

# Response to the Report of the University of Toronto Anti-Black Racism Task Force



Members of the University of Toronto community have shared in the global outpouring of concern about systemic anti-Black racism, in the wake of the horrifying death of George Floyd in the United States last spring and troubling incidents in Canada. Students, faculty, librarians and staff members marched, spoke out and supported each other. But most of all they called for action leading to substantive change, not only in our wider society but also within our own academic community.

As a key part of the University's response to these concerns, we commissioned a presidential, provostial and vice-presidential Task Force to advise on new, action-oriented measures and solutions we can take, to address anti-Black racism and to promote Black inclusion and excellence on our campuses. The Task Force has now fulfilled its terms of reference and its co-chairs have submitted their [Report](#).

- **We accept and embrace all of the recommendations of the Task Force.**
- **This includes all of its systemic recommendations, on the seven levels identified, and all of its recommendations in the areas of: students and curricula; faculty, instructors and librarians; and staff.**
- **In collaboration with other senior leaders in the University and all members of the U of T community, we will begin to implement these recommendations immediately.**

## Gratitude and appreciation

The Task Force met a tight deadline, which reflected the pressing importance of the issues in its mandate. It conducted a thorough review and prepared a comprehensive Report, which includes a detailed and very helpful set of recommendations that touch on all aspects of the University's mission.

We wish to express our gratitude to all the members of the Task Force, as well as its co-chairs: Roger Bulgin, Chief Administrative Officer, Woodsworth College; Desma Charlemagne-Michel, Director, Human Resource Services, U of T Scarborough; Professor Dexter Voisin, Dean, Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work; and Professor Njoki Wane, Chair, Social Justice Education, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.

We would also like to thank those who advised the Task Force's three working groups, and all the members of the University community who shared their experiences, insights and expertise with the Task Force throughout its consultations and deliberations. In particular, we would like to thank the members of the Black community who contributed, despite the hurt and exhaustion felt by many in the wake of recent events, as well as historical injustices and lasting trauma. Systemic, anti-Black racism and the actions required to address it have been well documented, repeatedly over many years. As we indicated when we announced the creation of the Task Force, the University community and society as a whole are collectively responsible for addressing this and all forms of racism. We must not expect only Black and racialized communities to do so.

We are very grateful to all those across our three campuses whose dedication has already led to meaningful progress, positioning us to take the next major steps that the Task Force has outlined. We hope to honour all of this previous work as well as the work of the Task Force in the actions we will now take.

## **Transparency and accountability**

To that end, we will begin today to implement the changes the Task Force has recommended. We encourage all members of the U of T community to read the recommendations, and to reflect on how each of us can contribute, directly or indirectly, to the realization of the Task Force's vision.

We are committed to building lasting change, and we share the determination that no future Task Force should be needed to prompt the actions we already know are necessary. To ensure transparency and accountability in our process of implementing the recommendations, we will create a new, dedicated website – an institutional hub to which members of the community can turn for updates on the implementation process, as well as other equity initiatives across the University. The site will list each Task Force recommendation and the actions undertaken. It will be operational no later than August 31, 2021, and it will be publicized beforehand.

Appreciating the urgency of the challenge, we anticipate being able to implement most of the Task Force's recommendations within the timeframes suggested. This includes key priorities such as: building on the current collection of relevant data about students and employees to inform decision-making in matters related to equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI); establishing additional EDI-focused leadership roles at the institutional and divisional levels to implement the recommendations; and launching a Provostial Faculty Fellows program to support the work of realizing the recommendations through scholarly and pedagogical expertise.

As the Task Force noted, some needed changes may take more time to implement. For example, it may take longer to address policy items that require thorough consultation with a wide array of stakeholders and approval through the University's governance processes. In some cases, we may

also need to find solutions that address the spirit of the recommendation as we review University processes – for example, in the case of sources and oversight of funding.

## **Promoting inclusion and excellence for all**

We acknowledge the enduring ethos of anti-Black racism that, sadly, still pervades Canadian society, and we recognize that its influence has been felt within many higher education institutions, including the University of Toronto. That ethos is rooted in undeniable facts of Canada’s history and present reality – facts which demand collective and individual responsibilities for all of us today.

Our actions to address anti-Black racism and to promote Black inclusion and excellence at U of T will not be taken in isolation. They will complement our ongoing implementation of the calls to action by our Truth and Reconciliation Steering Committee, in achieving justice for Indigenous peoples within the U of T community. They will also facilitate our efforts to continue to address the concerns of other equity-deserving groups on our campuses and in our wider society who have their own unique histories and challenges.

Action against all forms of racism and discrimination is a moral obligation. But it also springs from the heart of our academic mission. As articulated in the University’s Statement on Equity, Diversity and Excellence, “we believe that excellence flourishes in an environment that embraces the broadest range of people”. Moreover, as that Statement notes, reflecting the diversity of our society “is uniquely valuable to the University as it contributes to the diversification of ideas and perspectives and thereby enriches our scholarship, teaching and other activities.”

## **‘Action inspires hope’**

Looking ahead, we will be mindful of the fact that we are responding to long-standing injustices. We believe that “action inspires hope.” Raquel Russell, communications coordinator at the UTSC Library, quoted this simple but profound observation in an article on recent efforts across U of T to address anti-Black racism, in the winter 2020 issue of University of Toronto Magazine.

In her article, Ms Russell identifies the Task Force and other important initiatives, including the National Dialogues and Action for Inclusive Higher Education and Communities, as sources of action that inspire hope. The latter is the ground-breaking initiative coordinated by Professor Wisdom Tettey, Principal of UTSC and Vice-President of U of T, and Karima Hashmani, U of T’s Executive Director, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion.

The first sessions of the National Dialogues, held in October 2020, produced the soon-to-be-unveiled Scarborough National Charter on Anti-Black Racism and Black Inclusion in Canadian

Higher Education: Principles, Actions and Accountabilities. We are immensely proud that this historic project, which has attracted scores of partners among post-secondary institutions and organizations across the country, originated at U of T and remains guided by members of our University community.

The Task Force similarly calls attention to the progress made and leadership shown by members of the U of T community through recent key initiatives. These include the creation of a very robust Black Research Network; the recruitment of a significant number of outstanding students and researchers through our newly established graduate and post-doctoral fellowships as well as the provostial fund for hiring Black and Indigenous scholars; and our Employee Equity Survey and its associated annual reports.

While we are proud of these developments, above all we are humble when we consider how much remains to be done across the University. As the Task Force notes, its Report was “submitted in the spirit of hopeful expectancy as we look forward to all that can be accomplished together.” We share that spirit wholeheartedly, and we are determined to earn and sustain the hope that has been ignited through this collegial process.

The senior leadership of the University of Toronto, and leaders throughout the institution, bear special responsibilities in realizing the vision the Task Force has outlined. At the same time, we call on every member of the U of T community to participate, in order to achieve the deep and lasting change that is required.

In the wake of the tragic events of the past year in Canada, the United States and around the world, members of the Black community at U of T joined people everywhere in repeating the words of George Floyd, “I can’t breathe.” Today, let us all imagine the future we wish to see, tomorrow, a year from now, 10 years from now – and the better world we hope to enable for subsequent generations. Let us act, now, to build that future. Let our legacy be that our three campuses will be places where Black people, Indigenous people, people of colour and everyone in our society will be able to breathe, freely and fully, and to live and learn together.

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