

June 12, 2020

Next steps in York's plan to address anti-Black racism

Following the global outpouring of grief, anger and demands for change following the brutal death of George Floyd in Minneapolis, York affirmed its solidarity with those experiencing anti-Black racism and our commitment to fighting racism in all of its forms. You can read my statement [here](#).

Office of the President

1050 KANEFF TOWER
4700 KEELE ST.
TORONTO ON
CANADA M3J 1P3
T 416 736 5200
www.yorku.ca/president

In the days since my statement, we have heard from many members of our community. The message has been clear: while it is essential to stand in solidarity, it is not enough to issue statements. Action is required to address the long and destructive legacy of anti-Black racism in Canadian society. Today, I am pleased to announce a series of steps that we will take as part of our shared responsibility to build a more inclusive, diverse and just community.

Steps we have already taken

York has been actively engaged through our teaching and our research in addressing anti-Black racism. Some existing initiatives include:

- The Jean Augustine Chair in Education, Community & Diaspora, currently held by Professor Carl James
- Our innovative Black Canadian Studies Certificate in the Faculty of Liberal Arts & Professional Studies
- Work undertaken by colleagues in two of our organized research units, the Harriet Tubman Institute and Centre for Research on Latin America and the Caribbean (CERLAC)
- The York University-TD Bank Community Engagement Centre, working to increase access to education and facilitate community-engaged research in the Black Creek neighbourhood
- Our Community Safety Council that provides a valuable forum for community members to provide input into campus safety and security. Due to complications arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, meetings were recently deferred and Council members were informed that the meetings would be rescheduled in the summer.

What we are doing now

More recently, York has been working to increase the representation of Black faculty and ensuring diverse applicant pools in our complement searches. I am pleased to highlight that York has hired 14 new Black faculty members over the past two years, underscoring our longstanding commitment to inclusive excellence. Together with the York University Faculty Association (YUFA), we also struck the *Joint Subcommittee of Employment Equity and Inclusivity*, tasked with looking at the question of Black faculty representation on campus. This sub-committee delivered a series of important recommendations in early January of this year.

We know that the need for further action is urgent, and the recommendations in the Joint Sub-committee report provide a good place to start. Today we are announcing new measures to address anti-Black racism and the need for greater representation on our campuses including:



- Initiating dedicated searches to hire a minimum of six new Black faculty over the next three years.
- Our new Vice-President of People, Equity and Culture, is currently finalizing the appointment of a Senior Advisor on Equity and Representation to support the implementation of the Joint Sub-Committee's report.
- We are undertaking a review of our affirmative action program and unconscious bias training jointly with the York University Faculty Association. A key area for examination will be the disaggregation of hiring data to give the University a better understanding of where equity and diversity gaps exist.
- Developing a post-doctoral fellows program dedicated to emerging scholars who are Black, Indigenous and People of Colour to foster and build a pool of potential faculty hires for the future.
- Developing a solution to ensure the long-term leadership and vibrancy of our Race Inclusion and Supportive Environments (RISE) committee.
- Delivering a number of online training modules on Challenging Unconscious Bias to faculty, staff and students as well as modules on Understanding Racism. We know that education is a proven route to positive and permanent social change, and we are committed to increasing the educational resources available to our community focused on anti-racism.

What we want to do next

We are also contemplating a range of new initiatives that require more consultation and development before we can implement them. They include:

- Surveying our community to develop a complete picture of diversity and representation to better identify where resources are required. This should include the collection of disaggregated data for faculty, staff and students.
- Deepening the integration of critical race theory and anti-racism training into our curriculum through, for example, requirements in student learning outcomes, and the potential creation of a new micro-credential in anti-racism and anti-bias training available to all members of the York community using digital badging.
- Working with Black students, faculty and staff to refine our community safety model.

We hope that these actions represent a substantive first step in fulfilling our responsibility to address anti-Black racism and all forms of discrimination. I also know that these actions cannot be top-down. York needs to listen carefully to those living with anti-Black racism to shape programs that respond to their needs and to identify new initiatives that will ensure that every member of our community is supported as they pursue their personal visions of educational, research and career success.

To that end, we will be engaging in a series of consultations with Black students, faculty and staff over the coming weeks. We are finalizing the details of this consultation process, and I hope to provide the community with more information soon.

Sincerely,

Rhonda L. Lenton,
President & Vice Chancellor

French version to be posted on President's site when available.