



**UNIVERSITY
OF ALBERTA**

Report on 10 Calls to Action by the Collective of Black Student Groups at the University of Alberta

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Introduction

Purpose

This report provides an update on activities related to the institutional priority area of Black flourishing, specifically on the commitments made to a collective of Black student groups in September 2020. While it attempts to be thorough, it is by no means comprehensive. It also identifies areas where further discussion is needed.

Context

The murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, was the catalyst for a wave of transformation at universities across North America. Statements of solidarity by institutional leaders were quickly followed up by commitments to act, driven by the desire for broad and transformative systemic change. On September 3, 2020, U of A President Bill Flanagan met with the Collective of Black Student Groups (graduate and undergraduate) and key senior leaders to discuss the experiences of Black undergraduate and graduate students on campus. [The minutes of that meeting](#) were captured. The students outlined 10 areas for action across the University of Alberta and secured institutional commitments from President Flanagan and others with accountabilities in key portfolios.

Challenges

While steps have been taken in most of the areas identified in that meeting, a number of challenges in the institutional environment slowed progress significantly. The ongoing need for responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, adjustments to remote work and learning and institutional restructuring in the context of budget cuts put significant pressures on the key offices of accountability named in the meeting. These challenges were exacerbated by the lack of a clear plan for operationalizing the commitments themselves, with no primary lead identified to support implementation and no reporting mechanism built into the process.

Opportunities

Despite the challenges, there were also opportunities realized to advance Black flourishing for students outside of the scope of these calls to action. President Flanagan further joined a number of his colleagues across Canada in signing the [Scarborough Charter](#) in November 2021, thus publicly ensuring that the momentum gained over the summer of 2020 continued. Through the advocacy of the Black Faculty Collective and the support of faculty deans, 12 targeted tenure-line positions for Black scholars were established across 10 Faculties. These colleagues joined the U of A in the 2022–23 academic year as part of the [Black Academic Excellence Cohort Hire](#). This marked a significant increase in the number of Black faculty, which has a

positive impact on Black student experience. On January 1, 2023, Dr. Andy Knight was appointed Provost Fellow for Black Excellence and Leadership. His initiatives, including the development of an online and on demand micro-course “Combating Anti-Black Racism” (launch early 2024) and ongoing engagement on decolonizing the curriculum from a Pan-African perspective, will positively impact Black student recruitment, inclusion and retention.

Path Forward

The position of Vice-Provost (Equity, Diversity and Inclusion) was established on November 15, 2022. The overarching accountability for operationalizing and reporting on the progress of these and other initiatives related to Black flourishing has moved to this position to ensure sustainable and coordinated progress. Within this portfolio, the integrated EDI Action Plan, currently under development, will offer an opportunity to review and refresh or revise these action items with the Collective of Black Students in conjunction with the Black Faculty Collective.

The U of A will continue to identify and act on opportunities to support the thriving of Black students, faculty and staff with the goal of creating lasting, systemic change. These actions will be led by Black voices and centred on Black experiences, and be actioned with clear and transparent accountability of senior leaders.



Report

CALL TO ACTION ITEM 1	STATUS	ACCOUNTABILITY
Formally acknowledge Black History Month to commemorate Black Canadians and their contributions to the U of A and the wider community. Create a working group to plan and implement Black History Month events, activities and programs to engage and develop relationships between Black students, faculty and staff; the wider Black community; and the U of A.	On track	Recommended: Vice-Provost (Equity, Diversity and Inclusion) and External Relations

NOTES

A working group was formed for February 2021 Black History Month consisting of members of the communications team, Black students and faculty, the Deputy Provost and the Vice-Dean of Arts. A smaller communications-oriented working group was struck in November 2021 for February 2022. Starting in November 2022 and again in 2023, a dedicated Communications Partner for EDI worked solo to pull together events and initiatives. The goal each year is to showcase Black-led events at the U of A.

