



2021-2025

# EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION FRAMEWORK



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# FOREWORD

**Dear USC,**

This year, we are incredibly excited to present the University Students' Council's (USC) first Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Framework. This guiding organizational document is a culmination of the vision, drive, hard work, and futurism of generations of student leaders and staff, who have worked tirelessly to entrench equity, diversity, and inclusion as a core priority of our organization.

It is critical that we recognize the important grassroots work that has been forwarded by the USC's membership – that being student leaders working within the USC and Western students represented by the USC. The advocacy and action that has been led by these individuals has been especially important at Western, which exists within a colonial institution that is constructed for a dominant culture.

Over the past several decades, many students have experienced trauma and pain as a result of these systems, and it is imperative that the USC first recognize its role in upholding structures of oppression and discrimination. As we look toward the future, our organizational progress continues to be forwarded by an incredible team of student leaders.

To our phenomenal team of contributors:

**Emily Good**, Accessibility Coordinator

**Julia Campbell**, Associate Student Experience

**Kendrew Jacobs**, Indigenous Relations Coordinator

**Liem Nguyen**, Advocacy Research Intern

**Matthew Dawkins**, Ethnocultural Support Services Coordinator

**Peya Mynoddin**, International Student Support Coordinator

**Sreenidhi Jaganathan**, Gender Equality Network Coordinator

**Vivianne Quang**, Municipal Campaigns Coordinator



Thank you for sharing your lived experiences, providing your critical feedback, and driving our organizational mission – to build an accessible, equitable environment for all students and staff– forward. The development of this Framework and the progression of the USC’s equity, diversity, and inclusion work is wholly impossible without your tireless efforts to hold our organizational leaders accountable, deconstruct systems of oppression, and develop safe and inclusive spaces for all.

Your commitment has enabled the USC to carve a path forward to address power and privilege as it exists in our community and ensure that all individuals have access to the opportunities, supports, and spaces that they need to excel in their capacities as staff, students, and student leaders.

Additionally, to Jeff Armour, Chief Operating Officer, and Karla Pacheco, Senior Manager, People and Development – our empowering, supportive senior managers. Thank you for your guidance, trust, and unbelievable commitment to uplifting the student voice. I know that organizational change can be slow and difficult, but you never fail to knock down long-standing barriers to allow for students to change the world.

Your actions have impacted me in unimaginable ways. Under your leadership, the USC has provided me with an opportunity to impact change on the issues that matter most to me. My lived experiences as a queer, woman of colour on a predominately white campus have informed my frustrations about the organization’s dominant structures and my passion for addressing power and privilege as it exists within our institutions.

Last but not least, to the 2020-21 USC executive team – Matt Reesor, Victoria Barroso, Mackenzy Metcalfe, Hannah Tobias-Murray, and Marc St. Pierre – who are the most fervent supporters of the organization’s equity, diversity, and inclusion work, thank you for your continued allyship for students and staff at the margins. Your unwavering dedication to creating safer, more inclusive spaces for our community will inspire, empower, and educate me – now and in the future.



With that said, I am truly humbled to have the opportunity to implement much-needed change in an organization I care so deeply about and hope that this will be the first of many steps in creating a more accessible, inclusive space for everyone in the Western community.

Time and time again, leaders at the USC have said “we believe that students have the power to change the world” and now, it is time that all students are provided with equitable opportunities to do so.

Sincerely,

**Camellia Wong**

*University Students' Council Vice President Communications  
and Public Affairs 2020-2021*



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The USC's Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Framework serves as a core component of our organizational strategic planning process, which includes the following key documents:

**USC Charter:** Sets forth the core mission, vision, and values of the organization

**USC Frameworks:** Identifies the lenses through which every member of the organization should examine the development and execution of their work

- Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion
- Environmental Sustainability

**Policy Paper Library:** Presents data-driven principles, concerns, and recommendations on the USC's core advocacy issues

**USC Roadmap:** One-year tactical plan, written by the executive of the day and passed through Summer Council, which outlines their goals for their year in office

As a guiding document, this Framework outlines a basic structure through which the complex systems of the USC should function. Specifically, it will provide a collective understanding of the USC's approach to equity, diversity, and inclusion, with specific focus on the organization's goals, objectives, and responsibilities.

