EMILY
CARR
UNIVERSITY
of ART + DESIGN

Equity, Diversity +
Inclusion at ECU
Listening Sessions

Summary
March 2021

Introduction

In October and November of 2020, I hosted 12 online listening sessions.

These sessions were intended to provide opportunities for the Emily Carr community to give feedback on the EDI Action Plan, share their experiences with racism and other forms of discrimination, and talk about how we want to move forward as a community.

I am incredibly grateful to all those who took the time to attend these sessions, and for the courage, strength, vulnerability, wisdom and vision they brought.

These sessions are only one of the many ways we're engaging with EDI at Emily Carr, complementing the community-led conversations and initiatives that are taking place throughout the university. I'm deeply grateful to all the students, staff, faculty and alumni who are involved in this important work.

I took notes during each of the sessions, and then identified themes that emerged, which are summarized below.

Gillian Siddall

PRESIDENT + VICE-CHANCELLOR
EMILY CARR UNIVERSITY OF ART + DESIGN
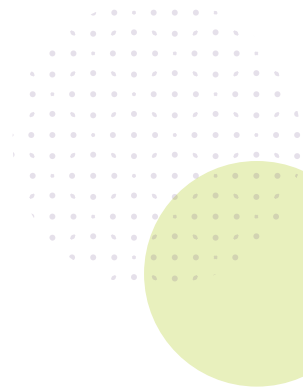
Community Themes

- The need for all members of our community to participate in education and healing.

- The need to develop an ethos of care.

- A desire to build community within the university.

- The power of vulnerability and the need for courage to have conversations.

- The need to focus on mentorship and relationship with each other in our community. The need to operate within a framework of love.

- The value of the many small conversations happening among university members now—but how do we come together as a larger group to mobilize the many ideas that are emerging?

- That we all need to participate in education and healing.

- Anti-racist work is about care. Deep listening. Setting ego aside.

- The importance of not shaming each other as we do this work together.

- How do we get immediate changes happening while also making space for longer-term goals?

- The need to consider, how can we be visionary in this work? Truly transformative?

- The need to consider what positive subversion looks like in terms of making change in the context of a colonial education system that is funded by and accountable to the province? How do we test the limits of transformation?

Racism + Discrimination Themes

- The need for additional ways to support BIPOC students.

- The challenge people face who situate themselves in identities that aren't always seen as BIPOC.

- The challenge people face who come from locations where they were not racialized, and having to deal with being racialized in Canada.

- Questions about how to educate or provide training for faculty and staff in an attempt to highlight the problem of micro-aggressions and outright racism.

Themes Regarding
Faculty + Staff Challenges

- The challenges facing non-regular faculty. Their anxiety about speaking about microaggressions and racism for fear of not being hired back.

- The extreme exhaustion being experienced by faculty right now, particularly BIPOC faculty who spend a great deal of time supporting BIPOC students and engaging in anti-racist and EDI work.

- The impact of the current teaching load on faculty's capacity for doing this work.

Ableism + Disability Themes

- Academic ableism in our curriculum is embedded in our curriculum delivery modes. Bodies with disabilities exist in fluctuating temporal spaces. There is a need to create equity in terms of people's experience of time.

- The need to develop curriculum that focuses on disability—including studying the work of artists and designers who identify as having a disability, and whose work addresses disability.

- Faculty feeling that there is less room for teaching feminist and queer theory in the curriculum than there used to be. Queer theory course no longer offered.

- What if university systems, including pedagogy and curriculum design and delivery, could be designed such that there was no need for an accessibility services office?

- Remember that some students are visual learners. The increase in communication via video during COVID has been very welcome for our visual learners.

- The need for more education for faculty on students with disabilities.

- Students' observation that ECU is not dealing well with students with disabilities.

- The question of how we are defining disability in our community.

- The need to hire more faculty and staff who identify as having a disability.

- The need for more communication with students who require accommodations about what accommodations are possible.

- The need for policy review with regard to disability.

Gender + Sexuality Themes

- The concern that some disciplines within the university are significantly gendered. Evidence of unconscious bias among faculty teaching in these disciplines.

- The need to have more opportunities for talking about LGBTQ2S+ in our university community.

- The concern about BIPOC, women and LGBTQ2S+ faculty getting poorer student evaluations because of bias and discrimination—and how, for non-regular faculty, this is a significant basis for decisions about re-hiring.

- The faculty belief that there needs to be more training for faculty, especially in relation to supporting trans students.

- Students feeling that faculty need more education around gender/queer/trans issues.

- The concern about faculty not respecting preferred pronouns.

- The need for more faculty and staff who identify as trans—particularly staff who interact with students.

- Questions about how to collect data regarding gender—a preference for making that an open blank section to be filled in rather than a series of boxes to tick.

Policy Work, Processes + Communications Themes

- The need for the university to deal with micro-aggressions. Our current policy framework does not provide a good mechanism for dealing with them.

- The need for better communication for students on how to access the various services available.

