



Response to the Report of the Anti-Asian Racism Working Group

May 29, 2023

Preamble

The University of Toronto is steadfast in its commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion, and strives to create an environment where all of its members feel they belong. As a part of this commitment, we stand staunchly opposed to anti-Asian racism, and acknowledge that this form of racism, which has plagued Canadian society for over a century, has intensified globally during the COVID-19 pandemic, and has continued to grow as a result of increasing international and bilateral tensions.

We know that in this climate, Asian community members at U of T have experienced hurtful incidents, including the inadvertent distribution of inappropriate joss paper at a Lunar New Year event in 2022, and the subsequent deplorable instance of racist Zoom-bombing at a student-organized town hall event at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. We deeply regret that these incidents occurred in environments that should have been safe and culturally sensitive. We also acknowledge criticism that the University should have done more at the time to recognize the impact of these episodes on Asian faculty, librarians, students, and staff. President Gertler apologized on behalf of the institution in 2022, noting that the Lunar New Year festival should have been a joyous and peaceful time. He committed, “We will continue our important educational efforts to better understand our diverse communities, and to foster inclusion across our three campuses.” The Anti-Asian Racism Working Group (AARWG) was formed to advise the University administration on concrete measures that may be taken to combat anti-Asian racism on our campuses and further the equity initiatives that are being implemented across the University. In considering the Working Group’s report, we understand that fostering inclusion and belonging on our campuses cannot take a one-size-fits-all approach. The University of Toronto owes its excellence to the multiplicity of perspectives that result from our diversity. As an institution, it must develop practices and structures that recognize and account for the unique cultural contexts that contribute to these different perspectives and our collective success.

Likewise, the multidimensional work of responding to racism at the University requires a collective effort. We must recognize the anti-Asian racism that exists within our institution and in society, acknowledge its toll on Asian members of our community, and mobilize against it.

We thank Professor Carol Chin and Mr. Vikram Chadalawada, AARWG co-chairs, as well as the Working Group and subcommittee members, for offering us their considered and thorough report. We are also grateful to those who shared their thoughts and concerns with the Working Group through the University-wide consultation process.

We readily accept the Working Group’s recommendations. In some cases, the University is implementing proposed actions as a result of the Working Group’s consultations and other ongoing equity-related initiatives. While responses to the recommendations may have differing timelines due to varying levels of complexity, we commit the University to proceeding as quickly as possible. The community will be updated on progress via the commitments [tracking webpage](#) of the Institutional Equity Office.

Responses to Recommendations

A theme that resonates through the Working Group’s report is that anti-Asian racism is further compounded by a sense of invisibility – that although 30% of our employees¹ across U of T’s three campuses self-identify as Asian, the unique experience of anti-Asian racism is too often ignored. The report also notes that the rich, complex and diverse Asian experience at U of T is sometimes overlooked, and many remarkable contributions from this community are taken for granted.

The report further highlights the unique experiences of international students from Asia at U of T and makes several recommendations that specifically address this group. We are mindful that Asian international students may encounter different challenges or prejudices than domestic students of Asian descent. Through the Centre for International Experience, the Associate Vice-President and Vice-Provost for International Student Experience, University of Toronto Scarborough’s International Student Centre and University of Toronto Mississauga’s International Education Centre, the Multi-Faith Centre, Student Life, and divisional leadership, the University will work proactively to address the unique issues that these students may face on our campuses.

In responding to the recommendations of the AARWG, the University will take meaningful action against the perpetuation of such invisibility. We recognize the diversity of experience within and across U of T’s Asian community, and we aim to create a more supportive environment in which all our members feel they belong.