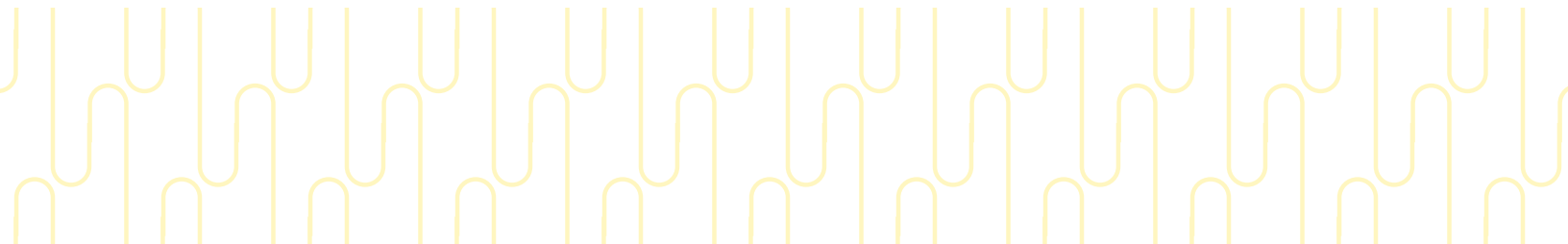
Recommendations/Comments: The institutional focus to date has been on communicating and amplifying Black-led events and contributions on campus. This leaves a gap in the support for the development of initiatives. With Provost Fellow Dr. Andy Knight, a two-day symposium featuring academics, diplomats and artists will take place in February 2024 as a collaborative initiative between the VPEDI and the College of Social Sciences and Humanities. There remains a need for coordination across and communication of all activities; reestablishing a working group is recommended.

CALL TO ACTION ITEM 2	STATUS	ACCOUNTABILITY
Introduce the collection of race-based and ethnicity data for Black and racialized students to assist the U of A in determining student outcomes for students that self-identify as Black, Indigenous or racialized. This would provide a quantitative method for the university to determine whether it is achieving goals related to EDI initiatives, and identify areas of success or those needing improvement.	On track	Performance, Analytics and Institutional Research, Vice-Provost (Equity, Diversity and Inclusion), Deputy Provost (Student Experience), Office of the Registrar, colleges and faculties

NOTES

The first survey was conducted in Fall 2021 and the second survey opened on November 22, 2023 with further administrations planned for every two years. The first report is [publicly available on the U of A website](#). The survey instrument for collecting race-based data was co-created with Black student groups and representatives from among Black faculty and staff (see page 12).

Recommendations/Comments: The survey and reporting are on track. The next step would be for academic and support units to utilize the data to address key initiatives and benchmarks; this is in development for Quality Assurance processes. Such goals are further embedded in the Student Experience Action Plan and will feature in the Integrated EDI Action Plan.



CALL TO ACTION ITEM 3	STATUS	ACCOUNTABILITY
Direct all Faculties and departments to provide anti-racism training focused on Black, Indigenous and other racialized content that will be mandatory for all academic staff, non-academic staff and graduate students.	In progress	Vice-Provost (Equity, Diversity and Inclusion), Human Resources, Health, Safety and Environment, colleges and faculties

NOTES

Learning and training in anti-racism and other forms of oppression, interpersonal/psycho-social harm and EDI more generally have been multiple and in different pockets – including the online [Tackling Structural Racism](#) in the Faculty of Native Studies and workshops offered by the Office of Safe Disclosure and Human Rights. Coordinating and identifying gaps is a priority for the VPEDI portfolio. The launch of the first of three EDI training modules, [Foundations in Equity, Diversity and Inclusion](#), marks a starting point for the broader University. Further, the anti-Black racism online and on demand course, led by Dr. Knight and currently being developed in a three-way partnership with the VPEDI, Online and Continuing Education and the College of SSH, will offer opportunities to consider broader training initiatives. In early 2023, mandatory safety training for all was instituted across the institution with introduction to the Discrimination and Harassment Policy. All other mandatory training is role-specific.

