

Equity Issues Committee (EIC) Recommendations

Following the August 2020 departmental meeting, the EIC was tasked with providing recommendations to the Department in response to the DSC and PSGSA anti-racism survey results (see Annex for an overview of the PSGSA results).

The EIC recommendations focus on teaching practices and curriculum revision, as well as the department's overall climate. The EIC views these recommendations as part of the department's ongoing trajectory of change, which has led to a more diverse learning environment both in terms of its composition and in terms of promoting different perspectives, as a pluralistic intellectual community.

In general, the EIC encourages further reflection and work by Faculty members themselves (individually and collectively) on race and racism, around the areas of pedagogy, curriculum and departmental culture. The EIC's recommendations should be considered in conjunction with this ongoing work being done by Faculty members. It is for the Department as a whole to develop a work plan that is both ambitious but realistic and the EIC views the faculty retreats (held on November 19, 2020 and on February 4, 2021) as representing important steps in this respect. More specific suggestions for the Department's consideration are included below:

The EIC recommends:

1. That course instructors consider crafting a statement for their syllabi that signals a commitment to anti-racism and EDII (Equity, Diversity, Inclusion & Indigeneity);
2. That the Department work with and support student-led initiatives to raise awareness with regards to anti-racism and EDII (for example: events, campaigns, surveys).
3. That the curriculum revision tool developed by the anti-racism advisor be updated annually to serve as a reference for course development or revisions, for integrating race and anti-racism as a consideration in curriculum development, ensuring meaningful BIPOC representation on syllabi and fostering an inclusive learning environment. This recognizes the work that has already been done by course instructors and TAs and the importance of academic freedom as a guiding principle of university research and teaching. The tool is wide-ranging, allowing instructors to reflect on questions that include everything from how to reflect on the discipline of Political Studies itself to the practical tasks of including more BIPOC voices. Please note that instructors are not required to use this tool, but rather are encouraged to use it to continue to reflect on our courses and teaching.
4. That the Department continue to offer more tailored equity training to TAs, TFs, instructors and Faculty members and staff, to help minimize bias in the teaching and learning process and assist in the development of anti-racist strategies in the classroom.

5. That the Department promote clearly the university structure for reporting instances of racism and discrimination, which protects the rights of students, and should enthusiastically support this structure to increase knowledge about and trust in reporting procedures and decrease apprehension about making such reports.
6. That the Department undertake a review of the student funding and work opportunities it offers in order to formalize a more transparent system for the allocation of contracts and fellowships.
7. That the Department assess its course offerings and BIPOC representation to identify gaps that are important to fill from an academic and EDII standpoint, which could then be addressed by the hiring of faculty and staff, the recruitment of students, and/or invitation of speakers to the department's speaker series.
8. As the Department pursues anti-racism strategies, it should also design a monitoring mechanism to measure progress annually.

ANNEX

The PSGSA anti-racism survey revealed that, overall, the department was seen as only moderately welcoming to BIPOC people and quite poor in terms of reflecting commitment to anti-racism and decolonisation. Racism in the department was seen to be a moderate issue which should be concerning. The fact that ANY instances of discrimination in the department were declared as having been witnessed or experienced should be an alarm for everyone to take on board the seriousness of the issues in the department in terms of requiring anti-racism work and making structural and meaningful changes to address these issues.

The PSGSA would like to highlight the following key concerns arising from the survey:

- The main take-away regarding the classroom experience is that the demand for content on issues of race and indigeneity from students is not being met in course design. Few courses focused on issues of race and indigeneity (more than half of respondents declared this was not the focus of ANY of their courses) and only some courses were seen to create opportunities to discuss these issues.
- There was a very mixed response in terms of students feeling like they would know where to go for support in reporting instances of racism, discrimination, and micro-aggression or if they were comfortable reporting such instances. Additionally, the precarious nature of Graduate Students affects their ability to make such reports confidently.
- The survey revealed questions of equity concerning access to professional development, work opportunities, and scholarship and funding opportunities. A key issue was raised regarding informal practices around hiring and funding decisions. Due to the informal processes in the department whereby Supervisors frequently open TA and RA opportunities for their supervisees, instances of discrimination were observed where BIPOC students are left out of these informal relationships. Additionally, without an understanding of these informal systems, BIPOC students would not necessarily be aware they could safely make such requests. This results in inequality in terms of stability in the program which can directly affect the ability to complete coursework, research, and thesis writing.
- Barriers emerging through a preferencing of traditional theories and methods over critical or anti-colonial approaches, were also raised. Students who wish to pursue research on issues of race, indigeneity, or decolonialism may find this affects their access to fieldwork funding, support for critical methods training, and more difficult proposal defences, and these future hurdles might incline students to revert to the more dominant approaches to ease their degree process or delay their progress in their degree if they if they choose to pursue more critical research.