1 Institutional Accountability, Data, and Transparency

We thank the Working Group for proposing a number of measures to help the University in improving its accountability, data collection, and transparency. These measures enhance and align with initiatives underway to capture and provide better data against which the University’s progress on its equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) goals can be evaluated. For example, the ethnocultural categories used to track representation at the University have been updated to reflect the diversity of the Asian diaspora. In

¹ We do not currently have reliable ethnocultural data for our student population. Data from the 2023 National Survey of Student Experience indicates that 64.75% of first-year and 63.72% of final-year U of T undergraduate students identify as East Asian, South Asian, or West-Asian and Arab (with an overall response rate of 26.6%). The 2021 Graduate Student Experience in the Research University survey reported that 37.6% of U of T graduate students identified as Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, South Asian, Southeast Asian, or West Asian (multiple answers permitted, with an overall response rate of 26.1%). We are hopeful that data collected from the Student Equity Census will provide more accurate figures for future understanding of U of T’s diversity.

both our employment equity survey and in the new student equity census, Asian-identifying faculty, librarians, staff and students may choose to refine their responses to specify, for example, Caribbean, East Asian, European, North American, South Asian, or Southeast Asian, or to self-describe. This more granular data will allow for more nuanced interpretation of survey results that could inform programming and educational activities.

Survey results are being made available on an aggregate level across the University through the annual Employment Equity Report and Student Equity Census report. Deans and senior managers will also have access to this demographic information for their own units, as will the Centre for Learning, Leadership, and Culture (LLC). As policies pertaining to discrimination are updated and reviewed, anti-Asian racism as a category will be incorporated. Anti-Asian racism will not be tolerated on our campuses, and we commit to using data and evidence-based approaches to identifying and understanding it as a pernicious form of discrimination that will lead to consequences under our policies.

2 Communications

While the University has been steadily incorporating more equity, diversity, and inclusion and anti-racism initiatives into its processes and activities, we realize that these efforts are not always highly visible or widely promoted. As the Working Group notes in its comments, there are “a number of perceptions, feelings, and indeed misunderstandings that the University can address through timely and transparent communications.” We agree with the Working Group on this point. In particular, we believe that such communications can be substantially facilitated by consolidating information on how to access EDI training, report incidents of anti-Asian racism, and find supports and resources related to equity and anti-racism.

The [Institutional Equity Office](#) was recently established to work across U of T’s three campuses to build capacity, support communities, and provide leadership in support of EDI and anti-racism efforts. Its website offers complaints resolution support and presents a single point of contact to access the University’s equity data and reports. Following on the Working Group’s recommendations, the University will ensure that the resources and tools on this site explicitly address anti-Asian racism and provide updates on the implementation of the recommendations made in this report. U of T Communications, the Centre for International Experience, the University of Toronto Mississauga (UTM) and the University of Toronto Scarborough (UTSC), and others will also be engaged to raise awareness of the University’s offerings and resources.

3 Hiring, Reviews, and Career Development

One of U of T’s notable strengths is the exceptional diversity of our faculty, librarians, staff and students. There is, however, a great deal of variability in demographic distribution across our campuses, divisions and departments. We acknowledge that representation in different fields of study can affect the perception of how well our workforce represents the diversity of our larger society, again highlighting the need for the data and transparency articulated by the Working Group. As previously mentioned, 30.1% of U of T employees self-identified as Asian on our 2021 employment equity survey. This compares to 38.2% of



Torontonians and 17.4% of the Canadian population (2021 Census). Of particular concern to the Working Group is appropriate representation of Asian staff among those in student-facing roles, given that a significant proportion of our students self-identify as Asian². We agree with this concern.

The Working Group rightly pointed out that “communities desire to see themselves reflected in all areas of the University,” and proposed the incorporation of EDI training and guidelines to support the hiring and promotion of employees from diverse and minority backgrounds. We commit to the implementation and continuation of these measures, and to the inclusion of anti-Asian racism as an explicit part of these efforts. We are confident that the progress initiated through the recommendations of this and prior equity task forces and working groups – including the establishment of EDI-informed initiatives to improve the diversity within the University’s leadership – will result in a University workforce in which all of our community members can see themselves represented across the ranks and at the most senior levels.

4 Education, Training and Mentorship

It is critically important that everyone at the University, including University leaders, appreciates the value of equity and diversity and understands the damaging consequences of racism. The Working Group report makes clear that members of U of T’s Asian community experience racism that is too often discounted, ignored, or minimized. We were saddened to read of experiences such as “having one’s skills or expertise underestimated based on one’s Asian identity or accent, being exoticized or sexually harassed, being perceived as a ‘model minority’ and thus invisible as an equity-deserving group, frequently encountering racist portrayals online and on social media, and being ostracized for cultural practices and religious beliefs.”

