



UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' COUNCIL POSITION PAPER ON

BIPOC AND RELIGIOUS STUDENTS



Legislative History

This Position Paper was commissioned by USC to update previous papers:

Racial and Religious Students' Policy Paper, approved by Council November 24, 2021

Approved by Council December 4, 2024

To be reviewed by Council in its 2027-2028 sitting

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LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

As an organization created to empower and support our students throughout their educational experience, it is particularly important to acknowledge and recognize the power of education as a tool for healing and reconciliation. The USC always seeks to empower students on our campus to voice their perspectives on the issues that matter most to them, but we must recognize that there is still immense work to be done, at the USC and across Western's campus. We must remain active in our process of learning and unlearning to ensure that we take responsibility for educating ourselves on the history of the lands that we are situated upon and their impacts on those that lived upon them first.

With this, we wish to acknowledge that Western University and our Affiliate Colleges are located on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak and Attawandaron peoples, on lands connected with the London Township and Sombra Treaties of 1796 and the Dish with One Spoon Covenant Wampum.



INTRODUCTION

“Regardless of their race, ethnic background, ancestry or religion, we recognize and value the right of all Western students, faculty and staff to pursue their studies, scholarship and work in a safe, respectful, inclusive and welcoming environment.”

From Western’s Anti-Racism Working Group Final Report, May 19, 2020¹

The University Students’ Council (USC) believes that campus should be a welcoming and inclusive space for everyone. Over the years, many students who have identified themselves as part of an equity deserving group have felt that Western University didn’t take their concerns about racism seriously.² The university was spurred to action in 2019, when a student became the target of online racial aggressions after objecting to a professor using the n-word in class.³ Following the incident, Western University established an Anti-Racism Working Group to explore the issue of racism on campus. Their final report revealed deeply seated racial and religious bias on campus, in the curriculum, and noted that many community members continue to experience micro-aggressions on a daily basis.⁴

Following the report, Western University began implementing a number of steps towards improving campus culture. The Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion was established in 2021, and in collaboration with the Office of Indigenous Initiatives, has produced a number of programs and initiatives designed to improve and enhance accessibility and the recognition of racialized students on campus. Beginning in 2022 and continuing today, all incoming students are required to complete an anti-racism module as part of the onboarding process.

Western University released an Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, Decolonization and Accessibility Strategic Plan (EDIDA) mid December 2024 with the results of an in-depth audit to be presented in 2027. The USC is pleased to see a demonstrated public

1 President’s Anti-Racism Working Group Final Report, May 19, 2020. <https://www.president.uwo.ca/pdf/arwg-final-report-to-president-shepard-fnl.pdf>

2 Butler, Colin. 2020. “This 3-time grad says Western University hasn’t learned much about racism in 25 years.” CBC News, August 5, 2020. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/london/western-university-racism-1.5673782>

https://www.instagram.com/uwominoritystory/related_profiles/?hl=en

3 Juha, Jonathan. 2019. “Western University student who called out professor over “n-word” facing racist backlash.” The London Free Press, October 30, 2019. <https://lfpres.com/news/local-news/western-university-student-who-called-out-professor-over-n-word-facing-racist-backlash>

4 President’s Anti-Racism Final Report.



commitment to address, and work towards resolving issues of racism on campus. A number of concerns that have previously been identified in past policy papers are addressed within the strategy. However, there are some areas of concern that are not explicitly addressed by the strategic plan that we feel warrant special consideration and observation as the plan is rolled out, and we strongly urge Western University to work towards addressing the following:

- Endorsement of academic freedom versus potential new policies to address racism, anti-hate, anti-discrimination in the classroom
- The lack of mandatory anti-racism training for existing staff and faculty members
- Methodologies used for measuring success (i.e. satisfaction and participation rates in clubs which fall under the USC's jurisdiction)
- Omission of a zero tolerance stance
- Omission of investment in multi-faith services

Acknowledging that it will take time to implement change and assess the success or failure of certain initiatives, the USC will monitor the progress and take note of any concerns that should be brought forward at the renewal of this position paper. It should also be noted that the Provincial Government just introduced an amendment to the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities Act in 2024 that will also drive change in how post-secondary institutions handle racism and hate speech. We anticipate positive results to come from this.

An area of student life which has not received much attention over the past several years is the provision of support and spaces for those with religious or spiritual affiliations. Western University does not collect religious information as part of their ongoing demographic survey, and so cannot adequately provide programming, spaces or services to accommodate those wishing to observe various faith practices. Services offered by Western's Chaplaincy have remained stagnant for a number of years with many students unaware of their existence. Other U15 universities have moved towards a Multi-Faith or Spiritual Care model with a variety of Faith and Humanist leaders available for consultation. The USC feels that this is an element of student life that warrants increased attention by Western University to ensure that students (whether or not they identify with a strong religious affiliation) can seek alternate forms of guidance, community and mentorship while on campus.

