

**Report to the Principal, Innis College,  
University of Toronto from the Working  
Group on the Black Student Experience**



**September, 2020.**

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## **Introduction:**

This inquiry focuses on the lived experience of Black Students at Innis College, University of Toronto. Our discussion was initiated by Innis Principal Charlie Keil, who reached out to a number of students, alumni, and faculty to gain their participation in this Working Group on the Black Student Experience (WG).

Announcement of the formation of this Working Group was included in Principal Keil's Statement of Solidarity with Black and Indigenous peoples (June 12, 2020).

(See Appendix and this link: <https://innis.utoronto.ca/statement-in-solidarity-with-black-and-indigenous-peoples/>)

## **Working Group Participants**

Makanaka Goredema, student

Muplangan Hirse, student

Aluong Jongkuch, student

Nana Koomson, student

Kassia Neckles, student

Michelle Nurse, student and Residence Don

Lauren Cramer, Faculty Member, Cinema Studies Institute

Zakerie Farah, Alumnus

Jaren Kerr, WG Co-chair and Alumnus

Ceta Ramkhalawansingh, WG Co-Chair and Principal's Appointee  
to Innis College Council

## **First Working Group meeting**

During the first meeting in early August 2020, members of the WG shared information about their relationship to the College and experiences. The WG also identified data needs.

The WG noted that Innis had a welcoming environment and their experience was very positive. The following are some observations:

- The size of the college made it possible to have a sense of belonging.
- The affordability of the residence is a factor and its apartment style meant that students could prepare their own meals, especially if traditional foods are not available on campus or in nearby restaurants.
- There were few Black students at the College, and any course content that would be of interest to Black students within College Programs was not publicised sufficiently.
- When race issues came up in class, the discussion ranged from being superficial to the expectation that Black students would address the content.
- Students also wanted to see more Black content in courses, more opportunities for networking and connecting with other Black students, and promotion of events that would be of interest to Black students. Since Innis has a specialisation in Cinema Studies, it would be important to show leadership by including lectures on Black Canadians and/or Black people world wide and their contributions to cinema.
- The Registrar's office was very helpful regarding information about funding. Students were not aware of mentoring programs early enough to participate.
- There was little recognition of Black History Month.

The WG requested data on the representation of Black students at the College and the University, mentoring and funding programs (awards and scholarships) aimed at Black students, as well as equity policies and procedures for addressing concerns.

## Second Working Group meeting

The themes discussed during the first meeting were elaborated.

- As a commuter school, UofT students can feel isolated.
- The commuter population is racialized.
- Commuter students need targeted programs, as their needs are different from those who live in residence.
- Within the classroom, the low representation of Black students can lead to experiences of tokenism, and being expected to be de facto representatives of all Black students.
- Lack of representation among faculty has to be addressed.
- Faculty members can be dismissive by not pronouncing names correctly and showing discomfort in talking about race. It is a sign of respect and an appreciation of student's individuality.
- Any course content on race is not prioritised, and often takes place at the end of a session when everyone is less engaged.
- Black students in Cinema Studies courses observed that others in their class took an "escapist" approach instead of considering race and other political issues in these films.
- Low numbers of Black alumni makes it difficult to obtain feedback on the world of work after graduation.
- The ICSS election needs to be opened-up to provide more opportunities for Black students who might be interested.
- It is difficult to find out about events and programs that would be of interest to Black students, as these activities are not well advertised.
- Students were not aware that there was an Anti-Racism office on campus.
- Students questioned whether evaluations of professors' behaviour had an impact.
- Students were not sure about how to register complaints or concerns about professors and if there are any consequences for reporting inappropriate treatment of students.
- Anti-oppression training should be made available to faculty.
- Frosh programs and participation do not include sufficient Black representation.

- A buddy system between first-year and upper-year students would help with integration.
- Data compiled by the University needs to be granular.
- Data should track post-graduation performance and experiences of Black alumni.
- Because of the low representation of Black students at the College, linkages should be set up with campus-wide Black organizations.
- Can financial support be offered to Black organizations to support their work with Black students?
- Addressing barriers should be the institution's responsibility and not that of the students.