The execution of this Framework will be led by the USC's senior leadership team – the executive of the day and the senior managers – and must be championed by every member of the organization.

Alongside its sister document, the USC's Sustainability Framework, these plans are intended to orient current and future members of the USC in their pursuit to understand our priorities, goals, and actions. These documents are not meant to contain a prescribed plan, but rather, they serve to provide a clear direction regarding the organization's priorities. Each year, the USC's EDI Framework will be supported by a yearly tactical plan, developed by the organization's Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Advisory Committee (EDIAC).



# DEFINITIONS

**USC Charter:** Sets forth the core mission, vision, and values of the organization

**USC Framework:** When capitalized, refers to the official document that outlines the organizational lenses of the USC.

**Policy Papers:** Presents data-driven principles, concerns, and recommendations on the USC's core advocacy issues

**USC Roadmap:** One-year tactical plan, written by the executive of the day and passed through Summer Council, which outlines their goals for their year in office

**Board of Directors:** Hired members of the USC who safeguard the organization's corporate function and maintain responsibility for matters related to land, labour, law, and organizational risk

**Chief Operating Officer (COO):** The sole employee of the Board of Directors, and the manager of all USC staff

**Equity:** The removal of systemic barriers and biases enabling all individuals to have equal opportunity to access and benefit from the organization. In order to achieve equity, all individuals who participate in the organization must develop a strong understanding of the systemic barriers faced by individuals from underrepresented backgrounds and put in place impactful measures to address these barriers

**Diversity:** Differences in race, colour, place of origin, religion, immigrant and newcomer status, ethnic origin, ability, class, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and age. A diversity of perspectives and lived experiences are fundamental to the organization's EDI processes



**Inclusion:** The practice of ensuring that all individuals are valued and respected for their contributions and are equally supported in their work

**Intersectionality:** The interconnected nature of social identities as they apply to a given individual or group, which create overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination and advantage

**Accessibility:** The provision of equitable access to everyone along the continuum of human ability and experience. Accessibility encompasses the broader meanings of compliance and refers to how organizations make space for the characteristics that each individual brings

**Safe Space:** A place or environment in which individuals can feel confident that they will not be exposed to discrimination, criticism, harassment, or harm



# EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION & THE USC

As an organization that exists to represent over 35,000 undergraduate and professional students at Western, the USC firmly believes that strong equity, diversity, and inclusion practices are at the core of our success as an organization. Bolstering our ability to support, represent, uplift, advocate, communicate, and program for individuals of all backgrounds will make us a stronger, more inclusive organization.

With the understanding that change starts from within, we are proud to present a strategic, specific, and measurable framework to identify and address our current and future members' concerns. Developed in partnership with the Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion (CCDI), this new Framework provides a foundation for collective and continued action, solidifying our belief that meaningful contributions to equity, diversity, and inclusion cannot be isolated to a single individual, portfolio, or department. In sharing this document, we hope to clearly articulate the values and considerations that the USC will employ as we move toward building a more inclusive, empowering environment for all students and staff, particularly those who are at the margins.

The USC is dedicated to creating systemic change and influencing our community partners to do the same. With that said, it is critical for members of our organization to understand how our biases influence how we interact, build our teams, grow our organization, and most importantly, how such actions impact our membership. Presently, the obstacles that the USC's membership faces present major barriers to the development of an inclusive and accessible work environment, which has a direct impact on the experience of marginalized students at Western.

In order to ensure that the USC is making consistent and considerable progress to build an organization for all students and staff, accountability must remain at the forefront of our priorities. Both individual and collective accountability is critical to ensuring that our equity, diversity, and inclusion strategy acknowledges,



understands, and addresses the specific experiences of all individuals, while providing a clear path forward for improvement.