Beyond the classroom, it is important that students feel safe and included in the broader community in which they live. Through a series of anti-hate actions and campaigns, the City of London is working to improve its reputation as a welcoming city for all. While still in their early stages, it is important that the city monitor the projects and collect feedback to ensure that these programs are working to make London a better place for everyone.



RECOMMENDATIONS

1. WESTERN UNIVERSITY SHOULD RELEASE AN EQUITY CENSUS REPORT EVERY FOUR YEARS AND ENSURE THAT CURRENT DATA IS USED TO INFORM ALL EDI STRATEGIES AND POLICIES.

In 2023, the office of EDI hired a data analyst to take the lead on collecting and analyzing data from the open census.⁵ Internal reports can be generated upon request by departments, but are not freely accessible otherwise. A lack of readily accessible data limits the ability to determine the effectiveness of various initiatives, and can be used to “conceal inequities and reduce the effectiveness of EDI measures...particularly when it [comes] to assessing the effectiveness and beneficial impacts of measures for students and faculty members belonging to certain groups (e.g., people with disabilities, people in the LGBTQ2S+ community, and neurodivergent people) and those subjected to discrimination based on multiple intersecting identities.”⁶

Making this information publicly available would provide the entire Western community with a better understanding of campus demographics, enabling the creation of a more inclusive and welcoming environment for everyone. Western should expand the scope of questions to further identify intersectionalities such as religious affiliation and cultural practices, as well as ask questions that aim to assess students’ feelings of belonging on campus. This would allow Western to anticipate the needs of, and better serve, students who feel that they are consistently overlooked or regularly find themselves having to advocate for accommodations.

Campus activities could be designed to reflect inclusivity, recognizing the need for options such as special diets or alcohol-free programming, allowing more students to participate in activities that currently do not align with their well-being or spiritual/cultural practices. Additionally, by expanding the scope of the survey to include questions about students’ sense of belonging, Western can better identify systemic barriers and develop targeted initiatives that foster a more equitable and supportive environment. This would allow for activities to be designed at the onset to include students who feel overlooked or who must constantly advocate for accommodations.

Students want to see themselves acknowledged, and get a sense of their place in the broader Western spectrum. Demographic survey data must be used in conjunction with an EDI strategic plan to ensure that strategies and policies are accurately reflecting the current student body. Tangible and accurate information will provide students with the

⁵ 2022-23 Annual Progress Report, prepared by The Office of Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (London, ON, 2022).

⁶ Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in the Post-Secondary Research System, prepared by Council of Canadian Academies (Ottawa ON, 2024).



means to hold Western University accountable for increasing representation of student and staff members, and to provide classes and programming that more accurately reflects the interests and intersectionalities of current students.

2. WESTERN UNIVERSITY MUST COMMIT TO ANTI-RACISM TRAINING FOR ALL NEW AND EXISTING CAMPUS EMPLOYEES TO ENSURE THAT CAMPUS-WIDE MINIMUM LEVELS OF EQUITY-DIVERSITY-INCLUSION (EDI) EXPECTATIONS ARE IN PLACE.

All students deserve to feel welcome on campus and in its teaching spaces. To address racism and discrimination at the peer level, Western University introduced mandatory anti-racism training for students, but this continues to remain optional for staff. The newly launched strategic plan makes allowances for training new staff on EDI issues, but fails to mention any requirements for existing staff members. This allows for a two tiered approach in eliminating racism and hate speech across campus, and prevents Western University from holding some employees to the same standards and expectations as students. This inequity should be addressed by requiring regular mandatory EDI training for all campus employees, and wording to that effect should be added into all Faculty and staff contract negotiations as they come up for renewal.

The Office of EDI has produced numerous training modules and workshops designed to engage the community and help incorporate inclusive content into academics.⁷ These modules have been used by numerous municipalities and post-secondary institutions in their own training programs,⁸ and as such should be celebrated and utilised by our own campus community. An Inclusive Language Guide⁹ was produced in 2023 to alert community members to the hurtful nature of words and phrases while guiding them towards more appropriate language. Completion certificates are already awarded for those participating in training modules, so tracking methodology is already in place to ensure campus-wide participation.

