

SGPS EQUITY STRATEGIC DRAFT PLAN

Prepared by: the SGPS Equity Issues Standing Committee

INTRODUCTION

Queen's University has identified one of its priorities as "strengthening the student learning experience"¹, centered on the goal of a transformative learning experience for all Queen's students. In order to truly ensure this experience, the institution needs to lay the foundation for a collegial culture in which everyone can succeed. The Society of Graduate and Professional Students is one of the pillars supporting this foundation, and as such, must be guided by principles that foster equity, diversity and inclusiveness. Creating this culture demands engagement from all of us, and we must be acutely conscious of the dimensions of exclusion and marginalization that permeate our Society, whether intentional or not. The purpose of this Equity Plan is to hold the SGPS accountable for change, focusing on both institutional mechanisms like governance and data collection, as well as cultural mechanisms like orientation and educational engagement to support an equitable, inclusive and diverse university.

Review of existing policies:

- Narrow conception of equity principles (P12.1)

The current statement of equity principles focuses on non-discrimination and non-harassment these legalistic, and thus overly narrow principles on which to understand equity concerns. While there is reference to 'systemic' issues, but these are taken to be a flag for unintentional harassment or discrimination, rather than structural, institutional, or cultural obstacles to greater equity. Inclusivity, accessibility, and sustainability are further concepts referenced in the policy, but no explanation is offered there.

- Lack of clear accountability for equity concerns

¹ <http://www.queensu.ca/principal/priorities>

The standing policy does not outline clear enough responsibilities and accountabilities for addressing equity concerns and carrying out equity advancing projects. An updated policy would be sure to accompany any goal, project, or directive with who exactly is accountable for carrying it out.

- Non-compliance with equity procedures as outlined in P12

It is unclear whether the SGPS currently fulfills its policy requirements, especially in regards to the Ethical Purchasing directive (P.12.2), anti-oppression training (P12.1.2), and the Equity Climate Survey (P12.3). Clear accountability needs to be identified for these projects, but given the resource demands they place on committees and executive, it must first be made clear how they support the advancement of equity.

- Proliferation of committees

Policy suggests that a number of special committee are to be set-up to deal with individual equity concerns. This approach is administratively over-burdensome and unnecessary. The Equity Issues Standing Committee should be the central hub for equity concerns, and can be split into sub-committees as its Chair sees fit.

A. CONCEPTS, TERMS, PRINCIPLES

The intent of a statement of concepts, terms and principles is to create a shared understanding within the SGPS of the many ways in which equity concerns can be voiced by equity seeking groups. The SGPS membership shares the responsibility of being familiar with the language of equity, as to build understanding and be better receptive to equity concerns. Ultimately, equity seeking groups create and use their own discourse to advance their ends, and thus the list offered here is not exhaustive, and is open to revision based on feedback from equity seeking groups.

Inequity - the way in which groups or individuals relate to one another falls short of some moral standard that is commonly held, or should be commonly held.

Legal and interpersonal standards

Discrimination - 'not individually assessing the unique merits, capacities and circumstances of a person; instead, making stereotypical assumptions based on a person's presumed traits; having the impact of excluding persons, denying benefits or imposing burdens.'²

Harassment - 'engaging in a course of vexatious comment or conduct against a worker in a workplace that is known or ought reasonably to be known to be unwelcome'³

Employment equity - Employment equity principles

Requires employers to engage in proactive employment practices to increase the representation of four designated groups: women, people with disabilities, Aboriginal peoples, and visible minorities. The Act states that "employment equity means more than treating persons the same way but also requires special measures and the accommodation of differences."⁴

Structural, systemic, institutional or inter-group standards

Systemic or structural - as contrasted with interpersonal interactions, systemic or structural interactions have their impacts on individuals mediated through rules, procedures, laws, institutions, social and cultural norms, the built environment, or other non-personal systems or structures. The thought behind a broadened view of equity that includes systemic or structural concerns is that not all equity problems can be traced back to the failings of an intentional agent in a specific circumstance. Instead, to understand problems of equity, we need to look beyond inequitable treatment on the part of an identifiable individual, and toward the systemic or structural barriers that create an inequitable *environment*.

