



ADVANCING BLACK INCLUSION AND ADDRESSING ANTI-BLACK RACISM IN THE FACULTY OF EDUCATION

**A REFLECTION ON PROGRESS, CHALLENGES, AND
OPPORTUNITIES**

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Authors

Dr. Sarah Barrett, *Associate Professor & Special Advisor to the Dean on Black Inclusion and Anti-Black Racism*

Nicola M. Dove, *Doctoral Candidate & Research Assistant to the Special Advisor*

Gratitude and acknowledgements

Many of the Black members of our Faculty Community—including the Student Advisory Group to the Special Advisor to the Dean on Black Inclusion and Anti-Black Racism, along with alumni, staff, and faculty— have taken the time to review the content of this report and provide feedback. Special thanks to them for their on-going support and council.

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LAND AND ANCESTRAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

York University recognizes that many Indigenous Nations have long standing relationships with the territories upon which York University campuses are located that precede the establishment of York University. York University acknowledges its presence on the traditional territory of many Indigenous Nations. The area known as Tkaronto has been care taken by the Anishinabek Nation, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, and the Wendat. It is now home to many First Nation, Inuit, and Métis communities. We acknowledge the current treaty holders, the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. This territory is subject of the Dish with One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement to peaceably share and care for the Great Lakes region.¹

We acknowledge our African ancestors, many of whom were forcibly and violently displaced and exploited in the transatlantic slave trade and whose stolen labour was the basis for a large proportion of our society's current wealth. Descendants of our ancestors continue to be inflicted by the remnants of slavery and colonialism to this day in the form of systemic and individual racism. Further, we acknowledge the histories and atrocities, hidden and erased, that we may never come to know yet continue to affect our daily lives. We acknowledge the visible and invisible labour of individuals committed to addressing racism and doing the meaningful and generative work of moving us closer to eradicating racism. We recognize the difficulty and toll of this work on all aspects of health and well-being. We are forever indebted to individuals who toil to make possible a brighter future for us all.

¹ [Indigenous Nations Land Acknowledgement | York University](#)

PREAMBLE

A message from the Special Advisor to the Dean on Black Inclusion and Anti-Black Racism (2021-2022)

It is an honour to serve in this position at the recommendation of the 2020-2021 Anti-Black Racism committee. As part of my role, I have met with committees of Faculty Council and consulted with students, staff, and faculty from both within our Faculty and within the larger university. From this, I have learned a great deal about the current state of affairs with respect to Black Inclusion and the possibilities for improvement.

My primary goals for this report are to both provide a snapshot of the ways in which our Faculty has worked to address issues related to Black Inclusion and Anti-Black Racism and also create a record of what the Black members of our Faculty's community identify as next steps. What they are saying is that the Faculty should be a space where Black lives are valued; Black joy should be the standard rather than the exception; Black voices should be heard, honoured, nurtured, and celebrated throughout the year; and Black presence should be reflected and represented in Faculty space.

As a Faculty Community, we have done a great deal but there is much more to be done as we create policies, procedures, events, and spaces that reflect our stated intentions with respect to social justice and inclusion.

This report provides an opportunity to reflect on how far we have come in fulfilling this vision and how far we still need to go.

Sarah Barrett
June 2022

CONTEXT AND APPROACH



In the wake of the murder of George Floyd, when institutions began to consider their role in structural racism, the undergraduate students in our Faculty of Education (represented by their Faculty of Education Students' Association – FESA – President) requested that our Faculty do something about the ongoing exclusion and racism that Black students continued to endure. At that time, in June 2020, the Faculty of Education (through Faculty Council) committed to advancing their efforts to enhance Black Inclusion and combat Anti-Black Racism.

In this report, we detail the current and ongoing actions taken to advance Black inclusion and address Anti-Black Racism in the Faculty and provide recommendations for further advancing this work.

We gathered information about efforts our Faculty is making to enhance Black Inclusion and address Anti-Black racism through (1) an environmental scan of current Faculty programs and (2) consulting with the Anti-Black Racism committee, which has gathered information from Faculty Council committees about their efforts in this area. Thus, this report does not reflect the research projects of individual faculty members or the content of individual courses.

