

Monday, March 22, 2021

Subject: Honours Bachelor of Musical Theatre Program Reform

Sheridan continues to take decisive and deliberate steps to develop a more equitable and inclusive space within the musical theatre program, throughout FAAD and across our institution.

As we have [publicly shared](#), “Sheridan recognizes that recent events are products of systemic structural and institutional failures – including our own” and we will “continue to challenge ourselves to consider how our actions may have negatively impacted learners and colleagues from diverse backgrounds” which includes the need to create spaces where “faculty, staff and students can disclose, report and seek support without fear of reprisal.”

Sheridan recognizes that for too long, we failed to meet your expectations and responded inadequately. We sincerely apologize for any and all harm experienced by our learners. It is our great regret that we cannot change the actions of the past.

Further to the deeply troubling experiences of anti-Black racism and other forms of discrimination that were shared in June 2020 and to the results of the FAAD equity assessment, which was released at the end of January 2021, we have taken the following steps which correspond to concerns that were brought to our attention by students and alumni last week. Individually and collectively, these steps speak to our journey to meaningful and lasting change.

Employment

While Sheridan is not at liberty to disclose the confidential and private details of individual employee files, concerns or allegations that are raised about specific employees are taken seriously and are investigated thoroughly in accordance with established policies and the principles of due process and procedural fairness.

In accordance with due process, the Employment Standards Act, 2000, S.O. 2000, c.41, and the terms and conditions of the OPSEU collective agreements, Sheridan has placed a number of employees on administrative leave and launched formal investigations into allegations of violations of Sheridan’s Discrimination and Harassment Policy and Sexual Violence Policy. These actions demonstrate our commitment to take student concerns seriously.

Within the Honours Bachelor of Music Theatre Performance program, eighteen new part-time/partial load faculty members were recruited across the Acting, Dance, Music Theatre, and Vocal Music disciplines; we have a total of twenty BIPOC faculty members in the program this year. The recruitment process for two full-time faculty positions (Acting, Vocal) as part of a special program for qualified candidates who self-identify as members of the Indigenous and Black communities has been completed, with one faculty member having started in January and

the second to commence the full-time position this coming September. Efforts will be made to provide equity-deserving part-time faculty members with greater roles within their programs, in terms of committees, projects, or other opportunities, in order to ensure a greater diversity of voices within FAAD programs. A strategy will be created to address any views being expressed in opposition to equity hires.

An institution-wide employment systems review is underway to embed diversity and inclusion into recruiting and hiring practices. Research is underway to improve BIPOC sourcing strategies via LinkedIn, partnerships with diversity specific organizations and with subscriptions to diverse job boards.

The recruitment for a permanent Associate Dean within the Visual & Performing Arts cluster is in process and being undertaken with a clear eye toward the successful candidate having facility with inclusivity practices and the implementation of EDI strategies. The Faculty is also in the process of recruiting a permanent Dean; experience with EDI work will be a critical attribute of the successful candidate.

Transparency

Sheridan has openly discussed its efforts on equity, diversity and inclusion on its institutional social media accounts and has archived community-wide letters and the results of its employee self-identification census on its [Inclusive Communities](#) webpage. Our commitments to address and prevent racism, racial inequality and injustice, made last June are posted in our [newsroom](#). Our progress reports are shared quarterly with our Board of Governors and published on the [Inclusive Communities](#) site. We have shared four updates on our progress during this academic year with all students in the Honours Bachelor of Music Theatre Performance program (also archived on our “Expanding the Lens” virtual community on SLATE) and one with alumni in February 2021 and we will continue to communicate our progress. We remain undaunted in the face of a vitriolic video criticizing Sheridan’s EDI efforts that has been created by a political and social commentary media website. Similarly, the complaints that we have received from across Canada criticizing our reform efforts have failed to derail us.

Coordination of Efforts and Ease of Reporting

Sheridan rigorously observes and adheres to documented processes that afford every community member due process. The Centre for Equity and Inclusion is Sheridan’s centralized entryway for reporting and addressing discrimination and harassment concerns and complaints. Sheridan has a strong and clear Discrimination and Harassment Policy (last revised January 23, 2020) Sexual Violence Policy (last revised January 1, 2020) and an Accessibility Policy (updated December 15, 2016), which exist under the purview of the Centre for Equity and Inclusion. The Discrimination and Harassment Policy and Procedures:

- create role clarification amongst various Sheridan departments/offices when it comes to jurisdiction and complaint-handling

- emphasize that creating and maintaining a working and learning environment that is free from discrimination and harassment is a shared responsibility, and underscore the duty of managers, supervisors and instructors to act when they know, or ought reasonably to know, that discrimination or harassment has occurred
- outline CEI's undertaking to provide confidentiality to the people who access its services, but clarify the limits of this undertaking (e.g. where the individual may pose a safety risk to themselves or others, where the sharing of information is reasonably necessary to investigate the complaint, etc.)
- describe three approaches to dispute resolution (personal resolution, facilitated resolution and formal resolution) and emphasize alternatives to a formal investigation

