that GALDSU will be conducting their Health and Wellness survey soon and asked whether questions about Indigenous issues should be included. Jane brought up the complex issue of writing survey questions and suggested that GALDSU seek guidance on this from people who are more expert.

### **Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 12:02 pm.

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*These notes are considered to be an accurate account of the meeting. Please note that attendance is recorded as per the sign-in sheet. If any discrepancies or omissions are noted, please contact the undersigned; otherwise these shall be deemed acceptable to all.*

Jenny Hill (*Committee Secretary*)

