

FHS Anti-Racism Task Force Meeting #2- Minutes

Location: Zoom

Date: October 21, 2020

Attendees: Seventeen committee members.

Time: 9– 10.15am

I- Introductions: Treena Orchard (Faculty); Anita Kothari (Faculty); Carla De Silva (Faculty); Andrew Johnson (Faculty); Tara Mantler (Faculty); Ivan Culum (Faculty); Marnie Wedlake (Faculty); Maxwell Smith (Faculty); Neciula de Paula Carneiro Porto G (Post-Doctoral Student); Denise Kamyuka (Graduate Student), Chizoba Oriuwa (Alumni); Elaine D’Agostino (Undergraduate Student); Chika Obeta (Undergraduate Student); Olubukola Sonibare (Graduate Student); Nicole Kaniki (Staff); Larissa Bartlett (Staff); and Wendy Latimer (Staff).

II- Ideas to think about: Carla offered a primer on Intellectual Empathy (drawing on the work of Maureen Linker), which is about making a specific effort to suspend individuality and look at a situation through another’s eyes in an attempt to know more fully. Recognizing that difficult topics such as this carry emotional labour and are littered with false opposites and that understanding intersectionality, and that the historical and social systems and invisible oppression exists. Max shared Barnor Hesse’s 8 White Identities as a way of framing how our taskforce could work to dismantle Racist Systems.

III- What is our focus?:

- Anti-Black racism

- Anti-Black & Indigenous experiences

- BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Colour)

- Anti-racist more broadly through an intersectional lens

 - Focus on multiple experiences without being reductionist or privileging one group

Each of these options received discussion and varying levels of support from within the group. The pros and cons of being really targeted or having a broader focus were discussed. Ultimately, the members appeared to agree that the experiences of our students, specifically our Black and Indigenous students, would be advisable to concentrate on, which is connected with the idea that addressing the most blatant forms of oppression can help elevate all forms of racism. There was widespread agreement about the utility of the concepts of intellectual empathy as well as the task of dismantling whiteness, which Max reviewed using the Hesse slides. Indeed, this option was discussed as way to ‘get around’ feelings like we need to focus on one or two groups while still being inclusive.

A recognition that the root cause of anti-Black and anti-Indigenous ways of being is white normativity and not labeling it as such means we miss the opportunity to link White Normativity to the violence and oppression that the system is perpetuating. Intersectionality is a no-brainer, as such, in terms of guiding principles, which we might want to think about harnessing within our methodological activities. Trauma-informed praxis was also raised as a critical tenet of our collective work.

IV- Terms of reference & Task Force mission:

Action item, see below.

V- Doing the work: Guiding questions, methodology, distribution of labour

Survey, interviews, written or audio submissions, Student-facing initiatives

NO SURVEY—we don't need another one, we know that racism is happening, and people are SICK of surveys, which don't always generate the most 'reliable' data. Gathering the experiences of people was discussed, but more in the form of talking groups, storytelling, and digital media platforms. Striking sub-committees was mentioned as the best way to take our work forward, which will be distributed with the minutes so that folks can sign up.

The issue of the over-representations of SHS on our Taskforce was raised, as was the non-attendance of our Dean and others in positions of significant power. We need to let them know that showing up, like the rest of us so, is vital to putting their money on the table, as it were. There is also an opportunity for us to consider our roles and the power and networks that we have and what concrete actions we can take to ensure that this cannot just be a report or demands without follow through. In what ways can this committee also disrupt in a way that shows our support and ensures change comes?

VI- Research Assistant: Draft job description to share with group & move forward with the hire

Treena can draft this and send around

VII- Wrap Up: Action items & next steps

1. Draft Minutes
2. Framework: aims, methodology, outcomes
3. **Five Action Items we can by sign up via email:**

- a) Explore President's Antiracism Working Group Recommendations with a Faculty Lens
- b) Explore the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions Call to Action with a Faculty Lens
- c) Create a Terms of Reference & Mission Statement Document
- d) Review FHS Curriculum to identify discriminatory policies and exclusionary content
- e) Envision ways of collecting stories and documenting racialized experiences- how can we create spaces that are safe, free of trolling, and trusted?

Following the meeting, Treena created a conceptual overview of the foundational ideas discussed related to our purpose, proposed methodologies, and anticipated outcomes. It was shared with five randomly selected Taskforce members for feedback, during which time it was edited in places and strengthened. The framework is featured on page three and we welcome your review of it. We hope it captures the spirit of our discussion and it will be of direct benefit as we move forward as a unified collective.

Dismantling Whiteness & Addressing Anti-Black & Anti-Indigenous Racism in The Faculty of Health Sciences

This taskforce is designed to address racism and systems of oppression in the Faculty of Health Sciences. We acknowledge that the institutional racism and marginalization on our campus impacts the social and educational experiences of students, faculty, and staff. Historical settler colonialism provided the foundations for academic institutions that centered whiteness and white normativity. Foundational to these were Slavery and the violent genocide of Indigenous people that created systems of oppression which are still evident today in police brutality toward Black people and violent attacks on Treaty lands.

In recognition of the hierarchies of oppression, we will use frameworks to dismantle whiteness that center anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism strategies and build intellectual empathy as a collective. This targeted focus helps ensure that we do not replicate the more generalized antiracism work being conducted at Western and is not meant to exclude or assign a lower value to the experiences of other communities. Given the interconnected nature of systemic and everyday oppression, the insights of additional communities will likely surface as our efforts unfold.

As a student-facing initiative we are well-positioned to contribute vital insights with which to impact structural change and everyday pedagogical practice that directly benefit our students at the undergraduate and graduate levels as well as for Faculty and Staff. The principles inherent to intersectionality and critical race and post-colonial theory inform the collective work we undertake as we respond to racism within the FHS in meaningful ways. These include acknowledging how multiple forms of oppression (i.e., race, gender, ability, age) intersect and overlap within people's lives to create barriers to various determinants of health, safety, and inclusion. We are committed to trauma-informed, action-oriented activities that cultivate safe, inclusive spaces within which students can share their voices and co-create opportunities for socio-political change.

To that end, we envision establishing intimate talking groups, digital storytelling, and other forms of narrative or arts-based dialogues as some of our key methodological activities. Taskforce members will also review the recommendations made by the President's ARWG and the Truth & Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action. Working with the Task Force's Research Assistant, we will also collate and review relevant scholarly literature on racism in Canadian universities, with an emphasis on the experiences of Black and Indigenous students. Creating an innovative, student-oriented social media campaign that can help mobilize our efforts is another initiative that we will undertake, ensuring that it is well-managed related to issues of security and trolling.

Designing appropriate evaluation tools to measure our success and impact will be determined as we unroll our taskforce activities. This will be critical in assessing the degree to which our work has adequately responded to and improved student experiences related to anti-racism in our Faculty, especially Black and Indigenous students. Other ways to make the structural changes that are needed to combat racism within our Faculty include conducting a curriculum review, making recommendations related to training materials and procedures for staff and faculty, and advocating for Black and Indigenous hires across all levels of the University.