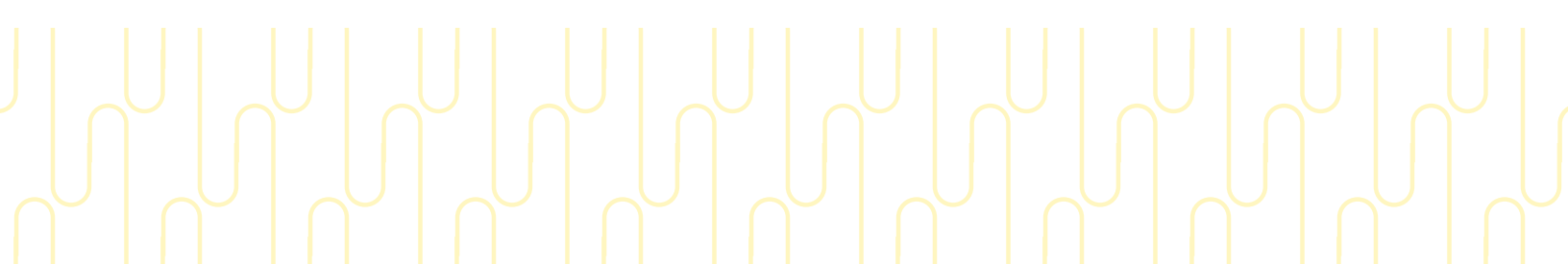
Recommendations/Comments: In 2023, “[A Culture of Care](#)” was launched with a clear recognition of the importance of psychological and cultural safety in our overall approach to safety. This offers an opening to ensure that anti-racism training is robust and institution-wide. Next steps in this space are to engage in a scan of all training opportunities currently on offer to build a “one stop shop” for existing training and to identify gaps, including reviewing principles around when a training becomes mandatory.

CALL TO ACTION ITEM 4	STATUS	ACCOUNTABILITY
Improve accountability measures to reduce experiences of anti-Black discrimination (and other forms of discrimination) in Faculties and departments that have been ineffective in resolving grievances to ensure safe working and learning environments for Black and racialized students.	In progress	Vice-Provost (Equity, Diversity and Inclusion), Deputy Provost (Academic), Human Resources, Health, Safety and Environment, Dean of Students, colleges and faculties

NOTES

A number of initiatives have been launched with the intent of improving accountability measures across the discrimination and harassment/interpersonal harm areas. This includes the establishment of student care coordinators in DoS, exploration of restorative processes as an alternative to formal complaints, the launch of the Options Navigations Network to address options in response to Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (with plans to scale up to include other forms of interpersonal/psycho-social harm such as racism and anti-Black discrimination) and other pathways to address individual options and modifications and to chart systemic concerns.

Recommendations/Comments: This work will flow into the revisions of the Discrimination and Harassment policy and procedures currently underway.



CALL TO ACTION ITEM 5	STATUS	ACCOUNTABILITY
Provide opportunities for Black students (and other racialized groups) to participate on committees working towards addressing racial-inequities at the U of A, for example the EDI Taskforce.	Needs review	Vice-Provost (Equity, Diversity and Inclusion), Dean of Students, governance, colleges and faculties

NOTES

Committees across the institution have begun assessing their approach to membership, including most notably GFC and other governance bodies. This is especially important for EDI Leads, governance committees and faculties to ensure representation and participation of Black voices, especially students. There has been no systematic approach.

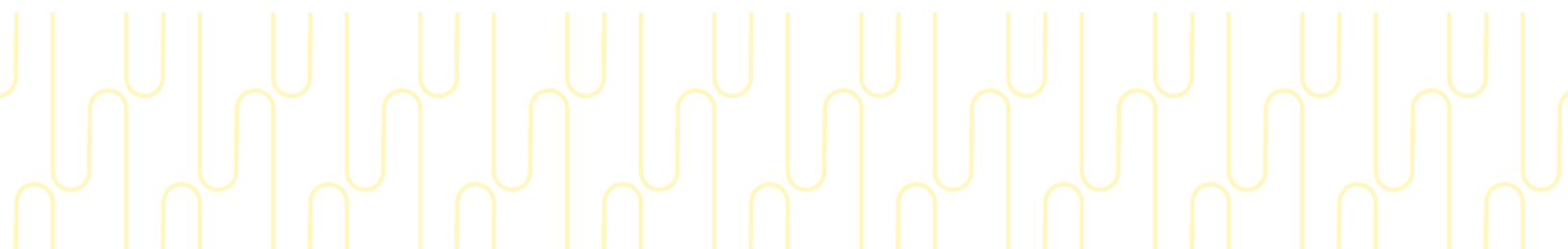
Recommendations/Comments: The accountability holders for this item need to be reviewed. Training for committee chairs and governance coordinators needs to address Black methodologies and ways of doing, and should also include deliberate conversation as to how to ensure committees are shaped to ensure the full participation of Black student members as whole people, not as representatives of Blackness. Further, the work being undertaken by Black students (and faculty) should be recognized through formal means. Finally, it should be recognized that any committee that addresses and/or has an impact on Black students must include Black student voices, in the spirit of “nothing about us without us.” A potential to address this will be an “Equity Policy” in UAPPOL, currently under consideration through the integrated EDI action planning process.

