

EQUITY CONVERSATIONS

Report from the Presidential Bi-Campus Standing Committee on Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Human Rights on the April 23rd & 24th Equity Conversation in UNB SJ and UNBF.



PRESIDENTIAL BI-CAMPUS STANDING COMMITTEE ON EQUITY, DIVERSITY, INCLUSION AND HUMAN RIGHTS

REPORT ON THE APRIL EQUITY CONVERSATIONS
OCTOBER 1, 2018

Executive Summary

The Presidential Bi-Campus Standing Committee on Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Human Rights would like to thank everyone who participated in our Equity Conversation Events on April 23rd and 24th, 2018. We had 118 people register for the events and we received positive and encouraging feedback from those in attendance. The table discussions revealed the considerable energy driving our equity efforts forward as well as enormous goodwill and a sincere desire to tackle the work in front of us.

Our biggest “take away” from the event is that there is a real thirst to learn more about what equity, diversity and inclusion *mean in practice* and a pressing desire to identify how we can work together to achieve an inclusive, respectful UNB community. We heard very clearly that we need to “keep the conversation going” to harness the momentum of these discussions and turn them into action. We were also encouraged to bring others into our conversations, especially students, for whom the timing of the event was a challenge. We were also asked by many of you to follow up with educational workshops on specific equity topics such as positive space training, anti-oppressive practices and how to be an ally to equity seeking groups.

In the weeks ahead, you will hear more from the committee inviting you to attend a series of upcoming conversations focused on specific equity issues, and, you will be invited to reconvene for an action planning workshop early in the new year to create projects team that will add infrastructure to our action plan.

Please read through the detailed report that follows and feel free to reach out to any of the members of the committee.

Sincerely,
Presidential Bi-Campus Standing Committee on Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Human Rights

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PRESIDENTIAL BI-CAMPUS STANDING COMMITTEE ON EQUITY, DIVERSITY, INCLUSION AND HUMAN RIGHTS

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On April 23rd and 24th, the Presidential Bi-campus Standing Committee on Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Human Rights held their first major public event, a two-day-long, action-oriented, bi-campus Equity Conversation.

The “conversation” format involved members of the UNB community (students, staff and faculty) sitting together at round tables to discuss their own work on equity at UNB, as well as talking about the challenges and barriers that confront us collectively, and ways in which we might overcome them. It was difficult to find an ideal time, and given the importance of the work, and the idea that this would be the first engagement of many, the event was held immediately after spring examinations. In all, 28 people from UNBSJ and 90 from UNBF registered for the event, with additional people joining us on the actual day.

Each table had a note-taker, and in the subsequent months, we have used these notes to create this report that seeks to capture an understanding of the current context for equity at UNB, including both the significant challenges that face us as we move forward and the exciting work many are actively engaged in to create a more equity-minded university. We also were able to pull from the notes a set of ideas that people put forward on how we might further advance equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) at UNB. Through a close reading of the table notes, several major themes emerged.

BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES TO EDI

The conversations revealed that there are many complex challenges that face us as we work towards a more equitable university, including general challenges that are inherent to the work, and challenges that are more specific to UNB. Participants recognized that EDI work is, in its nature, complex, and involves a continuous learning process. For example, many noted that the process of engaging diverse stakeholders in meaningful conversation is hard; we must find ways to create space for a diversity of views so that we can encourage those who may feel uncomfortable participating in a discussion of EDI issues and yet who would greatly benefit from that discussion. These insights highlight the fact that dealing with diverse and sometimes competing rights is difficult, and can involve both perceived and actual conflict as a result of the tension between academic freedom and freedom of expression, and EDI objectives and considerations. Finally, many noted the challenges that underlie resistance to EDI, challenges that stem from broad cultural factors. In general, participants appreciated the need for people to be able to develop competencies to talk about equity, and the need to expose the underlying issues without hiding them under general equity language. The broad cultural factors were at once prosaic, including basic vocabulary (changing how we talk about and to each other), and

profound, such as the difference between talking about inclusion on campus and talking about racism on campus. The relative cultural homogeneity (also described as a lack of diversity) in both NB and UNB was indicated as an additional challenge, and a source of both ignorance and complacency.

In addition to these general challenges, participants pointed to a number of specific issues that must be tackled at UNB. These include localized cultural issues, including a lack of baseline competencies around EDI, especially cultural competencies and skills at intercultural communication (which many suggested was a direct outcome of cultural homogeneity), and a campus culture of avoidance of conflict (often seemingly arising from a fear of making a mistake or causing offence). These are significant barriers to learning from doing. Many also pointed to a general lack of communication about EDI issues and collaboration with others working on EDI issues both within and outside of the university. This lack of communication leads to isolation and information gaps around current activities and aspirations. Finally, many pointed to the need for resources. This was expressed as a lack of resources for EDI work generally, a lack of support for teachers to build equity into curriculum and to implement that curriculum in a way that manages conflict that might arise from it, and the critical need to improve accessibility. Participants framed accessibility broadly, including both physical accessibility on the various campuses, and the need for access to and transparency in accommodation processes for faculty and staff.