Feedback from a student who was not a member of the WG reinforced the above experiences:

*the student observed and experienced "gas lighting" of race during classes; pressure to perform, especially being the only POC in a class; being dismissed by faculty, and treated like a token and representative of Black students rather than as a person in their own right; violation of personal space (e.g. touching hair); course content ostensibly defining what is Canadian that did not include the Black experience.*

The information provided by university officials was reviewed. The WG noted the following:

1. UofT is organizing and hosting a National Dialogue for Action on Inclusive Higher Education. It is being led by Professor Wisdom Tettey, VP and Principal of Scarborough and Karima Hashmani, Executive Director, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Office. Topics to be addressed include: access and success for Black students, staff, and faculty; inclusive teaching, learning, and curricula; representation within decision-making structures; enabling community and belonging; responsibilities and obligations of non-Black peers as partners; and how best to collect and use race-based data.
2. The current data comes from the National Survey on Student Engagement and noted that the data includes only a snapshot of 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year students. Retention is not tracked. <https://data.utoronto.ca/performance-indicators/education-pathways/diversity/>

3. In the fall 2021, race-based data will be collected along with other demographic indicators such as disability, Indigeneity, and gender-identity, for all of our students.

Details of the content, who has access to the content, and what it can be used for are still being ironed out. Other details are more set. The census-type questionnaire will be **voluntary** and open to all students to maintain. Students will be able to make changes whenever they want. Students will be informed of the questionnaire through an email, and there will also be a notification or an alert on the dashboard of ACORN.

ACORN is the student-facing side of the student information system. It is where students enrol in courses, check fees and finances, order transcripts and do other records and registration tasks. Students rely on it in the summer to sign up for courses and they use it at the beginning of the school year to find out where their courses are located, and to add, drop, and switch courses, and to check on fees for courses.

The administrative side of the student information system is called ROSI. For the first year, the census will be created outside of ROSI but it will be linked to ACORN seamlessly and the information will be uploaded to ROSI in a second stage. Then, in the near future, the University will build the survey directly into ROSI, perhaps as soon as next year.

4. With respect to available scholarships and funding, the Award Explorer Tool provides information on what scholarships/awards are available <https://awardexplorer.utoronto.ca/>. The tool can be used to search by a number of criteria.
5. The Anti-Racism and Cultural Diversity Office (ARCDO) administers the complaints process arising from [Statement on Prohibited Discrimination and Discriminatory Harassment](#) for the whole University.

For students, the section on vexatious conduct in Section B.1(e) “Offences Against Persons” of the [Code of Student Conduct](#) states:

*(e) No person shall engage in a course of vexatious conduct that is directed at one or more specific individuals, and that is based on the race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, marital status, family status, or disability, and that is known to be unwelcome, and that exceeds the bounds of freedom of expression or academic freedom as these are understood in University policies and accepted practices, including but not restricted to, those explicitly adopted.*

6. The College Library has focussed on increasing representation of Black creators and Black-experience along with scholarly works examining racism in cinema and writing in the library's print collection (60 titles added in the past year) and is now working to enhance the Library's online research guides. Initiatives at other libraries are being examined to identify further opportunities to better connect Black students at the College with academic programs and offer support.
7. Within the Residence and Student Life portfolios, there are no programs and/or initiatives that specifically target Black students. The experiences of these students and other marginalized students is always top of mind. An equity lens has been applied to all programs, in an attempt to ensure that the varied needs and experiences of the College's diverse student population drives the work of Student Life. This manifests in a variety of ways including the type of training and education provided to students, student leaders, and staff, how support is provided to students experiencing a wide array of personal and academic difficulties, as well as the choice of speakers and resources utilized by programs and events, and in advocacy for students with other University departments.
8. The WG also considered the statement by Black Students at New College and the experiences at Trinity College.

### **Third Working Group Meeting**

Invited participants to this meeting included College officials (Principal, Registrar, Dean of Students, Chief Administrative Officer) and the head of the Innis College Student Society (ICSS).

An overview of student experiences discussed at the prior meetings of the WG was shared.

Regarding the establishment of scholarships, it was noted that these are guided by the wishes of the donors. In the past year, Innis had access to \$180K of bursary assistance for students who are on OSAP (Ontario Student Assistance Program) and/or UTAPS (University of Toronto Advance Planning for Students). An additional \$30K was provided to Innis College by the Faculty of Arts and Science to address the particularly high level of need this past year.

Other observations were:

- The Black Students Association (BSA) could be helpful in connecting Black students with one another, particularly in Colleges with low representation.

- ICSS had attempted an Innis affiliation of the BSA, but there was low take-up.
- ICSS could look at its constitution to see what can be done to provide diversity in its membership.
- Woodsworth has a Black student club and perhaps a collaboration could be explored.
- Students would like a buddy system for attending events as they are uncomfortable going to events alone.
- First-year students should be identified and matched with mentors from higher years.
- Perhaps a new award based on need and community participation could be established.
- The College should promote the completion of the new survey of students.
- Can the College provide financial support to Black groups such as the BSA to facilitate networking, etc. by Black Students?