CALL TO ACTION ITEM 6	STATUS	ACCOUNTABILITY
Dedicate staff and resources to Black student advancement aimed at securing resources for prospective and current Black students to improve recruitment and retention. Intentionally include student groups such as BSA, BMSA, BGSA, etc., in recruitment outreach efforts.	Needs review	Office of the Registrar, Dean of Students, Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies, University of Alberta International, Vice-Provost (Equity, Diversity and Inclusion), Deputy Provost (Student Experience), colleges and faculties

NOTES

There are a number of factors that go into and impact recruitment and retention. Undergraduate recruitment activities through the Registrar’s Office have included taking steps toward bringing more data into activities, such as aligning the EDI Census Data for better understanding of student populations, as well as offering workshops to organizations focussing on Black youth. Retention activities for all students as well as targeted recruitment of graduate and professional students is managed at the program level and therefore securing or allocating resources is in the hands of faculties and departments. Some programs (i.e. Faculty of Medicine, Faculty of Law), have implemented or are exploring changes to admissions practices. But recruitment and retention also requires initiatives to address funding as well as inclusion and belonging. While not as a direct response to this item, in 2022 the Dean of Students office appointed a Student EDI Coordinator who has offered a number of engagement sessions for Black students, notably an exploration of Black student leadership challenges and a Black student and faculty mixer. These intentional community-building activities for Black students will likely have a positive impact on retention.

Recommendations/Comments: There is more activity on this item at the faculty and program level than is captured here (some of these initiatives Black led, such as the [ELITE Program](#)). There is great potential for continued engagement with the Registrar’s Office along with the Offices of Education in the Colleges, the DoS and GPS to explore initiatives and coordination across the university. Further, there is a recognition that diverse representation of Black and other racialized students should be part of discussions in the Integrated Enrolment Growth plan.



CALL TO ACTION ITEM 7	STATUS	ACCOUNTABILITY
Allocate resources to recruit mental health providers that are knowledgeable in mental health needs of Black students (and other racialized groups).	On track	Dean of Students

NOTES

This priority area for the Dean of Students Office was advanced as planned. All Health and Wellness Services Mental Health Teams have completed online training focused on incorporating evidence-informed EDI practices into recruitment processes, including postings, committee membership and question design along with working with HR to increase diversity in recruitment pools. These processes have had a positive impact, along with a formal commitment to build out the diversity of the Counseling and Clinical Services team. This includes hiring clinicians with diverse gender and sexual identities, diverse cultural backgrounds and those who identify as Black and/or racialized. Two most recent CCS clinician hires are visible minorities (totalling four of 16 full-time continuing clinicians). The last three hires in the Wellness Support Team have been visible minorities (totalling three of four full time continuing social workers). The last office staff hire in the Sexual Assault Centre was a visible minority (totalling two of four full time continuing office staff members).

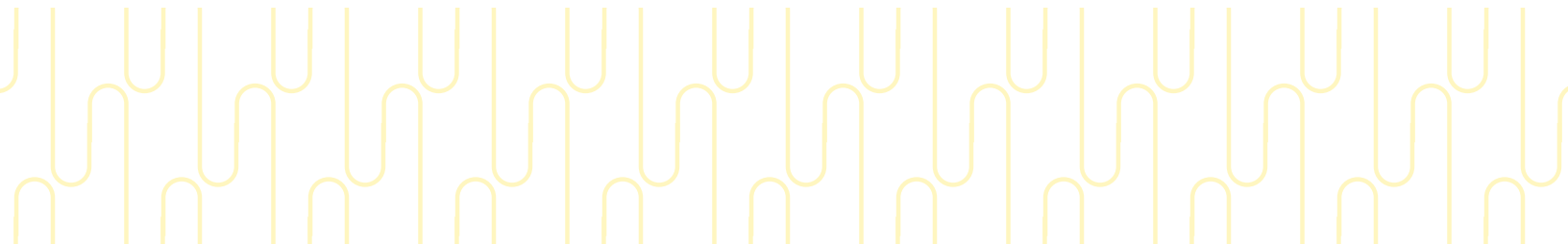
Recommendations/Comments: Efforts will continue, particularly through the mandate that the Student Experience Action Plan offers and should be replicated across other student service units in faculties.