The FAAD equity assessment – which was led by an expert, external panel – resulted in a number of recommendations which the Faculty will implement in stages, such that all recommendations will be actioned no later than April 2022. FAAD authorized a Taskforce to undertake this work on March 3, 2020. The actions that relate to coordination of efforts and ease of reporting include:

- proactive processes for identifying equity-related issues within programs, such as periodic/scheduled wellness checks with faculty, staff, and student leaders
- public assurances to students and employees that they have the right to raise concerns or make formal complaints without fear of retaliation or reprisals and education about the mechanisms in place to protect them should they not feel safe
- addition of equity-based questions on faculty evaluations and student surveys to proactively track students' experiences of equity within classrooms, labs and studios
- consistent and ongoing training to employees and students on Sheridan's policies and resources pertaining to discrimination, harassment, sexual misconduct, racism, microaggressions, religious/creed freedoms, disability, and the duty to accommodate, as well as to Sheridan's obligations under the Ontario Human Rights Code and other applicable legislation.

Dedicated Resource

Stacey Alderwick, an Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Officer within Sheridan's Office of Inclusive Communities was assigned to work with 4th year students in the Honours Bachelor of Music Theatre Performance program and visiting creatives in February 2021 to advance our shared responsibility to foster connection, respect, and equal opportunities to engage, thrive and belong. As part of this seven-week initiative, she has held facilitated 40-minute sessions with three groups of learners to date. Her core duties include:

- **Establishing productive conversations:** Working within a dialogue framework that roots communication in respect for human dignity will allow divergent experiences to be respectfully shared while fostering curiosity and the genuine intent to learn among all.

- **Real-time referral to resources:** Serving as a conduit to additional resources beyond our [Expanding the Lens](#) virtual community on SLATE, such as counselling, will ensure that learners have an immediate mechanism to process emotions, heal and feel supported.

Going forward, as a result of our equity assessment we will empower students to deal with interpersonal conflict by improving student training/resources related to conflict management and problem-solving, and by ensuring that students are familiar with Sheridan's Student Code of Conduct and with EDI principles.

Faculty-wide Charter of Values

As an outcome of the FAAD equity assessment, we will enact the recommendation to create a Charter of Values by the end of April 2021. We will set out in one document the commitment of all FAAD programs to ensuring: a safe and welcoming work and learning environment for everyone in FAAD; that all FAAD programs abide by their legal obligations under the Ontario Human Rights Code and other applicable legislation; and, zero tolerance for discrimination, harassment and sexual misconduct on the part of FAAD employees or students. We will align these values with Sheridan's institutional commitment to EDI principles as set out in Sheridan 2024 and we will post the Charter of Values visibly throughout all FAAD programs' work and learning spaces, and online.

Addressing Trauma, Exclusion and Inequity

The Taskforce will also ensure that the following recommendations from the expert-led FAAD equity assessment related to addressing trauma, exclusion and inequity will be completed no later than April 2022 with components being implemented in stages. We will:

- develop a resource on Trigger/Content/Care warnings that provides guidance on how to respectfully engage with trauma and identity in art and design, and that reflects a commitment to exercising compassion for students' experiences of trauma, especially as they relate to the operation of racism, gender-violence and other inequities.
- develop consistent parental/childcare policies and practices and implement childcare policy statements (including breastfeeding/chestfeeding statements) which are mindful of the impact of childcare responsibilities.
- institute clear measures to address transphobic behaviour, including misgendering and deadnaming. While there are a number of positive measures in place to promote inclusivity with respect to gender and sexuality, there should also be consistent enforcement of these measures and guidance to students, faculty and staff facing gender-based barriers.
- develop and communicate guidelines regarding obligations and duties of students who require disability-related accommodation, consistent with the policies and practices of

Accessible Learning Services (ALS). This material should make clear that students are not required to disclose their personal medical information to anyone outside of ALS and that they may request accommodation for mental health disabilities pending receipt of documentation.

- institute consistent guidelines and develop accessible and uniform language across student handbooks/admissions criteria to ensure that students from low socio-economic backgrounds are not unfairly disadvantaged by admission or project requirements.
- implement greater support and protection of non-majoritarian religious and creed-based expressions within FAAD, while ensuring continued protection of the competing rights of other equity-deserving groups.
- provide greater supports to assist international students directly, and to assist faculty in supporting cultural diversity within the classroom among students for whom English is a second language.

Alumni Network and Mentoring

Sheridan has a virtual network whereby alumni, faculty, students and staff can connect with each other for mentorship. While participation is voluntary, meaning we cannot automatically register our current and past learners, we warmly invite all signatories to the March 16 letter to visit [Sheridan Connect](#) and get involved. This platform was created to foster connections that advance both professional and personal development and may be used for racialized learners to connect with one another.

Sheridan is also in the midst of forming Employee Resource Groups to enable individuals with shared characteristics or common interests to support one another. Pilot groups will launch in fall, 2021.

Mandatory training

Our online mandatory training course, *Foundations of Equitable Practice* (Human Rights 101, Unconscious Bias, and Anti-Oppression & Anti-Racism) was implemented during the fall of 2020. The training is mandatory for full and part time faculty and staff and senior management. In January 2021, Sheridan's Board of Governors began its formal anti-bias training with an external facilitator.