Oppression - "the experience of oppressed people is that the living of one's life is confined and shaped by forces and barriers which are not accidental or occasional and hence avoidable, but are systematically related to each other in such a way as to catch one between and among them and restrict

² [Ontario Human Rights Commission](#)

³ [Bill 168](#), Subsection 1

⁴ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Employment_equity_\(Canada\)#cite_note-federal-ee-website-1](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Employment_equity_(Canada)#cite_note-federal-ee-website-1) (through EA Act)

or penalize motion in any direction. It is the experience of being caged in: All avenues, in every direction, are blocked or booby trapped.”⁵

Privilege - unearned benefits conferred automatically and systematically to individuals in virtue of their perceived or actual membership in dominant groups; benefits that those not included in the dominant group have to earn. Privilege is almost always unjustifiable, likely invisible to those who hold it, and has purchase across a wide variety of circumstances and contexts.⁶

Inclusivity - welcoming, appreciating and using our unique differences – strengths, talents, weaknesses and frailties – in a way that shows respect for the individual and ultimately creates a dynamic multi-dimensional organization. As in inclusive design: taking into account differences among individuals and groups when designing something, to avoid creating barriers. Inclusive design can apply to systems, facilities, programs, policies, services, education, etc.

Diversity - a quality of groups whose membership exhibits a heterogeneity of the many different and unique personal characteristics that distinguish us as individuals and groups. These include but are not limited to: age, sex, gender, race, ethnicity, physical and intellectual ability, class, creed, religion, sexual orientation, educational background and expertise.⁷

Integrated - Integrated communities include membership from diverse groups who participate in the life of the community as equals. The relationships between members of integrated communities are friendly, cooperative, at ease, and trustful, rather than awkward, anxious, alienating or hostile.

Disadvantage - a person or group is disadvantaged when compared to others, they enjoy less of, or have reduced access to, some important good. Such goods might include income and wealth, opportunities, rights and freedom, or social respect.

⁵ Frye, Marilyn. “Oppression” *Gender Basics: Feminist Perspectives on Women and Men* 2nd edition. Edited by Anne Minas. Wadsworth 2000.

⁶ Bailey, Alison. "Privilege: Expanding on Marilyn Frye's "Oppression"." *Journal of Social Philosophy* 29.3 (1998): 108-110.

⁷<http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/teaching-human-rights-ontario-guide-ontario-schools/appendix-1-glossary-human-rights-terms>

Accessibility - the degree to which persons with disabilities can access a device, service or environment without barriers. Accessibility is also a process - it is the proactive identification, removal and prevention of barriers to persons with disabilities.⁸

Accommodation - different from accessibility. It is a reactive and individualized adaptation or adjustment made to provide a person with a disability with equitable and non-discriminatory opportunities for participation.⁹

Marginalized - a group is marginalized when they are subject to an ongoing process of marginalization that is supported by flawed norms, conventions, or institutions that unjustifiably disadvantages them in a way that no individual supporting those norms and institutions actually intends. Disadvantage through marginalization need not be the result of overtly discriminating practices undertaken by equity-hostile or equity-dismissing individuals, but is rather the result of unconscious bias or by-standing inaction on equity issues that upholds structures of disadvantage.

Intersectionality - holds that the many axis of oppression that create structural disadvantage, such as race, gender and class, are interlocking, overlapping, or mutually reinforcing. Analyses that attempt to isolate and focus on any one axis are thus incomplete, and obscure our understanding of the simultaneous operation of intersectional systems of oppression.

Social Justice - a state of society that is the positive goal of equity seeking groups. Justice is a property of institutions of the right moral kind. Social Justice obtains when institutions are just, and the groups and people that participate in them have remedied the moral failings found in discriminatory, marginalizing, oppressive, and otherwise inequitable practices.

⁸ Queen's Equity Office, [Accessible Customer Service Online Training](#), Module 1, Accessibility Terminology

⁹ Ibid.

ACTIONABLE RECOMMENDATIONS

A. ORIENTATION

1. Include a statement of commitment to be acknowledged by students as part of their registration with the SGPS orientation week events – include the Human Rights Office on this to help design this statement. Orientation Week gives SGPS the opportunity to introduce incoming members to our student code of ethics and issues of equity, anti-oppression and diversity; we must emphasize the importance of sensitivity to these issues as students prepare for their first week at Queen's
2. Strengthen the existing orientation week feedback system to address students' equity, diversity, and inclusivity concerns
3. Task VP Campaigns and Community with reviewing orientation feedback and compiling the information into a report to Council members to ensure that SGPS is held accountable to demonstrating respectful inclusion of the wide range of students and their interests
4. Include equity-related resources in graduate goody bag and incorporate an information session disseminated by the Equity and Diversity Commissioner or a member of the Equity Issues Standing Committee during the orientation breakfast. Equity-related resources includes information (i.e. anti-oppression training, cultural competency workshops, bystander intervention, Positive Space, Human Rights and Equity Office) for equity-minded students who wish to get involved or seek engagement with governance bodies/committees dedicated to equity, oppression etc., in addition to information outlining resources for those who require support services if/when they experience oppression on campus

B. EDUCATIONAL ENGAGEMENT

1. Mandatory anti-oppression, intercultural competency, and diversity training for SGPS employees, staff and student advisors * find out current rate of completion from Andrea, specify what kind of training and prioritize which one
2. Establish and support a lecture series in coordination with council representatives that recognizes and engages equity-related issues, including but not limited to systemic racism, sexism, misogyny, heterosexism, colonialism, ageism, discrimination and other axes of oppression. These can be brown bag or catered seminars that bring in academic leaders as well

as student panels to keep the conversation going year-round rather than in response to particular events on campus.