To ensure that this report reflects the ways in which Black² members of our Faculty community have experienced these efforts, we have

- hosted a **Focus Group Engagement Session** to which alumni from our Faculty were invited to share ideas and engage in a generative conversation that would inform and guide actions around advancing the inclusion of Black students and addressing Anti-Black Racism in our Faculty.
- established a **Student Advisory Group** to amplify the voices of Black students in our Faculty and leverage their insights and expertise to guide Faculty decisions and approaches to advancing the inclusion of Black students and eradicate Anti-Black Racism in the Faculty of Education.
- engaged **faculty and staff** about their vision of Black Inclusion.
- created opportunities for the Student Advisory Group, and Black faculty and staff to review and comment on the main content of the report, including providing feedback on the impact of the initiatives and programs as well as prioritizing and critiquing recommendations.



² We use the term “Black” to refer broadly to diverse groups comprised of individuals who identify as African, Caribbean, and Black (ACB).

York University signaled its commitment to combating Anti-Black Racism by developing two policy documents: [Addressing Anti-Black Racism](#) and [Action Plan on Black Inclusion](#). Simultaneously, York University, along with many universities across Canada, signed the [Scarborough Charter](#) in 2021. For the purposes of this report, we are using the Scarborough Charter to frame our analysis. We do this because its articulation of the experience of Black Inclusion—Black flourishing, inclusive excellence, mutuality, and accountability—resonates with us. Each aspect of Black Inclusion is described in detail in the Charter. What follows are questions that each one implies.



Black Flourishing

What factors propel and prevent students, staff, and faculty from thriving in the Faculty at all stages of study and career?



Inclusive excellence

How has the Faculty advanced the inclusion of Black students, staff, and faculty and in what areas are improvements needed?



Mutuality

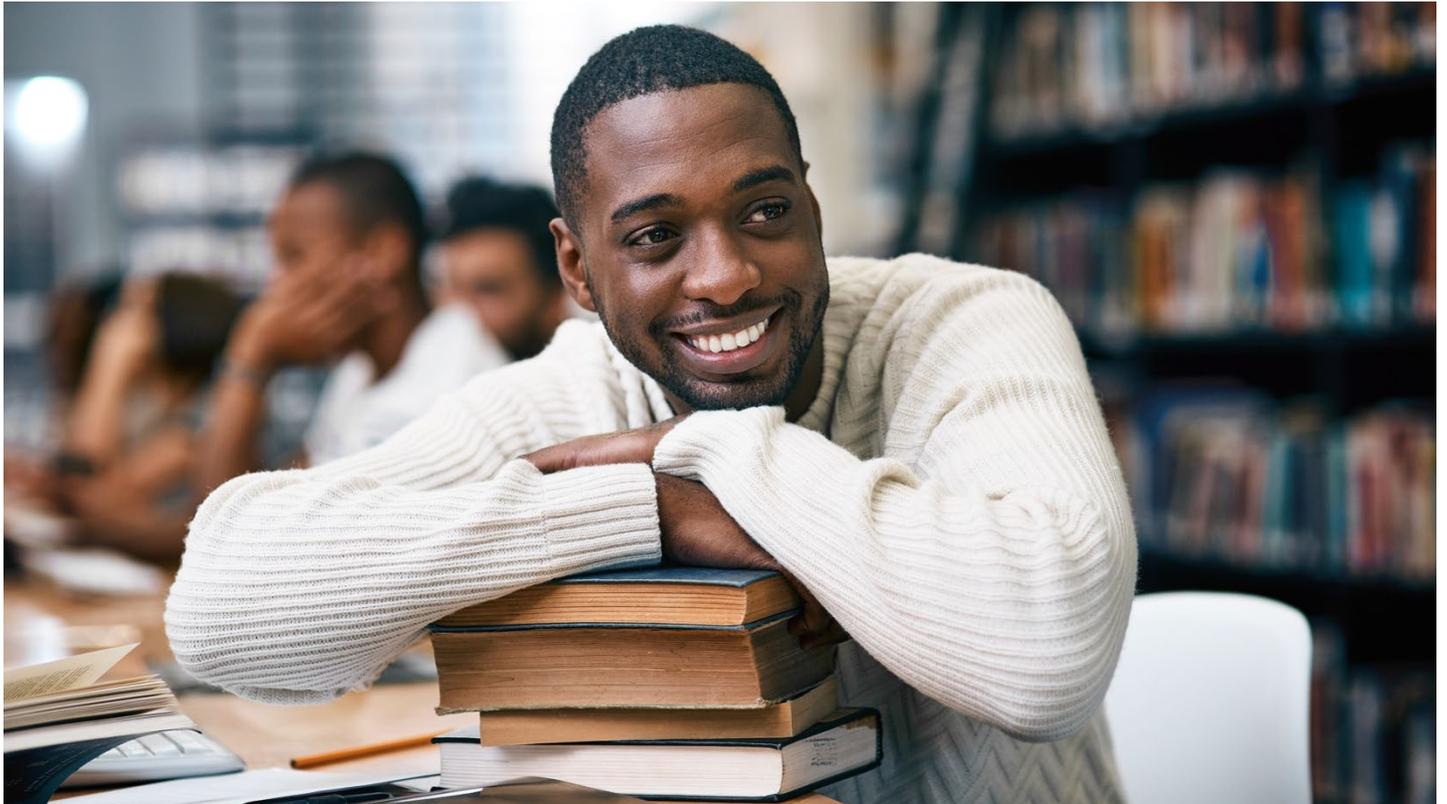
What does engagement look like in the Faculty and how can the thoughts, ideas, and concerns shared be mobilized to improve the within-faculty experiences of Black students, staff, and faculty?