While some studies indicate that implicit bias education alone may not change behaviours,¹⁰ Western University must take the first steps to hold all campus members to an established set of standards, and ensure that sanctions are applied to those who contravene them. Taking a stand against racism is not merely about mouthing platitudes but requires cultivated actions to create a new normative culture. By ensuring that all staff and faculty members on campus have completed anti-racism training, Western University can hold each and every person on campus accountable for how their words and actions may cause harm to others.

7 A listing of anti-racism training courses can be found here: <https://www.edi.uwo.ca/trainings-and-certificates/EDID%20Online%20Module%20Booklet.pdf>

8 As noted by Opiyo Oloya Western's Associate Vice-President of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion during the webinar Together for Change: Discussing the EDIDA Strategic Plan hosted by Western Alumni Relations, January 22, 2025.

9 A Guide for Inclusive Language, produced by The Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (London, ON, 2023).

10 Ibid.



3. AS PART OF THE WIDE DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY, WESTERN UNIVERSITY SHOULD INCLUDE QUESTIONS ALLOWING STUDENTS TO INDICATE THEIR SPIRITUAL IDENTITY IN ORDER TO BETTER ANTICIPATE THE NEED FOR A VARIETY OF MULTI-FAITH SERVICES ON CAMPUS.

Western University aims to dramatically increase its student population over the next several years, and is actively working to recruit Black, Indigenous and International students to add diversity to campus.¹¹ An estimated 36% of international students and 21% of domestic students regularly participate in religious or spiritual activities in order to relieve stress.¹² With this growth of diversity comes a requirement to provide adequate services and spaces to accommodate the cultural and religious practices of all students.

In order to track and anticipate the needs of an increasingly diverse student body, Western University should include questions about religious and cultural practices on the demographic survey and include the results in the Equity Census Report. The data could inform proactive measures that could be taken to promote inclusivity. For example, campus eateries could provide more options for specific religious or cultural dietary needs, and teaching staff could design project due dates around religious holidays to reduce the number of accommodation requests.

4. WESTERN UNIVERSITY SHOULD ASSESS THE USE OF ALL MULTI FAITH SPACES ACROSS CAMPUS TO ENSURE THAT THEY ARE ADEQUATE IN SIZE AND FUNCTION.

For several years, student groups have been requesting more and larger multi-faith spaces in buildings throughout campus, along with adequate storage spaces for equipment and belongings. During the summer of 2024, Western University created a number of new multi faith-quiet spaces located across campus for the purpose of prayer, reflection and meditation.

To ensure these areas are meeting the needs of all students and community members, Western University should begin tracking the use of these spaces. In conjunction with information collected from the demographic survey, the university would then be able to proactively respond to changing needs, and make sure that campus has welcoming spaces suitable for everyone.

11 Towards Western at 150, prepared by Western Communications (London, ON, 2021).

12 Joe Danis, Katie Herlick, Rachel Janzen, “Examining Student Wellness Within the Student Population,” Academica Group, September 20, 2021.

13 Braganza, Chantal, 2017. The role of university chaplain evolves with the times,” University Affairs, November 10, 2017.

14 <https://chaplain.uwo.ca/index.html>



5. WESTERN SHOULD CONSIDER FOLLOWING THE EXAMPLES OF OTHER UNIVERSITIES WHICH HAVE REBRANDED THEIR PROGRAMS AS MULTI-FAITH OR NON-DENOMINATIONAL SPIRITUAL LIFE CENTRES IN ORDER TO BETTER SERVE THEIR STUDENT POPULATION.¹³

According to the Western Chaplains website, there are only three members who voluntarily serve the entire Western main campus community.¹⁴ The website has been static for several years and serves as nothing more than a landing page directing students to contact the Chaplains via email, and providing directions to various places of Worship in the community at large. By comparison, other U15 universities¹⁵ have launched various forms of multi-faith or spiritual wellness programs with between 3 and 24 faith leaders active on their campuses. Their websites are fulsome including biographies, listings of numerous events and regular programming designed to support and bring faith and non-faith communities together. Services often include prayer spaces, yoga sessions, game nights, discussion groups, snacks and other relationship building activities, all of which are absent here.

Some students may prefer to connect with faith leaders for support and encouragement as an alternative to long waits for appointments within the mental health system. While faith leaders should not be expected to take on the role of mental health specialists, not all problems or concerns require a therapist. University Chaplains report growing numbers of students (with and without religious inclinations) approaching them to discuss concerns over loneliness and mental health, particularly stress and anxiety.¹⁶ As noted in the USC's 2023 paper on Mental Health, students are concerned about the lack of timely access to mental health assistance on campus and in the broader community; as an alternative pathway for students seeking to improve their mental and spiritual health, Western University should ensure that spiritual life resources are readily accessible to students.

