

Response to the Report of the Anti-Semitism Working Group University of Toronto

December 8, 2021

Introduction

The University of Toronto is committed to the principles of equity, diversity and inclusion as fundamental to our institutional identity and academic mission. As an integral and necessary part of that commitment, we are profoundly opposed to anti-Semitism, which remains a source of discrimination, harassment and violence in our society and a threat to free societies everywhere. Moreover, we are determined to ensure that our campuses are places where members of the Jewish community feel that they are safe, included and respected as members and friends of the U of T community.

The Anti-Semitism Working Group was established in response to concerns raised by Jewish students, faculty, librarians and staff at U of T as well as stakeholders in the wider community, and in the context of our efforts to address the concerns of equity-deserving communities. These efforts include our ongoing action in response to the calls to action arising from the work of our Truth and Reconciliation Commission Steering Committee, our implementation of the recommendations of the Anti-Black Racism Task Force, and our establishment of the Anti-Islamophobia Working Group.

We wish to thank Professor Arthur Ripstein and all the members of the Anti-Semitism Working Group for their very thoughtful and helpful Report. We also wish to thank all those who shared their experiences and insights with the Working Group in the course of its wide and thorough consultations.

We are pleased to accept all of the Working Group's recommendations, and the University will take specific actions accordingly, as detailed below. Completing some of these actions will require considerable time, to allow for proper consultation and planning. But, appreciating the importance of the concerns they are meant to address, we commit to proceeding as expeditiously as possible, and we will provide progress updates on the website of the Division of People Strategy, Equity & Culture (PSEC).

Response to Recommendation 1

- PSEC will work with the Office of the Vice-Provost, Students (OVPS), the Office of the Vice-Provost, Faculty & Academic Life (OVPFAL), and academic administrators and stakeholders across the University to ensure that the processes for resolving equity-related complaints are clear and inclusive of complaints of anti-Semitism. This work will begin in January 2022. PSEC will also work to ensure that all equity staff on our three campuses are trained to implement these processes consistently and to explain them clearly to any member of the community who may wish to make a complaint.
- The University's Anti-Racism and Cultural Diversity Office (ARCDO) will develop a Faith and Anti-Racism Education Strategy that will include a component on anti-Semitism, to be deployed by the equity team in PSEC and all divisional equity directors. Work on the Strategy will begin in January 2022.
- ARCDO's mandate includes the advancement of equitable practices as well as the provision of education and training and complaints resolution supports on matters of race, faith and intersecting identities, guided by the Ontario Human Rights Commission and in accordance with the University's Statement on Prohibited Discrimination and Discriminatory Harassment. ARCDO's efforts to counter anti-Semitism and promote the inclusion of members of the Jewish community flow directly from its mandate.

Response to Recommendation 2

- PSEC will add the new position of Faith and Anti-Racism Advisor to the staff of ARCDO, and seek to fill the position by the end of April 2022 at the latest. The Faith and Anti-Racism Advisor's mandate will explicitly include a focus on countering anti-Semitism and promoting the inclusion of members of the Jewish community in the University community as a whole. The Advisor will be responsible for ensuring that anti-Semitism is included in all equity-related training, education and outreach campaigns across the University.
- PSEC will continue to offer programming on anti-Semitism, in collaboration with the Multi-Faith Centre. For example, programming in the upcoming academic term will include a talk by Deborah Lipstadt, part of our Race, Action and Equity Speaker Series, on January 31, 2022, and a training session on *Understanding and Addressing Anti-Semitism in Post-secondary Environments*, to be led by Dr. Shari Golberg on March 22, 2022.

Response to Recommendation 3

- In light of the advice provided by the Working Group, mindful of the diversity of views expressed in its consultations by members of the Jewish community at U of T, and in keeping with the University's longstanding policies, contained in the Statement on Freedom of Speech and the Statement of Institutional Purpose, the University will not adopt any of the definitions of anti-Semitism that have recently been proposed. We will continue to address subtle and blatant forms of anti-Semitism within its intersectionalities as experienced by members of the Jewish community, in accordance with our obligations under the Ontario Human Rights Code and all relevant legislation, as well as our policies related to equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI), just as we address other forms of racism and religious discrimination.

We appreciate that some members of the University community as well as external stakeholders may be disappointed that we are not choosing to adopt any of the definitions of anti-Semitism that have recently been proposed. We agree that each particular form of racism and religious discrimination poses specific challenges. We also understand why some feel that adopting a particular definition of anti-Semitism is necessary in order to address certain historical and contemporary experiences and disputes that are especially painful to so many members of the Jewish community.

In response, we note that the Working Group consultations revealed a wide diversity of views on the matter among members of the Jewish community at U of T. We also acknowledge and appreciate the Working Group's principled and thoughtful reasoning on this point – that the various proposed definitions were not designed for use in a university context, in which institutions like ours have particular responsibilities that flow directly from their unique and indispensable role in our society.