Accountability

What mechanisms are in place to ensure Anti-Black Racism is being addressed and the inclusion of Black students, staff, and faculty is being advanced and how can they be improved?

PRE-EXISTING PROGRAMS AND ENGAGEMENTS



Although the specific focus on Black Inclusion and Anti-Black Racism is new, we note pre-existing programs and engagements here.

Research

- The activities of the Jean Augustine Chair in Education, Community and Diaspora focus on advancing equity, inclusion and community engagement and aim to advance the inclusion of Black students.

Teaching and Learning

- Borderless Higher Education for Refugees (BHER) is a program where all students are Black and residents of refugee camps in Dadaab (95-98% are from Somalia; 3-5% are from Ethiopia, Eritrea, South Sudan, Rwanda, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Uganda).
- BEHR courses are designed to create space for interactions and sharing of ideas between cohorts enrolled locally and internationally; in many graduate and undergraduate courses, BHER students are enrolled along with students in Toronto.
- BHER encourages faculty members and course directors to rethink inclusion (e.g., faculty and course directors have had to ask themselves: how do I take this course that I taught in Toronto and make it interesting, relevant, and responsive to forcibly displaced students encamped in Kenya? This prompts them to search for African-focused scholarship and incorporate this scholarship in their courses).

Community Outreach

- The *Getting to Know YU* program is not designed to specifically serve Black students, but many are enrolled.
- Programs designed to introduce local elementary and secondary students to the campus (including *Success Beyond Limits*, *Readers to Leaders*, *Advanced Credit Experience*) are also not designed specifically for Black students but many take part.
- The Faculty of Education Summer Institute (FESI) engages faculty members and teachers from local school boards, community groups, and students on issues related to equity and inclusion.
- FESI aims for representation through the participation of Black panelists and approaching topics around the experiences of Black people in a way that celebrates rather than pathologizes.
- The Jean Augustine Chair has connected with *Getting to Know YU* to explore the possibility of extending its focus to specifically engage Black students.



NEW PROGRAMS AND ENGAGEMENTS



Since 2020, various initiatives have been enacted or proposed to enhance Black Inclusion. We describe them here.