A second concern noted in the mental health paper was the lack of diversity and lived experiences of the existing mental health counsellors. By ensuring that a variety of faiths and personal backgrounds are represented within a spiritual life hub, students may feel a greater sense of comfort in seeking guidance from someone who understands their "particular culturally specific conundrums...[without the need to] devote a huge chunk of time to explaining their background."¹⁷ This would help students

15 University of Calgary: <https://www.ucalgary.ca/student-services/faith-spirituality>

University of Toronto: <https://studentlife.utoronto.ca/department/multi-faith-centre/>

McMaster: <https://studentsuccess.mcmaster.ca/spiritual-care/community-and-support/>

UBC: <https://students.ubc.ca/campus-life/religion-spirituality/>

Dalhousie: https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/communities/multifaith-services.html

16 Braganza, Chantal. 2017. "The role of university chaplain evolves with the times." University Affairs, November 10, 2017. Guest, Matthew. 2019. "Students are increasingly turning to religious leaders for mental health support." The Conversation, May 9, 2019.

17 Lewsen, Simon 2022. Inside the mental health crisis facing college and university students," Academic Matters Summer 2022 Issue.



find ways to meet their well being needs in multiple places, creating a stronger campus community. Western University should consider the value of spiritual wellness services on campus as a means of promoting whole person health. This service should be staffed by representatives of a number of faith and non-faith creeds, and have dedicated spaces for a variety of activities and gathering sizes.

6. THE CITY OF LONDON SHOULD CONTINUE TO PARTNER WITH WESTERN UNIVERSITY'S OFFICE OF EQUITY DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION TO OBTAIN STAFF TRAINING PROGRAMS, DEMONSTRATING A LEADERSHIP ROLE IN COMBATING RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION IN THE COMMUNITY.

Following a series of year over year increases in hate crimes reported to police,¹⁸ the City of London launched an information campaign called Stop Tolerhating in October 2024.¹⁹ The program is designed to increase community awareness about the increase of racial injustice in the city with the hopes that education will provide enhanced respect, understanding and an increased sense of community for all residents of London.

In conjunction with this program, the City of London has partnered with Western University's Office of EDI to provide antisemitism and Islamophobia training modules to city staff.²⁰ This information will be used by staff in the creation of more equitable services and policies that take into consideration the experiences of diverse communities. While this may ensure that key players within the city are more aware of the issues that face equity-deserving community members, there remains an opportunity to expand upon this initiative by continuing to partner with Western University to expand anti-hate learning opportunities for both city staff and the greater community.

7. THE CITY OF LONDON SHOULD CONDUCT SURVEYS AND COLLECT FEEDBACK TO MEASURE THE SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES OF THE STOP TOLERHATING CAMPAIGN IN ORDER TO MAKE ONGOING IMPROVEMENTS.

The potential impact of the Stop Tolerhating campaign extends beyond the experiences of permanent residents to include post-secondary students. By setting city-wide objectives to be more respectful and tolerant of others, students may benefit from better experiences when interacting with not only city centric services like public transit and housing by-laws, but in their participation in broader community activities.

The city should ensure that data and feedback is collected about the initiative, from both residents and experts, in order to gauge its effectiveness and determine what

18 Statistics Canada. Table 35-10-0191-01 Police-reported hate crime, number of incidents and rate per 100,000 population, Provinces, Territories, Census Metropolitan Areas and Canadian Forces Military Police

19 The link to the program can be found here: <https://london.ca/stoptolerhating>

20 Stacey, Megan. 2024. "Change beyond the campus gates: Western-developed training purchased by City of London." Western News, December 12, 2024. <https://news.westernu.ca/2024/12/western-edi-training-city-of-london/>



improvements could be made to make it even better. Progress should be tracked regularly, and shared publicly through a dashboard similar to that of the City's Strategic Plan.²¹ Efforts should also be made to communicate the results yearly through media outlets to allow for maximum exposure to the community.

8. THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT SHOULD CONTINUE TO MONITOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF BILL 166 TO ENSURE THAT POST SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS CREATE AND MAINTAIN STRONG POLICIES TO PREVENT RACISM AND HATE ON CAMPUS AND IN CLASSROOMS.

In 2024, the Provincial Government introduced Bill 166 as an amendment to the Colleges and Universities Act,²² requiring post-secondary institutions to create and publicly post anti-racism and anti-hate policies. Western University's new EDI strategic plan begins to address some of the issues that students have identified as problematic over the years, and Bill 166 will be an important tool to support and strengthen the changes that are important to students.

