

A message from Dr. Janet Morrison



Taking Action

June 12, 2020

Students: we truly are living through unprecedented times, not only as a consequence of the pandemic but, more broadly, in the context of cries for justice and an end to systemic racism. As a community of educators, learners, researchers, and leaders, we are all accountable for addressing and preventing inequality and injustice in our communities, on our campuses, and in our classrooms.

Too many of our students, faculty and staff who self-identify as racialized have shared lived experiences that, without question or further discussion, demand change. Inequity, injustice and marginalization undermines mental health and leave valued members of our community without a sense of belonging. In the context of Sheridan's character and commitment to student success, that is unacceptable.

To better foster working, learning and teaching environments wherein dignity, individualization, integration and full participation are valued and respected, Sheridan pledges the following actions:

- We will ensure every employee at Sheridan receives unconscious bias, anti-oppression and anti-racism training. We are committed to listening and learning from people whose lived experiences are different than our own and to continue educating ourselves about barriers to inclusion and equity that are inherent in our culture, policies, practices, curriculum, pedagogy, and interpersonal relationships.
- Over the next two academic years, in the Faculty of Animation, Arts and Design, we will hire 6 professors who self-identify as Black or Indigenous. To deliver on this commitment, we will disrupt our normal hiring processes, which are built on a legacy of racial bias that must be upended. Ontario's Human Rights Code recognizes that employee recruitment strategies of this nature may be necessary to rectify the historical disadvantage experienced by specific marginalized groups.
- To facilitate access to our programming, we will launch a scholarship program to promote the recruitment and enrolment of Black and Indigenous applicants.
- We will work with our community partners to facilitate skill and interest development related to our disciplinary strengths such as engineering, music theatre, and animation at the primary school level, regardless of economic status or race.
- Sheridan's Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Advisory Council-- which was formed in 2019 and includes faculty, staff and student members who identify as Black, Indigenous and racialized -- will continue to inform Sheridan's future actions and assess the efficacy of our change agenda. We recognize that their perspectives are fundamental to creating and implementing recommendations that can generate meaningful change.
- We will continue to report our progress to our Board of Governors (whose meeting minutes are public) on a quarterly basis.

These actions build on foundational work that has been completed in recent years, notably:

- Our 2019/20 budget reflected a 300% base increase for the work of the Centre for Equity and Inclusion (CEI). As a result of this funding, new full-time continuing positions were established including a Senior EDI Officer, a CEI Intake Coordinator, a Sexual Violence Response Specialist, and a Dispute Resolution Officer. We are proceeding with a search for an additional Manager to further support the unit's work.
- Dr. Jane Ngobia was named Sheridan's first Vice President, Inclusive Communities. Earlier this year, she completed a robust Listening Tour to better understand the lived experience of students, faculty and staff across our programs and Faculties.
- While CEI was originally located only on our Oakville campus, we established a physical presence at the Brampton and Mississauga campuses as well.
- An EDI Advisory Council was formed that includes faculty, staff and student members; together, they developed and approved an EDI Action Plan. This Plan, and -- of note -- an Equity Statement of Commitment, was approved by Sheridan's Board of Governors. The Board has since passed several motions to support Sheridan leadership as it implements equity initiatives across the organization; further, they have asked for quarterly updates on our progress and their impact.
- Our Senate approved Sheridan becoming a signatory to the Dimensions Charter and participating in the Dimensions Pilot program. Both recognize that equity, diversity and inclusion strengthen the research community and the quality, relevance and impact of research.
- The EDI team developed an Unconscious Bias Training module that is ready to launch. Already, many leaders of the Executive and Decanal team have completed Intercultural Competence training to develop self-awareness and the capacity to distinguish people's behaviors from one's own perspectives.
- We undertook an Employee Diversity Census, which will facilitate a baseline understanding of the diversity of our employees. Results are expected next month (July) and will enable evidence-based decisions about addressing barriers in the workplace and the needs of our diverse communities.

To every student at Sheridan: you have my word that your learning community will continue to challenge itself to consider how our actions may have negatively impacted learners from diverse backgrounds in the past and how we must do better. This will necessarily include immediate and ongoing discussions about how we can create spaces that promote honest and difficult conversations. Further, we must ensure that every member of our community can disclose, report and seek support without fear of reprisal.

All of this reflects our genuine commitment to build a community where every individual feels a sense of belonging and is confident that their unique perspectives and contributions will be valued.

Sincerely

Janet Morrison

President and Vice Chancellor

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