Governance

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) is now part of the mandate of all committees of Faculty Council. They have reported various initiatives to support Black Inclusion and address anti-Black racism:

- Our graduate program is working to implement anti-bias file reading in graduate awards and admissions and is considering a similar approach to the Access program that is used for Bachelor of Education (BEd) admissions.
- The Associate Dean, Academic and a representative from each of FESA (undergraduate students) and YGSE (York Graduate Students in Education) sit on the Anti-Black Racism committee.
- Committee on Undergraduate Admissions, Awards and Academic Standards (CUAAAS) is making connections with local schools and revising language on the website to be more accessible to prospective students.
- The Anti-Black Racism Committee (ABR) is consulting with the Associate Dean, Academic about supporting Teaching Assistants (TAs) who are facilitating difficult conversations in their tutorials.
- The Committee on Faculty Research, Awards, and Grants (CFRAG) is doing an audit on past nominations and awards to see if representation is appropriate.
- The Committee on Petitions, Appeal, and Research Ethics (PARE) is re-framing the language of petitions and awards to ensure that race and anti-racism are explicitly considered.

Faculty Programs and Engagements

- The Undergraduate Program Director (UPD) is working towards creating spaces for Black teacher candidates to talk about their experiences in their education and placements and around the provision of mentorship.
- For professional development, the Faculty ran the *365: Black Canadian Curriculum workshop* (for teacher candidates) and a faculty/doctoral reading group for Sarah Ahmed's book, *Complaint!*
- The Faculty is supporting a mentorship program for undergraduate students that could combat the isolation that Black students might feel.
- The Graduate Program has a Diploma in Education in Urban Environments and is considering proposing a Diploma aimed at Anti-Black Racism in Education.
- The Associate Dean, Research has made highlighting the research of diverse faculty members a priority.

The Special Advisor Role

- Established a Student Advisory Group to advise the Advisor on issues relating to their experiences (e.g., priorities, mentorship, security services review, website changes).
- Established lines of communication with Black faculty and staff.
- Worked with University Librarians to establish curriculum and professional development resources for instructors (through research guides and keywords), and revise acquisition strategies (e.g., connecting to Black owned vendors, etc.).
- Met with committees of Faculty Council and Faculty administrators to give advice on the topic of Black Inclusion.



RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS



Black faculty, students, and staff have reviewed the initiatives listed above. The recommendations listed below emerged from their feedback.

Key recommendations

Black Flourishing: Cultivate Faculty spaces in which Black students, faculty and staff feel valued and respected

- Centre and honour the lives and experiences of Black members of our community in explicit ways.
- Offer Black students, faculty, and staff the option to decline engagement in issues about race and racism without reproach. Identify the needs of prospective and current Black students, from pre-admission to conferment, and devise strategies to meet them.
- Prepare faculty and staff (regardless of race) to mentor Black students effectively, at all stages of their academic journeys.
- Be attuned to the culture³ cultivated within the Faculty, and how that culture is impacting Black students, faculty, and staff.

³ We recognize culture to be multi-layered and multi-dimensional—not easily reduced to simple descriptions but central to the experiences of all members of our Faculty community.

Inclusive excellence: Strengthen faculty, staff, and student engagement

- Engage Black research and scholarship within the undergraduate curriculum and graduate studies.
- Address gaps in Black representation particularly multiple dimensions of representation in the Faculty (including, for example, leadership and administration, instructors, curriculum, art).
- Build a research culture that honours the many theoretical, pedagogical, and cultural orientations of Black scholars, community constituencies, and research participants.
- Programmatically support means to create and sustain time and space for collegial discussion and action to address the knowledge/power assumptions of our research culture (infrastructure funding, research grant-writing support, community-facing projects, speakers series, etc.).
- Leverage Faculty resources to engage and support Black students at all stages of their educational journeys (e.g., through the provision of mentorship) and Black faculty and staff at all stages of their careers.

Mutuality: Conceptualize Black members of the York community as key informants and decision-makers

- Consult with Black students, faculty and staff when devising actions– e.g., for advancing Black inclusion of combating Anti-Black Racism in the Faculty– that ultimately will affect their lives.
- Ensure that efforts to combat anti-Black racism and enhance Black inclusion are vetted by Black members of our community; and undertaken only after input from Black students, faculty, and staff.
- Create time and space for on-going collegial discussions around the nature of anti-Black racism and our intentions for creating a Faculty culture that is truly inclusive of Black lives, perspectives, and contributions.