- The need for an ombudsperson to take EDI concerns to.

- The need for a clear-language explanation of how our university governance works.

- The need to create a repository of EDI research.

- That it's important to think about EDI as knowledge creation, and not always in terms of deficit.

- The idea of creating a research centre for EDI.

Health + Wellness Themes

- Students' observations that we need more counselling staff, and need to have some counselling drop-in sessions available.

- The particular challenges facing students who have not yet been diagnosed, especially with a mental health challenge—that they haven't yet built a support system and toolbox for getting support when they are experiencing symptoms. They need to be able to have immediate access to counselling services.

- Students' and faculty observations that university systems put students' bodies under pressure.

- Faculty very concerned about the mental health of students. That some students come from places where they were not racialized and now have to deal with being racialized in Canada.

- That BIPOC students are more likely to experience mental health challenges.

- Faculty focus on the exhaustion of students, and on exhaustion as a symptom of injustice.

- Need to be thoughtful about how we talk about wellness at the university—not fetishize a fitness culture.

- Consider a four-day work week.

- The need for all managers to show leadership in this area.

- The need to think about the Threat Assessment Team in relation to students in distress—students having a panic attack or psychotic episode need an approach that sounds less scary. Need to be cautious about calling police.

- Students talking about the importance of group agreements, and their observation that not all faculty are using them. Students use them as a way to talk about their queer identity, and also as a way to articulate agreement on indicating that potentially triggering content is forthcoming, either from the professor or other students in the class.

Reconciliation + Decolonization Themes

- The need to do a colonial audit of all areas of the university.

- The importance of our relationship with the land. The need to care and to give back.

- The need to really understand what it means to be located on Coast Salish lands. What are our responsibilities to that land and to the land claims against it?

- The challenge of working within a western colonial model, where measurement/metrics are paramount.

- Inviting the three host nations to walk through the campus with Connie Watts, Associate Director of Aboriginal Programs.

Discussion Regarding EDI Leadership at ECU
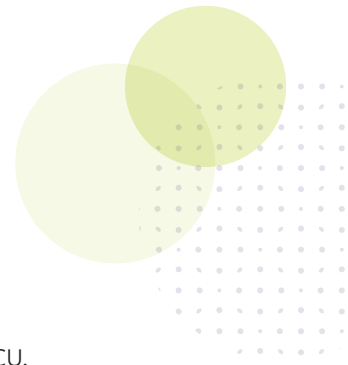
One question I have asked each group is for feedback on the idea of creating a senior EDI position at ECU.

I preface the question with reference to *The Equity Myth*, a book I am currently reading and discussing with my senior team. It focuses on the experience of Indigenous and racialized faculty in Canadian universities, and looks at the failure of many EDI offices to make real progress in terms of increased representation of BIPOC faculty (they provide data that indicate that representation has actually decreased over the past ten years or so) and in terms of systemic racism in Canadian universities. However, I also think that if the position is conceived of appropriately and has the necessary support and resources, such a role could significantly enhance the university's work in advancing EDI and anti-racist initiatives.

Below is the feedback received during the listening sessions, regarding the possibilities for this position at our university.

— *Gillian Siddall*

Summary of Feedback on the Creation of an EDI Lead Position

- Overall, quite a lot of support, with caution about how we define and position it.
- Some concern expressed about bringing someone in from outside when we already have expertise within our community and when people are already doing this work within the community.
- Some BIPOC faculty and staff expressed a desire to have someone lead out on doing that work to ease their burden of contributing to it.
- Some expressed a desire to have this role be at a grassroots level, not at a senior level.
- Some have suggested it should be located in Research—noted that NSCAD created a research centre. Others suggested it should be located in Academic Affairs.
- Awareness of disability is essential. Also consider that hiring someone with a disability into this role might mean making it a part-time or reduced hours role.
- Needs to have decision-making capability—that would need to be understood and supported by the Board of Governors.
- Consider Native Friendship Centres as a potential model.
- Consider an EDI fellowship—thereby using expertise that already exists in our community.

Appendix: Summary of Sessions + Participants

October 16 at 10 am
ALL STUDENTS, STAFF AND FACULTY

October 16 at 2 pm
ALL STUDENTS, STAFF AND FACULTY

October 23 at 10 am
STUDENTS

October 23 at 2 pm
FACULTY + STAFF (NON-MANAGERS)

October 30 at 10 am
BIPOC STUDENTS

October 30 at 2 pm
BIPOC STAFF + FACULTY

November 2 at 2 pm
LGBTQ2S+ STUDENTS

November 3 at 2 pm
LGBTQ2S+ STAFF AND FACULTY

November 13 at 10 am
STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

November 13 at 2 pm
STAFF AND FACULTY WITH DISABILITIES

November 16 at 2 pm
FACULTY

November 27 at 10 am
ALUMNI

50 individuals in total attended the 12 sessions; eight of those individuals were members of President's Executive Committee. Several people attended more than one session, with a total registration of 69.