

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion at Humber College in the Time of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has thrust the global community into a state of crisis. Research has demonstrated that during crises of pandemic scale, equity-seeking groups are disproportionately impacted (Ruhee Ismail-Teja, 2020). This includes lower-income earners, racialized peoples and women. These groups are also overrepresented in what have been deemed essential or “frontline” roles. Similarly, evidence demonstrates that during periods of stress, individuals utilize biased decision-making processes. Individuals and groups are more likely to neglect using an EDI lens when experiencing a stressful situation.

Partington (2020) argues that “EDI is a mindset: a way of thinking, speaking, acting and planning that can be continually improved. It is not a supplementary program that can be turned on when convenient and turned off when challenging.” Recognizing that the COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately affects equity-seeking groups, and given that bias enters into our decision-making during periods of stress, this is not the time to put EDI aside. In fact, EDI must be a top priority as we navigate this turbulent time.

As a Humber employee, what strategies can be employed to ensure that Humber continues to be an equitable, diverse and inclusive space—a space that enables feelings of belonging?

1. **Address** all instances of harassment and discrimination, including harassment in virtual environments.

Humber’s Human Rights Policy includes coverage of incidents of discrimination and harassment that occur both on and off campus, which affect Humber’s learning, working and living environments. Members of the College community have the responsibility to foster a climate of understanding and mutual respect for the dignity and rights of each individual and to discourage, prevent, and report discrimination and harassment by others. This includes taking specific action(s) to ensure the virtual environment is free of all racist, misogynistic or vulgar content.

2. **Encourage** students to come forward and speak to you about the barriers they may be experiencing.

Humber’s Accessibility Policy states: “It is the College’s goal to create a community that is inclusive of all persons and supports all members of the community in an equitable manner.” Recognize that COVID-19 has disproportionately affected women, black communities, racialized communities, people with disabilities, immigrant

communities, the LGBT2SQ+ community and Indigenous communities. Staff and students from these communities may be struggling. It can be challenging to understand the needs of individuals from these communities, as they are unique and complex. However, staff should be in the habit of helping create an environment where individuals are able to come forward and share some of the barriers they are experiencing.

- 3. Prioritize** equity, diversity, inclusion and accessibility as you redesign courses and course material for suitability in a virtual environment.

Accessible education is a key pillar in [Humber’s Strategic Plan](#), and creating inclusive courses and learning environments that are accessible to all of our diverse learners is essential to an effective teaching practice. Build your courses and programs with accessibility and EDI as a top priority, rather than an “add on.” This might mean altering typical formats for class sessions/program delivery.

For more information, see: [Humber’s Human Rights Policy](#)

References

Ismail-Teja, R. (2020). *Issue 25: COVID-19 is the ‘Great Unequalizer’*. In A. Potter, C. Reboul and P. Sim (Eds.), *Policy for Pandemics*.

<<https://maxpolicy.substack.com/p/issue-25-covid-19-is-the-great-unequalizer>>

Partington, J. (2020). “A Mindset, Not a Program: Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in the Time of COVID-19.” *Academica Forum*.

<<https://forum.academica.ca/forum/a-mindset-not-a-program>>

At a Glance		
In Toronto, preliminary findings show “people in areas that have the highest proportion of lower income earners or areas that have the highest proportion of recent immigrants and high unemployment rates are experiencing higher rates of COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations” (Dr. Devilla, <i>NOW</i> magazine, May 5).	“Racialized populations, in particular black populations, are having the worst experiences in the healthcare system” (Massaquoi, from “Racial Bias Reaches Tipping Point in Canada’s Healthcare System,” <i>CityNews</i>). Link: https://toronto.citynews.ca/2019/12/04/racial-bias-healthcare-system/	“If we don’t understand what health experiences racialized communities are having, we’re not going to be able to treat people effectively” (Massaquoi, from “Racial Bias Reaches Tipping Point in Canada’s Healthcare System,” <i>CityNews</i>). Link: https://toronto.citynews.ca/2019/12/04/racial-bias-healthcare-system/