The mandates will require Western University to regularly communicate the number and types of incidents reported on campus, and the actions it takes to counter incidents of racism, discrimination, and hate-speech. A zero tolerance approach for such behaviours will help demonstrate to students and community members that campus is a welcoming space for everyone.

There has been some push-back from parties who are concerned about how Bill 166 could affect academic freedom and freedom of speech; however, the USC believes that it is imperative that all students feel safe in the spaces that they inhabit, and encourages the Government of Ontario to monitor this issue and make adjustments to the amendment as necessary to ensure teaching spaces remain safe places for all students. The USC is confident that a balance between academic freedom, freedom of speech, and safety on campus exists, and looks forward to working together with Western and the Province of Ontario to ensure that balance is found.

9. AS PART OF THE TRACKING AND REPORTING STRUCTURE MANDATED BY BILL 166, WESTERN UNIVERSITY MUST ENSURE THAT STUDENTS ARE AWARE OF THE REPORTING TOOLS AVAILABLE TO THEM. THESE TOOLS MUST BE ROBUST ENOUGH TO ALLOW FOR STUDENTS TO ACCURATELY REPORT INCIDENTS OF RACIAL AND/OR RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION.

Students consistently report a lack of trust in institutions which are perceived to be slow to act or where ineffective sanctions are applied to perpetrators.²³ According to data

21 Strengthening Accountability and Student Supports Act, 2024, S.O. 2024, c. 11- Bill 166, prepared by Ministry of Colleges and Universities (Toronto, ON, 2024).

22 Strengthening Accountability and Student Supports Act, 2024, S.O. 2024, c. 11- Bill 166, prepared by Ministry of Colleges and Universities (Toronto, ON, 2024).

23 President's Anti-Racism Working Group Final Report, May 19, 2020.



collected by the President's Anti-Racism Working Group, up to 60% of racist incidents are not reported because the means to do so are not clear, and victims do not believe that there will be any real consequences for the perpetrators. Students participating in our own 2024 survey on racialized and religious students overwhelmingly noted that Western must be seen to take real action on issues related to racism, education, and creating a more welcoming environment for all students.²⁴ Bill 166 will ensure that there is a clear process available to lodge complaints, and that transparent reporting will follow.

Students need to be made aware of the process to lodge a formal complaint whether they experience peer discrimination, or they feel that a member of the teaching staff is abusing academic freedom by using derogatory, discriminatory or hate speech in class. This can be accomplished by including an anti-racism statement and providing a list of resources on course syllabi (similar to the gender based violence statement). This action will demonstrate a commitment to the entire community that Western University is serious about combating racism at all levels, as well as providing students with a clear path for reporting incidents.

The current reporting tool also needs to be updated as it does not allow for distinguishing between a racial or religious incident. This should be updated to allow for clear and accurate reporting methodology of single or multiple types of discrimination, as race and religion are not exclusively connected.

Students want to see genuine efforts being made by the university to acknowledge and address transgressions. By providing reports on the number of incidents and consequences imposed on perpetrators, Western University leadership will demonstrate their commitment to address and eradicate racism, discrimination and hate speech on campus. Bill 166 provides a framework through which students can expect more accountability from their institutions.

²⁴ USC's BIPOC and Religious Students' Policy Paper Focus Group Report, October 2, 2024.



CONCLUSION

The recommendations presented in this paper aim to address current priorities not explicitly covered by Western University's EDIDA strategic plan, which, based on consultations with our student community, we believe require special attention and monitoring as the plan is implemented. We are eager to see the ways in which the City of London and Western University can work together, as well as the role that Bill 166 will play as it is implemented. Many of the recommendations in this paper also address the need for consistent and thorough data collection in order to evaluate the effectiveness of plans currently in place. The University Students' Council (USC) is committed to advocating for these recommendations through continuous dialogue with Western University administration, as well as all levels of government. The VP University Affairs and VP External Affairs will seek out opportunities with various stakeholders at Western University and relevant government bodies in order to advocate on behalf of all students to ensure that decisions, policies and actions affecting students are undertaken through the lens of EDI.

As we meet with these key decision makers, we plan to present our findings, outline the necessity of each recommendation, and initiate collaborative planning for implementation. By championing student perspectives and engaging with stakeholders, we aim to make significant strides toward a more equitable and inclusive environment for our campus community.

Acknowledging that it will take time to implement change and assess the success or failure of certain initiatives, the USC will monitor the progress and take note of any concerns that should be brought forward at the renewal of this position paper.





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