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

The Working Group offers the following recommendations.

### **STUDENT SUPPORT:**

1. That the bursary and scholarship programs be expanded to ensure that BIPOC (Black Indigenous People of Colour) students receive the support required to continue their studies.
2. That the University, Faculty of Arts and Science, and Colleges seek out opportunities to create scholarships for BIPOC students.
3. That in addition to citizens, permanent residents, and convention refugees, support should also be provided to international students with need.
4. That Innis College be pro-active in making students aware of financial aid and mental health support.



## **COMMUNICATIONS AND PROMOTIONS:**

5. That the University, Faculty, and Colleges communicate their acknowledgement of the barriers faced by BIPOC students.
6. That the University, Faculty, and Colleges implement awareness programs and learning journeys regarding the Black student experience and give attention to days that are significant to the Black community, such as Black History Month.
7. That the newsletters/bulletins consider including BIPOC students/alumni who are making a contribution.

## **DATA:**

8. That the University, Faculty, and Colleges vigorously promote the equity survey of students.
9. That the University compile detailed data on the experience of Black students.
10. That the University follow-up with BIPOC alumni to gain knowledge of their experiences in the workplace.
11. That the University track the participation of BIPOC students in awards and scholarship programs.
12. That the University compile detailed data on graduation rates for Black students, and the number of years it takes to graduate.

## **NETWORKING AND MENTORING:**

13. That the University establish campus-wide networks to enable Black students to connect with one another.

14. That the Faculty of Arts and Science establish networks to enable Black students to connect with one another.
15. That Innis College establish linkages with other Colleges to facilitate a critical mass of Black students to network with one another.
16. That Innis College establish connections with Black clubs on campus to engage with the College's Black population.
17. That during orientation, efforts be made to provide mentoring and a buddy system for new BIPOC students.
18. That the University, Faculty, and Colleges acknowledge that the "commuter" student population is racialized and that targeted programs be implemented to facilitate a sense of belonging and inclusion.
19. That the University, Faculty, and Colleges reach out to Black alumni:  
to create mentoring opportunities; and  
to obtain information about their experiences after graduation.
20. That support be provided to the Black Students Association to strengthen their connection with Black students.

## **CLASSROOM CONTENT**

21. That the University and the Faculty of Arts of Science undertake a review of curriculum to assess the inclusion of material that reflects the Black experience and contributions.

## **ANTI-OPPRESSION TRAINING**

22. That the University and the Faculty of Arts and Science provide anti-racist/oppression to all faculty and student groups to ensure that they are aware of expectations regarding their conduct towards BIPOC students.
23. That the University's policies and procedures regarding complaints be widely communicated.

**24.**That in addition to the course evaluation program, the process include reporting instances of racism involving faculty, teaching assistants, and students be implemented, and that follow-up take place with students who report racist behaviour and incidents.

**Consultations, inquiries and outreach:**

Charlie Keil, Principal

Donald Boere, Registrar

Steven Masse, Dean of Students

Joyce Hahn, Chief Administrative Officer

Breanna Lima Martinez, Innis College Student Society

Kelly Hannah-Moffat, Vice-President, Human Resources and Equity

Sandy Welsh, Vice-Provost, Students and First-Entry Divisions

Jessie Metcalfe, Assistant Director, Office of Vice-Provost, Students

Black Students Association

Student Awards Office

Francisca Wiafe-Amoako, student

Bahati Damien, student

Oreoluwa Adara, student

Adams Aghimien, student

Kofi Hope, Alumnus

**Acknowledgements:**

The WG expresses its appreciation to Maitri Vosko and Lauren Cramer for assistance with scheduling our meetings. We also wish to thank all the officials who responded to our search for information.

## **Appendix One:**

<https://innis.utoronto.ca/statement-in-solidarity-with-black-and-indigenous-peoples/>

# **Statement by Principal Charlie Keil in Solidarity with Innis College's Black and Indigenous Community Members**

*June 12, 2020*

How can we ensure that Innis College's commitment to a supportive learning community applies meaningfully to the Black and Indigenous students at our College?

George Floyd, D'Andre Campbell, Regis Korchinski-Paquet, Chief Allan Adam—these are only the most recent reminders of the continued, and often lethal, violence that people of colour experience on a daily basis. We recognize that Black and Indigenous students face substantial barriers and live with fears that are intolerable and unacceptable.