In order to ensure that there are structures in place to support every student and staff member, we have broken down our process into nine actionable steps:

- 1.** Establishing guiding principles for the USC's equity, diversity, and inclusion work
- 2.** Building a process structure by which EDI work should be executed
- 3.** Creating a framework model which outlines the organization's key values and guiding considerations
- 4.** Developing a communications and engagement strategy
- 5.** Establishing objectives, goals, action items, primary stewards, and checkpoint targets
- 6.** Setting clear timelines for actionables
- 7.** Identifying measurable indicators for each goal
- 8.** Establishing organizational buy-in for strategy and accountability
- 9.** Transparently marketing our successes and failures



# OUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The first step in developing and executing the USC's Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Framework is establishing a core set of values by which initiatives should be executed. The USC will institute six guiding principles to ensure that our equity, diversity, and inclusion initiatives are impactful to and representative of every individual within our membership.

## **1. Personal accountability and collective responsibility:**

The USC's equity, diversity, and inclusion work starts with personal accountability and collective responsibility, which focuses on acknowledging and disrupting processes that inhibit an equitable and inclusive environment for all students and staff. In order to foster high-impact, long-lasting cultural shifts, EDI processes at the USC must be championed by all.

The USC has a responsibility to define roles, leadership, actionables, and timelines regarding our equity, diversity, and inclusive initiatives in order to ensure that our mission – to build a more inclusive, accessible environment – is forwarded, year over year. With that being said, individuals that currently exist within the USC's system must be given the training, support, resources, and feedback required to contribute to solutions that dismantle systemic power and privilege within the organization.

Further, marginalized members of the USC must be able to access fair and just tools to report any instances of oppression and discrimination they face and maintain confidence that the organization will take appropriate actions to address their concerns. To that end, the USC must institute safe spaces for individuals to provide feedback about their experiences, share suggestions for organizational improvement, and participate in the development of organizational EDI practices if they so choose.



## **2. Critical analysis and continuous improvement:**

While this Framework provides a preliminary structure for the USC's equity, diversity, and inclusion practices to be developed and executed, we must be committed to collecting, counting, comparing, and considering relevant data for improvement. Specifically, the USC must collect demographic-based data to examine organizational make-up and provide regular feedback opportunities for members to share their experiences while working or interacting with the USC. Further, it is critical that data is disaggregated to ensure that we employ a nuanced, specific, and wide-reaching approach to equity, diversity, and inclusion.

To ensure opportunities for continuous improvement, the organization will instill a regular feedback loop that will inform the development and impact of past, current, and future EDI initiatives. Alongside regular feedback, individuals within the organization must be committed to continuous reflection, action, and improvement.

## **3. Centering and empowerment:**

Often, organizations including the USC will avoid discussing topics of power and privilege openly, in fear that it may make dominant groups uncomfortable. However, it is critical that the USC examines the power structures and shortfalls that currently exist to disenfranchise marginalized members, in order to uproot these systemic issues and make strides toward creating a more inclusive environment for all students and staff. Namely, the USC must consider intersectionality closely in its approach.

The USC's equity, diversity, and inclusion strategy must include everyone, but should be centred around the experiences, voices, and needs of marginalized members of the organization. We must foster an environment where individuals of diverse lived experiences are empowered to voice their concerns and provide their perspectives, while simultaneously being provided with the resources and support they need to address their concerns. Specifically, leaders within the USC sphere must foster open dialogue regarding the power and privilege structures that presently exist and motivate collective action to facilitate a cultural shift.



#### **4. Transparency:**

In order to ensure individual and collective accountability in the USC's equity, diversity, and inclusion practices, the USC must be transparent about our current conditions and our future goals. Specifically, the organization should consistently share: (a) our demographic-based data and membership feedback, (b) our proposed timeline and progress on projects, and (c) our actionables and plans for the future.

It is important to note that transparency regarding both the successes and failures of the USC's equity, diversity and inclusion practices is critical to ensuring individual and collective accountability. The USC must prioritize true and considerable progress, rather than organizational reputation and optics.

Ultimately, the USC exists to serve the student body and we must provide our membership with the opportunity to examine and evaluate our work, while providing feedback and suggestions for the future to ensure we are building the most representative, inclusive organization possible.

#### **5. Specificity and measurability:**

As an organization that is committed to progress, we must ensure our EDI goals are specific and measurable. Each year, the actionables included in our tactical plan should be accompanied with details regarding leadership, timelines, and metrics for success.