Advocacy on the part of the VP Campaigns and Community, toward the ends of:

3. Training to build cultural awareness and inclusiveness skills among staff, students, faculty and leaders (include the students in something they can access but is not necessarily mandatory)¹⁰
4. Recruit and financially support faculty who want to research on issues such as diversity, equity and inclusion.¹¹ Training faculty on inclusive teaching methods
5. Identify ways to expand students' options for courses and co-curricular experiences which deepen their understanding of equity and diversity issues and that are appropriate to their field of study. (Eg. Modifying existing courses and creating new courses, or extracurricular experiences; Identifying new resources needed to sustain such courses, including the funding of teaching assistantships.)¹² Integrate these initiatives into degree requirements, so that they are not simply extra work.

C. GOVERNANCE

1. Task the Equity Issues Standing Committee with:
 - a. Overseeing the implementation of this Strategic Plan and to ensure accountability
 - b. Acting as a point of contact, and information resource for the equity concerns of SGPS members
 - c. Communicating campus wide support services to SGPS membership
 - d. Facilitate communication between the equity representatives and/or organizers at the department level (i.e. within Graduate Student Associations). This includes sharing best practices, events, coordinating advocacy at the University Administrative level (as undertaken by the VPCC) with advocacy at the department level (as undertaken by the GSA's). Explore the creation of an Equity Caucus, a meeting of equity concerned members from various GSA's, to accomplish this.

¹⁰ <https://diversity.umich.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/executive-summary.pdf>

¹¹ *ibid.*

¹² <http://diversityatubc.sites.olt.ubc.ca/files/2010/11/valuingdifference1.pdf>

2. Review visual art displays across SGPS community and in event rooms to consider a plan for acquiring new work that supports a more inclusive visual environment
3. Ensure Council Speaker includes acknowledgement statement [that recognizes Queen's sits on the traditional lands of the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe peoples] on every Council Agenda, and during all Council meetings
4. Mandate SGPS staff, Executive and Commissioner employees to attach land acknowledgement to all email communications as per recommendations of the Queen's Truth and Reconciliation report
5. Task the Speaker with ensuring that Council meeting provide an inclusive, equitable space where diverse voices can be heard.
6. Add a limited number (e.g. 5) of council seating for equity-seeking groups. Allow groups to self-identify and elect representatives to these seats, as in the standing Recognized Group procedure in B.4.2. Explore the addition of more seats should the need arise.
7. The following changes to the Society of Graduate and Professional Students Bylaws and Policies:

P.12 EQUITY

12.1 SGPS Equity Policy

Baseline: Statement of equity principles; primarily about non-harassment and non-discrimination.

Recommendations: This part of the policy should be updated with the statement of equity principles outlined in 'CONCEPTS, TERMS, PRINCIPLES'. Many of the hyperlinks to external policy statements are broken and need to be updated.

12.1.1 Educational Policy

Baseline: a statement on promotion of educational equity. The only specific reference is to work with Senate Education Equity & Diversity Committee.

Recommendations: Update in accordance with 'EDUCATIONAL ENGAGEMENT'.

P.12.1.2 Employment Equity

Baseline: commitment to employment equity. Anti-oppression training mandated (not clear for whom, possibly everyone). Equity statement to be included in all hiring messaging stated.

Recommendations: Retain commitment. Provide a clearer statement of the intent and implementation of employment related equity training like anti-oppression. Remove reference to P.3.7.1 which does not exist.

P.12.1.3 Accessibility

Baseline: commitment to accessibility as an equity concern

Recommendations: Move accessibility into the statement of equity principles at the start of the policy.

P.12.1.4 Implementation

Baseline: Claims that all SGPS members are responsible for implementing the Equity Policy

Recommendations: Surely all SGPS members should be committed to equity principles and their implementation in some form. But specific responsibilities need to be identified, with specific Equity projects outlined in policy being part of the work portfolio of SGPS employees. This will hopefully remedy non-compliance with parts of the policy e.g. 12.3 climate survey, 12.1.2 anti-oppression training. Typo P10.6 should be P12.3

P.12.2 Ethical Purchasing

Baseline: A very long and complicated ethical purchasing policy. Its primary concern seems to be that the SGPS not support unethical practices or products in relations with external business services or products. Contracts with suppliers are to have equity related commitments. The SGPS is to collaborate with the broader Queen's and Kingston community to promote ethical purchasing. Executive Director and VP Finance are responsible for ensuring compliance (4f). Requires annual review.