Our job is to listen and to educate ourselves before acting. How we move forward is as important as the decisions that we reach.

For that reason, the last week has been spent in communication with Black alumni to hear their perspectives and for guidance on the concrete steps we can take in the near future. We want Innis to be a place where Black and Indigenous students, staff, and faculty are equal contributors to a community that offers space for belonging.

We should all be fuelled by the fervor and wisdom of our student leaders, who have issued their own compelling statements. Still, as Esi Edugyan reminds us, "idealism is not only for the young. Nor should it be left only to those who bear the greatest brunt of systemic inequities. Everyone must do the work."

At Innis, we will do that work. To that end, we are forming a working group dedicated to examining the experiences of Black and Indigenous students at the College. This group, led by people of colour who understand the issues, will provide a set of proposals that the College will then implement. We will issue regular updates on our collective progress. This will be our first step on a path to learn more and do better.

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For students looking for resources at the University, please consult the following:

- <https://antiracism.utoronto.ca/>
- <https://studentlife.utoronto.ca/service/myssp/>
- <https://studentlife.utoronto.ca/department/health-wellness/>

For faculty and staff, the following links may be helpful:

- <https://antiracism.utoronto.ca/request-a-training-workshop/>
- <https://antiracism.utoronto.ca/connections-and-conversations/>
- <http://equity.hrandequity.utoronto.ca/>

For Esi Edugyan's full statement, please see:

- <https://www.macleans.ca/opinion/the-weight-of-change-should-not-rest-on-the-shoulders-of-black-people/>

For an op-ed by alumnus and Urban Studies instructor Kofi Hope, please see:

- <https://www.thestar.com/opinion/contributors/2020/06/04/ive-worked-for-years-on-anti-racism-training-heres-what-ive-learned-about-how-canadians-can-take-the-next-steps.html>

## APPENDIX 2

### Communication by New College Students

Dear Office of Residence and Student Life,

Given the recent events regarding the death of George Floyd, Regis Korchinski-Paquet, and several other Black lives taken at the hands of the police worldwide, several of us Black students at New College feel as though the college can play a bigger role in promoting anti-racism and fostering an equitable environment. Over the last few weeks, there has been increased awareness of the structural racism that plagues the lives of Black people here in Canada. Many are being inspired to find the part they can play in the pursuit of a more equitable world, and we wish for New College to do the same.

We, students of New College, are emailing you with suggestions we believe would show that you stand in solidarity with your Black students beyond just empty statements and platitudes.

Our suggestions are as follows:

- Pledging any unutilized funds from residents' events to the Black Lives Matter organization. As a result of COVID19, many college-wide events had to either be cancelled or postponed. We suggest that the funds from these events be donated to Black Lives Matter organizations such as Black Visions Collective, and Campaign Zero.
- Posting an image on the 'lifeatnew' Instagram page, for a limited time, that could either be liked or shared and donations per dollar could be made based on every like/share or 2 likes/shares.
- Strongly encourage using the 'lifeatnew' Instagram, as well as the and New College newsletter to guide students towards toolkits, petitions, and educational resources regarding anti-Black racism, police brutality, and carceral violence.
- Organize Zoom talks and discussions held by the College's faculty and student leaders that students can attend that would help shed light on microaggressions, implicit bias, and the personal experiences of Black students at New College.
- Increase mental health resources and initiatives available to Black students at New College in the wake of internet-viral traumatic violence, and bringing in Black identifying professionals in this field that students can identify with and can holistically understand the life experiences of Black students.
- The inclusion of black cuisine in the Audrey Taylor Dining hall from across the entire black diaspora namely; the Caribbeans, East and West Africa, Afro-American and Afro-Canadian.
- Mandatory anti-racism meetings at New College to help prevent the occurrence of racist remarks and behaviour that has previously been experienced by Black students and in the past, and to identify and discuss implicit bias.
- Increased funding to Black student-lead organizations on campus such as BSA, ASA, SSA, SOSA and NSA, as well as encouraging other student groups to implement equity officers and undergo anti-racism training.

We believe the college must live up to the pillars of inclusivity, acceptance and diversity that it stands on the very standards that have made the college the right fit for us as students at the University of Toronto. As one of the most diverse colleges on campus, we feel as though the college must exercise its role in both showing support for its Black students and subsequently set an example for other colleges to follow.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Oyugi  
Furqan Mohamed

With the support of:  
Vanessa Williams  
Elvire Agossou  
Mackenzie Stephenson  
Hiyabel Samuel  
Samia Asir  
Liyu Moges

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Truong Thien Nguyen  
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