Accountability: Advance accountability and reporting mechanisms and adapt human-centred approaches to the treatment of data and reporting of outcomes

- Ensure that everyone is aware of the processes and relevant policies related to reporting incidents of racism and work to mitigate the multiple risks students, faculty, and staff face with reporting these incidents.
- Identify gaps and opportunities for advancing Black Inclusion and eradicating anti-Black racism through data collection.
- Collect data in ways that go beyond traditional approaches (which prioritized the meeting of objectives and quantitative data). For example, engage in conversations and treat the ideas that emerge from experience as valid sources of data.
- Collect, analyze, and report on data collected in ways that take into consideration the lives being affected as a result of these activities.
- Provide training and education around Black inclusion, Anti-Black Racism, and other topics relevant to the lives and experiences of Black people. This can be done along with other EDI training/education. This training/education should be mandatory and ongoing for anyone taking on a leadership role in the Faculty (Coordinators, Chairs of committees, administration, TAs etc.).

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

We would like to acknowledge, once more, our appreciation for the actions taken recently to combat anti-Black racism and enhance Black Inclusion in our Faculty community. As we move forward, it is crucial to continue to think beyond Black lives merely as sites of struggle and oppression. Similarly, it is important to not treat Black inclusion as the sum total of lists of actions and engagements. To truly advance Black Inclusion, we need to engage in deep, meaningful, and on-going conversations, re-imaginings, and deconstructing of taken-for-granted beliefs, systems, and practices that marginalize and pathologize Black lives. To that end, we provide sample questions for discussion in Appendix A.

We are confident that our Faculty community is up for this challenge and look forward to continuing this essential work together.



APPENDIX A: SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR ON-GOING DISCUSSIONS



Black Flourishing: Cultivate Faculty spaces in which Black students, faculty and staff feel valued and respected

- What are the ways in which the voices of Black students, faculty, and staff are being incorporated into different Faculty spaces (walls, classrooms, courses, websites)?
- In what ways does the Faculty highlight expressions of Black joy and excellence in Faculty spaces?
- To what extent are the services available accessible to Black students, faculty, and staff?
- What are the different ways that we can engage Black students and where can they express themselves?
- What damage might be inflicted through courses, programs, and events that do not take Black Inclusion into account?

Inclusive excellence: Strengthen faculty-student engagement

- Does the proportion of Black students, faculty, and staff reflect the larger community?
- To what extent are there culturally appropriate resources available to Black students in the Faculty?
- How do we best provide guidance to students at different points in their educational journeys?
- How can we support the ambitions of Black faculty, students, and staff, and at what points is mentorship crucial?
- To what extent have we created space for the diversity of Black cultures and experiences? How are we accounting for intersectionality?

Mutuality: Conceptualize Black members of the York community as key informants and decision-makers

- How is a sense of community being fostered and is it done in a way that is conducive to the inclusion of Black students, faculty, and staff?
- What does our Faculty community need to learn/unlearn/question/critique?
- Are there opportunities for explicit ally-ship within the Faculty?
- How can we effectively amplify the voices of Black members of our community?
- What resources can we leverage to foster a sense of community among Black students, faculty, and staff in our Faculty?
- What risks should be mitigated when consulting with Black students, faculty, and staff?
- Do Black students, faculty, and staff have a say in how the Faculty engages them?

Accountability: Advance accountability and reporting mechanisms and adapting human-centered approaches to the treatment of data and reporting of outcomes

- Are policies and procedures for dealing with racist incidents easy to access?
- When students, faculty, and staff are subjected to implicit or explicit anti-Black racism, how can we protect them from on-going harm while aiming to heal relationships in community?
- To what extent can students, faculty, and staff access supports when faced with racism within our Faculty community?
- Are we creating time and space to periodically evaluate the impact of our efforts to enhance Black Inclusion and combat anti-Black racism?