CURRENT PROJECTS:

Despite the challenges facing us as we work to enhance EDI at UNB, participants reported on a wide range of exciting and innovative projects that are currently being planned or are underway at UNB. The discussions at the tables appeared to skim across the surface of this work, and it seemed likely that there were many more projects that remain unreported. Given the large number of projects underway, and natural next step will be to create an online inventory of UNB projects.

Overall, the projects discussed in the notes reflect an abundance of good will, imagination and commitment. They include:

- a taskforce, formed by the Graduate Student Union, to examine harassment issues and whistleblower protection
- a UNB policy, developed by the Registrar and academic administration, around options for students relating to provision of chosen name and gender identity.
- a course on land issues with an EDI lens, developed by FOREM
- a campus-wide initiative around gender neutral washrooms aimed at both creating an inventory and increasing their availability
- a collaborative program between UNB HR and the Fredericton Multicultural Association to provide settlement support
- a gendered pronouns campaign by the Student Union and the academic vice-president's office

These projects represent a selection of those reported and indicate both the breadth of EDI activities on campus, and the need for both coordination and support for this work.

IDEAS FOR FUTURE INITIATIVES

Perhaps the most exciting aspect of the conversations was the extent to which participants were looking ahead and hungry for change. There were many suggestions for activities, initiatives and projects we could undertake to make things better. These include changes to policies, opportunities to break down inherent barriers through training, programs and projects to tackle challenges one by one, and ways in which we can reinforce the infrastructural supports for EDI at UNB.

A number of participants pointed to the need for EDI to become a focus in all UNB's planning activities. This was reflected in calls for both new and renewed policies and agreements, and the need to link EDI planning to academic planning, strategic planning, and collective bargaining processes. There already exists a range of EDI policies, including an Employment Equity policy, a harassment policy, a Rights and Responsibilities Declaration, and policies on how to reflect EDI in job postings and job advertisements; there was a strong will to collaboratively review and improve these. Access to information on EDI could be made better by improvements to the policy repository.

Just as many saw deep, inherent cultural practices as a significant barrier, they also looked to problem-solve around this issue. Many addressed the need to consciously develop our competencies through changing language and behaviour. They advocated for training and education to exploit opportunities to inculcate EDI into incoming and current students, as well as faculty and staff. These opportunities included integrating EDI into curriculum, and developing specific training programs such as on unconscious bias (especially for hiring committees), on being a bystander/upstander, on positive spaces, and on anti-racism and anti-oppression actions and activities.

Participants suggested a wide range of specific programs and initiatives for change. These include:

- Mechanisms to better integrate EDI into workplace evaluation (both on appointment and through one's career, such as during performance evaluations and allocation of professional development opportunities)
- Annual events to showcase and celebrate EDI accomplishments
- More equity conversations – including theme-specific conversations and training
- A survey of equity-seeking students
- Development of mentoring programs for equity-seeking groups (students/faculty and staff)

- Expansion of international exchanges for university community members (students, as well as faculty and staff) as a mechanism to create cultural competencies and intercultural communication
- Development of student recruitment campaigns focused on EDI
- Mechanisms to enhance EDI in the classroom (supporting diverse learners) through existing structures such as CETL;
- Create a framework for a UNB-wide territorial acknowledgement (and other templates for EDI innovation e.g. pronoun statement/inclusivity statement etc. on syllabi)
- Establish vehicles that can explicitly be used for communication and collaboration around EDI, such as listservs and messages to academic advisors, as well as mechanism to communicate with existing governance structures (such as Faculty Councils)
- Produce a coordinated annual report of EDI activities and resource allocation as a way to demonstrate how training and EDI money is being spent, and enable better planning and coordination

While the issue of resources and supports for EDI were also seen as a challenge and barrier, many offered specific ways in which resources could be used to make a major difference in EDI at UNB. For example, participants advocated for:

- expansion to daycare resources
- development of designated prayer spaces
- addition of multi-faith holidays to UNB academic calendars
- allocation of resources for equity hires
- facilitation of communication around EDI gaps and accomplishments
- development of an employment equity survey
- growth of equity-focused supports for students of all kinds.

IN SUMMARY

Given the participation rates, the quality and quantity of insightful input, the passion and excitement of participants, the first Equity Conversation exercise was a tremendous success, and has given us a broad understanding of where we are, where we need to go, and how we might get there in improving equity, diversity and inclusion at UNB. A final key recommendation of participants was that we continue to have these conversations, and continue to seek ways to transform ideas into action, and our community into a place this is open, respectful, and equitable.

If you would like to have more information on the Equity Conversations, the Presidential Bi-campus Standing Committee on Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Human Rights or would like to add your feedback and ideas into the conversations please feel free to contact Sula Levesque or Peter McDougall (the committee co-chairs) or write, in confidence, humanrights@unb.ca.