Through specificity, measurability, and continuous feedback, the USC will be able to identify our successes and shortfalls in regards to the organization's equity, diversity, and inclusion. This will provide the USC with an opportunity to instill a process of continuous learning and improvement, and adapt to the ever-changing makeup of our membership.



## 6. Mutual respect:

The key to building an inclusive, equitable environment for all USC members is to approach EDI discussions with empathy, acceptance, and validation. It is critical that all members of the USC are able to acknowledge how our individual and institutional biases often exclude marginalized communities, and actively work to dismantle such thought processes.

Individuals whose identities do not fit within the dominant culture of our organization must be provided with a safe space to share their experiences and contribute to the development of solutions moving forward. Instilling a culture of open, respectful, and thoughtful dialogue can help to ensure that the USC is carving a strong, action-oriented, and equitable path forward.



# OUR PROCESS STRUCTURE

Secondly, the USC must implement a process structure by which equity, diversity, and inclusion initiatives are developed and executed within the organization. The organization's Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Advisory Committee (EDIAC) will be accountable for fielding feedback, prioritizing initiatives, and devising a path forward for projects. Each member of the committee will also be responsible for championing and communicating the organization's equity, diversity, and inclusion practices to their respective groups.

In order to ensure that the USC's membership is adequately represented, the committee will include, but is not limited to, representatives from the following categories:

- President & Chief Executive Officer (1) – chair
- Chief Operating Officer (1)
- Senior Manager, People and Development (1)
- USC Executive (1)
- Coordinators, Interns, Associates (4)
- USC Councillors (2)
- USC members-at-large (2)
- Board of Directors (1)

USC members at large will also be notified of, and have access to, monthly EDIAC where they will be provided with a forum to share their feedback.

Each May, the outgoing EDIAC will produce a tactical plan for the following academic year, which will be executed by the incoming EDIAC beginning in July. The committee will meet on a monthly basis to field feedback from USC membership and set priorities, assign leaders, develop action items, and determine measures of success for the organization's EDI initiatives.



## Our Tactical Objectives

To ensure that the USC's equity, diversity, and inclusion initiatives do not remain at the surface level, it is critical that there is an organization-wide understanding that uprooting systematic oppression and discrimination is a years-long process that should fundamentally transform the foundation of the USC's approach to work. With that in mind, this Framework is focused on creating meaningful change through continued feedback, action, learning, and unlearning. We will employ the aforementioned steps to achieve four long term tactical objectives, which will be expanded upon through the organization's yearly tactical plan:

- 1.** Increasing the accessibility of the USC to reflect the diversity on campus
- 2.** Foster an equitable, inclusive culture in the day-to-day operations of the USC
- 3.** Understand, listen to, and amplify the voices of diverse individuals throughout the USC's work
- 4.** Define and commit to shared accountability to build an equitable, accessible organization

Each year, this document will have an accompanying action plan, developed by the USC's Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion committee, detailing the organization's key priorities, actionables, stakeholders, timelines, and measures of success.



# FORWARD

As the first-ever USC Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Framework, this document takes the first of many steps in codifying EDI as a core organizational value. As we look toward the future, we are focussed on building a more accessible, inclusive, and intersectional organization which reflects the diversity of our current and future members.

As an organization that is built for students and by students, we have a responsibility to employ specific, nuanced, and data-driven approaches to ensuring that all our members have the opportunities, supports, and spaces they need to succeed. Equity, diversity, and inclusion work is most impactful when we are all pulling in a common direction. We must take individual and collective ownership of the work that needs to be done to provide all students with a safe, equitable environment to call home.

At the time of writing, Western's administration has taken strides toward more equity, diversity, and inclusion in their spaces, through the creation of an Associate Vice President EDI position. While this is the first step of many, it signals a commitment from our campus partners to create a supportive environment for students to learn, reside, and grow.

The guiding principles, process structure, and tactical objectives outlined in this Framework serve as the building blocks for our work, but every individual within this organization will play an integral role in creating structures for all USC staff, students, and students to change the world – in their own way.





# CONNECT WITH US

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