



The USC's Ethnocultural Feedback Report



Introduction

The University Students' Council's mission is to enhance the educational experience and quality of life for undergraduate students at Western University. This is largely done through advocacy work and service provision.

When it comes to racial and religious diversity, the USC created the Ethnocultural Support Service – a program that works to build community among racialized student groups and educate the university demographic as a whole.

However, just as racism is an evolving challenge this service must evolve as well. As such, the USC has initiated multiple feedback mechanisms to learn more about where students the most need support.

Though a variety of topics were discussed – ranging from colonial traditions to popular culture – this report focuses on more immediate changes the USC can work towards implementing while keeping the overall dialogue in mind.

Method

The University Students' Council took the following steps to hear more from students on racism and support:

1. Invitations were sent to cultural club executives within the USC's clubs system, asking for their participation in a focus group. The focus group was primarily concerned with addressing ways that the USC can better coordinate with and encourage development of cultural and religious groups on campus. A feedback forum with similar questions was available for those unable to attend.
2. A larger focus session, hosted by Ethnocultural Support Services, took place inviting any students at to share their views and experiences as minorities on campus. Similarly, these students were asked about the ways the USC can better cater to the needs of cultural groups.
3. A survey was created and promoted through the USC's social media channels gathering information on both awareness of and interest in Ethnocultural Support Services. The survey asked students about the success of ESS's former campaigns and potential future work. This survey received a total of 287 respondents.

The insights provided from these focus sessions and the online survey are articulated below.

Recommendations

Students who participated in the focus groups and survey raised a number of important issues. Taking this feedback, the USC, ESS and students collaboratively made the following recommendations. Once again, these recommendations focus on what the USC can do in the short-term and do not include long-term advocacy projects to the university or the city of London.

A. Develop an orientation program that is culturally competent

A recurring note in the feedback was the lack of satisfaction for racialized students during orientation week. Students, both international and domestic, commonly cited feeling like an outsider during what was promoting as the most welcoming time. Students felt as though their Sophs and other orientation leaders lacked the awareness or skills to address issues of exclusions taking place. Additionally, students expressed a sensation of being cheated out of an orientation week and freshman year that seemed largely targeted to white students.

B. Increase the focus on race issues in the One Love Rally

As mentioned above, orientation week was identified as an issue but the One Love Rally specifically – as programming meant to address diversity on campus – was highlighted as consistently neglecting issues of race or religion. Though steps had been taken this O-Week, such progress should be continued to further develop a program that has sparsely discussed racism on campus.

C. Increase awareness of Ethnocultural Support Services during the year

ESS's on-campus presence has been deemed by students to be insufficient. Thus, steps should be taken to increase the promotion and communications of the service. In conjunction with this, ESS should work towards making a larger effort to connect with cultural groups on campus – notably clubs. Reaching out to already established communities can provide new opportunities for collaboration and problem-solving for racism on campus.

D. Conceptualizing a mandate in regards to diversity or an initiative to encourage minority students to participate in student government

Overall, students felt there was not adequate representation in student government when it comes to race. Concerned with the lack of non-white students applying for positions within the USC, these students suggested some kind of mandate to encourage diversity. An alternative would be an initiative helping international students and students of non-white backgrounds to apply for positions with the USC.

Conclusions

The feedback from students in the focus groups and online survey provide a number of insights for the USC moving forward. Though this organization has a history of fighting for accessible post-secondary education, more should be done to ensure that once here every student feels comfortable and supported by both the university and their student government.

By assessing and implementing both these recommendations and future projects, the USC can become a better resource for non-white students and more effectively champion diversity at Western.

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