Cultural Awareness

We have launched an "Expanding the Lens" training and awareness series which has hosted the following sessions:

- **Anti-Racist Theatre Workshop** by Nicole Brewer on October 27, 2020
- **Contemporary Indian Dance Workshop** by Krystal Kiran on November 17, 2020
- **Hip Hop class for all HBMTTP students** by Valerie “Ms. Vee” Ho on December 1, 2020
- **Q&A about Anti-Racist Work** by Kimberley Rampersad (Shaw) and Keith Barker (Native Earth Performing Arts) on December 1, 2020
- **Cultural Responsiveness Training** (three-part series) by Lisa Karen Cox (creator, director, mentor, performer, producer) to provide faculty with space for reflection on current teaching practices and methodologies in relation to white supremacy, oppression and bias held on December 4 & 8, 2020; January 13 & 14, 2021 and March 3 & 4, 2021.

Going forward, Associate Deans will be expected to dedicate at least one meeting per academic term to discussing equity-related concerns and sharing equity-related initiatives. In addition, training on conflict resolution will be provided to senior administrators, program managers, and other individuals with significant responsibility in the workplace and for advising or supervising students.

Curriculum

Significant changes have been made to the curriculum in all disciplines, including:

- the first-year history course that has been completely re-written to reflect a global perspective
- the Music Theatre Performance Repertoire selection process is now done by the students, and is open to all performers, regardless of the sex of the character who originally performed the material
- the Styles Repertoire now reflects the current demands of the music theatre industry, and each semester will include a minimum of one guest artist for a module in expanding styles (i.e. hip hop, contemporary/lyrical, world dance);
- the Historically Informed Performance Practice courses have now been reorganized to move away from the traditional focus on historical periods to include readings/texts that reflect gender parity in authorship, with greater than 40% of readings now from BIPOC authors.

As another outcome of the FAAD equity assessment, we will develop a plan for a faculty-wide curriculum audit framework that will be incorporated into the regular program review cycle for each program in the Faculty. Our work will include measurable steps and timelines for reviewing all program curricula with an inclusion lens, for re-thinking canonical staples, and for diversifying curriculum materials to include a range of perspectives. The Music Theatre Performance program review process began this January and will run throughout 2021 and 2022.

Entrance Auditions

In response to feedback from students and applicants, and in light of pandemic conditions, we have made several changes to entry auditions this year. Entry auditions will be in one stage, without callbacks, as had been the previous practice. Changes have been made to the dance requirement, and only one performed song – from any era of musical theatre – is now required as part of this process. In addition, a “personal choice” submission has been added to help applicants showcase their unique interests and abilities that may not be reflected in the other audition requirements. Video auditions will be reviewed by a multi-disciplinary team.

Student Support

Associate Dean Mary Jane Carroll began holding regular “Coffee and Conversation with the AD” sessions. This is an informal way for students to share their ideas, experiences, and feedback.

Across Sheridan in the fall 2020 term, 513 students benefitted for the first time from a new bursary for Black students. For Fall 2020, out of a total of 3,646 applicants, 694 students identified as Black as part of their bursary application, and 513 of the 694 applicants qualified and received a bursary. One hundred and fifty (150) students in most need received \$1,500 each, 67 students received \$1,000 each, and the remaining 296 students received a bursary in the amount of \$250. Altogether, a total of \$366,000 was distributed.

Advisory Committee

An external Advisory Committee has now been established to make strategic recommendations to guide the implementation of changes to or development of new policies, procedures, practices and curriculum for the Honours Bachelor of Music Theatre Performance Program. The Advisory Committee met for the first time on December 1, 2020. The members are:

- Dillan Chiblow, Alumni
- Sierra Holder, Alumni
- Camila Diaz-Varela, Industry
- David Connolly, Industry
- Avery Jean Brennan, Industry
- Neha Ross, Industry
- Dr. Seika Boye, Higher Education
- Celeste Catena, Student resource member
- Rhiannon Hoover, Student resource member

Thank you for taking the time to read this update to learn about the additional steps we have taken to foster an environment that recognizes the dignity and worth of every member of our community. We have much work to still do but we are dedicated to building a better Sheridan.

Sheridan firmly believes that diversity fuels excellence and we condemn racism, hatred, and discrimination in all of its forms. People of privilege have an obligation to disrupt and deconstruct systemic structural and institutional failures and to do more within their spheres of influence to cultivate an equitable and inclusive community. As a community of educators, learners, researchers, and leaders, we hold ourselves accountable for addressing and preventing racism, racial inequality and injustice in our communities, on our campuses, and in our classrooms. We call on every member of our community to join us in our important work.

We remain steadfast in our commitment to building a long-term, mutually-beneficial relationship with you and we will always be proud to celebrate the impact that you have on our program, institution, our communities and our profession. We look forward to continuing along this journey in partnership with every member of our learning community: students, alumni and employees.

Sincerely,

Carol Altilia
Provost and Vice President, Academic