Adhering to our institutional purpose can be difficult and frustrating at times. But ultimately it serves our shared interest in the search for truth and justice, and the advancement of knowledge. At the same time, it makes us that much more determined to ensure that everyone is free to partake in that search – to continue defending those at risk of marginalization, and urging all members of our community to exercise their rights responsibly and to treat others with respect.

Response to Recommendation 4

- We agree that individual members of the University are entitled to hold whatever opinions they wish, and to express them within the limits of the law, and that participation in the life of the University must not be made conditional on their willingness to espouse any particular views. This includes a student's right to share their views with their teachers and peers without fear of harassment or reprisal.

To that end, the Office of the Vice-President and Provost (OVPP) will increase its proactive communications on relevant policies to student organizations as well as to faculty and senior staff members through regular meetings and events. These include meetings between OVPS and student organizations, meetings of Principals, Deans, Academic Directors & Chairs as well as onboarding activities such as department chairs breakfasts. OVPP and PSEC will seek to leverage U of T's Annual Freedom of Speech Report as an occasion to do likewise among members of our community, and PSEC will increase the frequency of its proactive communications to reinforce the University's equity-related policies, programs and initiatives.

Response to Recommendation 5

- Just as individual members of the University community are entitled to express their opinions, they are also entitled to decline to disclose their views and to pass peacefully by controversial demonstrations. OVPS, OVPP and PSEC will include this directive in their communications on freedom of speech and academic freedom, through the channels mentioned in our Response to Recommendation 4.
- We should note here that the University's commitment to EDI sometimes requires the granting of space to organizations and communities that are based on shared identities. PSEC will continue to support academic and administrative leaders in assessing requests to use University spaces for activities that are limited to members of such organizations and communities. PSEC will also continue to design programming and book spaces for its own EDI initiatives directed at specific communities. This includes its programming for members of the Jewish community at U of T, such as the Reflect-Restore-Action sessions to be held on January 18 and 21, 2022.

Response to Recommendation 6

- OVPFAL, in collaboration with PSEC and the EDI offices at U of T Mississauga and U of T Scarborough, is preparing a guide for faculty members on the possible impacts of social media engagement in their research and teaching. The guide will encourage faculty members to appreciate the potential impact of their exercise of free speech through such channels on members of particular stakeholder communities. Promulgation of the guide will begin in 2022.
- In addition to its ongoing efforts to combat exclusion, harassment, bullying and micro-aggressions, PSEC will conduct a review of the University's Statement on Prohibited Discrimination and Discriminatory Harassment, to ensure it is responsive to the particular challenges presented by social media. Consultations on this review will begin in 2022. PSEC will also provide support to administrative and academic leaders to ensure their guidelines and practices are consistent with the approach of the University as a whole. As part of both initiatives, PSEC will work to ensure that anti-Semitism is addressed in a manner consistent with other EDI-related concerns.

Response to Recommendation 7

- Through its Inclusive Employer Guides, PSEC will continue to raise awareness of the range of religious observances among members of the University community, including members of the Jewish community, and to encourage all those responsible for scheduling to provide accommodations in an inclusive, equitable and consistent manner. PSEC and OVPS will collaborate to promote awareness among students, faculty and staff of the process for students to raise conflicts with instructors, as well as the duty to accommodate, as detailed in the Policy on Scheduling of Classes and Examinations and Other Accommodations for Religious Observances. PSEC will also resume its workshops for faculty and staff administrators on the duty to accommodate.
- At the same time, working with OVPS, PSEC will ask the tri-campus equity offices to offer support to faculty and staff leaders dealing with unavoidable scheduling conflicts, to ensure that such situations are handled in accordance with our obligations under the Ontario Human Rights Code and the University's EDI policies. PSEC will also continue to look for IT solutions to advance that goal.

Response to Recommendation 8

- In response to concerns expressed by Jewish students, in 2020 the University made kosher food available on the St. George campus at Robarts Library, the Medical Sciences Building and the Faculty of Law, and efforts are underway to expand kosher food options at UTM and UTSC over the next year. PSEC will deepen its engagement with Jewish student groups, as well as relevant departments on our three campuses to help ensure that kosher food is more readily accessible across the University, and this collaborative effort will continue in January 2022.

Conclusion

Once again, we would like to thank the members of the Anti-Semitism Working Group for their excellent work. Through their consultations and deliberations, and through their Report, they have made an extremely valuable contribution to the University on behalf of its Jewish community. We would also like to thank the many individuals and organizations, internal and external to the University, who took part in the consultation process and who have spoken up to share their concerns more broadly in recent years. Anti-Semitism has absolutely no place in a civilized society, let alone in an institution of higher education, and we must continue to be vigilant and united in countering it, whenever and wherever it occurs.

We are hopeful that the concrete plan of action we have outlined in this Response will enable all members of the Jewish community to feel safe and welcome on our campuses. Doing so will further strengthen the ability of the University of Toronto to fulfill its academic mission. We look forward to continued collaboration with all interested stakeholders in the realization of these crucial, shared goals.

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