Recommendation: First need to ask whether this policy is actually observed. If not, then we need to ask how it's admirable intent - a widened scope for SGPS equity concerns - can be maintained while making it practicable and relevant.

P.12.3 SGPS Equity Climate Survey

Baseline: This part of the policy details an annual climate survey to be undertaken by the Equity Climate Survey Committee.

Recommendations: This part of the policy does not seem to be followed. As outlined in 'DATA COLLECTION AND RESOURCES', data collection is one of the main actionable focuses of this equity plan. A specific member of the executive or staff need to be identified as responsible for undertaking and managing this data collection project. The requirements for committee membership seem to be overly specific, and should be relaxed. More information needs to be offered as to how the data collected will be used toward the advancement of equity concerns. In this sense, a climate survey might not be the best description for this project. Rather, this part of the policy can detail how other actionable equity projects are to be data-driven, and have access to data support services. The Equity Climate Survey Committee's duties should be subsumed under the Equity Issues Standing Committee.

P.12.4 Accessibility Policy

Baseline: Offers a definition of disability and barrier concerns. States a commitment to work in concert with AODA act (provincial law) and Queen's accessibility policy 'to improve barriers to the success an inclusion of its members'. Requires Accessible Customer Service Training for all SGPS employees. Calls for a committee (separate from the Equity Standing Committee and Equity Climate Survey Committee) to implement this part of the Equity policy. Calls for the website to conform to WCAG 2.0 level A accessibility standards.

Recommendations: Definition of accessibility terms should be moved to 12.1. Would be good to add contrast between accessible and accommodating. Guidelines generally look fine and should be kept. Employee training needs to be properly enforced, and a specific SGPS staff members should be responsible for doing so. No additional committee for accessibility is needed. Accessibility issues should be handled by the Equity issues standing committee, who should be tasked with consulting with members with accessibility concerns.

[END]

Cross-References:

- P.1.7.g.3 - organizers of event or projects must abide by equity policy
- P.2.2.2.l - hiring of commissioners and coordinators to accord with equity policy
- P.2.2.3, b.2 and c - social commission to ensure events are equitable; role and responsibility of equity commissioner
- P.3.1.2.c/f - one member of hiring committee deemed responsible for employment equity concerns; equity statement required for job postings
- P.3.4.1.a - Equity Commissioner to be on hiring committee for student advisors
- P.6.1 - role of Equity Commissioner with respect to SGPS awards.
- P.8.2.3 - Equity Issues Standing Committee detailed. To understand equity issues as defined in equity policy
- P.8.2.6.b.2 - Equity Commissioner on Social Events Standing Committee
- P.8.2.9.c.7 - Equity Commissioner on Strategic Planning Standing Committee.
- P.8.2.10 - Equity Commissioner on Human Resources Standing Committee.
- P.13.3.c.4 - equity concerns in sponsorship agreements
- P.14.3.f - equity concerns in strategic planning
- P.17.1.1.d - Passing reference to Equity Policy as complementary procedure for addressing harassment
- P.18.5 - Use of space to accord with Equity Principles, as decided by commissioner.

D. DATA COLLECTION AND RESOURCES

- Require SGPS to collect and administer diversity self-identification and feedback survey on an annual basis, reporting results publicly. Data collected must include racialization, sex, indigeneity, disability, queer, and working class backgrounds, as well as domestic versus international student backgrounds.
- SGPS Council should support the development of a resource network across faculties to explore feedback of course content in regards to diversity of curriculum and perspectives. An annual report should be publicized in partnership with SGS to serve as an accountability tool to faculty members - as Queen's HR should be focused on attracting diverse faculty/staff/students [and the development of

processes that value diversity, equity and inclusion-related contributions in faculty evaluations and tenure reviews]¹³

iii. SGPS should lend more support, financial and otherwise, to existing inclusivity and anti-oppression campaigns as well as accessibility initiatives i.e. QCARED (Queen's Committee Against Racial and Ethnic Discrimination) and QFADS (Queen's Facility Accessibility Design Standards)

iii. Increase visibility of access to the emergency fund bursary on the SGPS website as well as outlining Graduate funding opportunities (scholarships/bursaries) to mitigate financial burden for students in need

¹³ <https://diversity.umich.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/executive-summary.pdf>