CALL TO ACTION ITEM 8	STATUS	ACCOUNTABILITY
Initiate a plan to offer an interdisciplinary Black studies program that would make the U of A a leader in offering the only Black studies program in all of Canada, in addition to attracting and retaining diverse and talented students and faculty from across Canada and the world.	In progress	Vice-Provost (Academic), Vice-Provost (Equity, Diversity and Inclusion), college deans

NOTES

President Flanagan connected with the Interim Dean of Arts on Sept. 8, 2020, who in turn engaged members of the Black Faculty Collective to explore possibilities of a Black Studies Program. The Dean of Education joined these conversations. The Black Faculty Collective determined that the capacity for a program was not available at the time, but was interested in exploring a Black Studies certificate. Oversight for the initiative was passed to the VPEDI, who collaborated with the Dean of Education to build a steering committee of members from the Black Faculty Collective with the goal of working toward a cross-institutional Black Studies Certificate as an embedded undergraduate certificate. The development was transferred to the College of SSH starting Fall 2023.

Recommendations/Comments: Progress has continued toward a launch in 2024, with the goal of developing a non-credit micro-credential certificate with the OVPEDI alongside.



CALL TO ACTION ITEM 9	STATUS	ACCOUNTABILITY
Prioritize the importance of building relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, faculty and staff at the U of A.	Needs review	Named: Black students' Collective Recommended: Black students' collective, DoS, UAI, VPIPR, VPEDI

NOTES

The Black students' collective met with Assistant Dean Shana Dion to explore the building of relationships and connections.

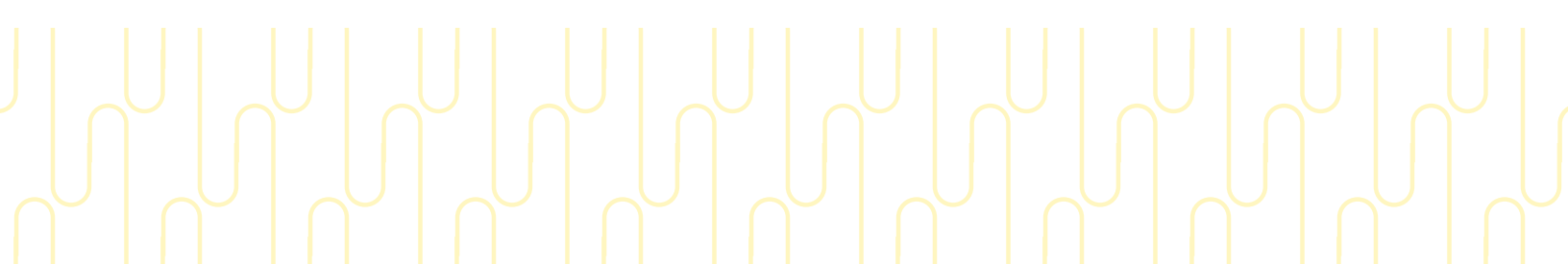
Recommendations/Comments: This item will remain a priority, particularly within the commitments laid out in [Braiding Past, Present and Future](#). Formal and informal mechanisms for supporting the further building of these relationships should be explored with an emphasis on learning.

CALL TO ACTION ITEM 10	STATUS	ACCOUNTABILITY
University-wide announcement on calls to action discussed today.	On track	Black Students' Collective, Dean of Students, University of Alberta International Vice-Provost (Indigenous Programming and Research), Vice-Provost (Equity, Diversity and Inclusion)

NOTES

The calls to action were announced in [The Quad](#) in the context of Black History Month in February 2021.

Recommendations/Comments: Moving forward, reporting mechanisms will be built into actions identified as priority areas as well as mechanisms for communicating to the community.



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