These painful examples of anti-Asian racism are unacceptable in an institution that thrives on mutual respect and collaboration. Through the Institutional Equity Office, the Anti-Racism and Cultural Diversity Office (ARCDO), tri-campus student services, as well as all campuses and divisions, the University will recognize the particularities of anti-Asian racism. These offices will make sure that anti-racism resources for Asian members of the University and their allies are widely available, including to institutional leaders and those in student-facing roles.

5 Teaching, Curriculum, and Research

We are extremely proud that the breadth of research, scholarship, and teaching at U of T is among the world’s most extensive. This breadth, however, can sometimes lead to challenges in identifying and accessing courses and faculty with a focus on specific areas of study. This is particularly true in considering Asian and Asian diaspora scholarship due not only to its inclusion across multiple academic units, but also to the great diversity represented within the category of “Asian.” Through Timetable Builder, undergraduate courses can be searched by keyword – a more flexible and dynamic way of finding courses with particular content (as opposed to a static inventory built on a webpage or designed around a tagging

² Ibid.

system). In the future, this new functionality will be communicated more broadly among our student body to empower them in finding the course content they desire.

In regard to research and teaching, we encourage collaboration among our Asian faculty and/or faculty who study Asia and Asian diasporas. For example, the Asian Institute, the Department of East Asian Studies, and the Centre for South Asian Critical Humanities bring scholars of Asian studies together and foster Asia-centred research. Likewise, we strongly support the development of course content that centres or includes representation of diverse cultures and experiences. The Centre for Teaching Support and Innovation has been developing anti-racist approaches to instruction and course design and promoting the adoption of the Universal Design for Learning framework that supports equity and inclusion. Additionally, the Office of the Associate Vice-President and Vice-Provost, Strategic Initiatives, along with our tri-campus teaching and learning centres and the School of Graduate Studies, will be exploring research, curriculum, and teaching and learning initiatives that address the particular needs of Asian researchers as well as Asian graduate and undergraduate students – both international and domestic.

6 Community and Belonging

As the academic home for many Asian-identifying faculty, librarians, staff, and students, the University is invested in fostering a welcoming and inclusive environment for the Asian community that builds belonging and opposes anti-Asian racism. For example, ARCDO and the equity offices at UTM and UTSC host regular workshops, plenary sessions, and awareness-raising events on anti-Asian racism and Asian cultural practices and celebrations.

Maintaining and enhancing the creation of spaces and programs for Asian students, staff, faculty and librarians is an important facet of community-building. Within St. George Student Life, the Access & Inclusion Peer Programs include a Southeast Asian Student Engagement group that provides connections to academic, career, and wellness services that foster belonging and community and that help students from this group navigate barriers to access and inclusion. Sussex Court Clubhouse on the St. George campus provides office and gathering space for a number of Asian-focused student organizations, and the Student Initiative Fund has provided support for many Asian-student-serving clubs in past years. UTSC has various Asian-identifying student clubs, offers community support space, and plans to expand its Stronger Together programming in partnership with the Chinese Cultural Centre of Greater Toronto. UTM is home to many student clubs that bring together students from different backgrounds and interests, including several groups for students from Asian cultures. EDI training that encompasses anti-Asian racism is provided to student orientation leaders on all three campuses to help create a welcoming environment for all students from the beginning of their time at U of T. Future plans include strengthening these efforts, as well as exploring the creation of an affinity group for Asian-identifying staff within the existing Connections and Conversations group for racialized employees.

We are mindful that nurturing a sense of community is a whole-university responsibility. As a dynamic society of faculty, librarians, staff, and students; divisions, departments, and offices; and Deans, Chairs, Directors, administrators, and frontline staff, we expect that all our community members will contribute to making sure that Asian colleagues and students feel a sense of belonging here at U of T.



7 Health, Wellness, and Support

The Task Force on Student Mental Health that led to the University's recent mental health redesign underlined the importance of providing appropriate health and wellness services for our entire community. To ensure that Asian students have access to culturally appropriate and sensitive health and wellness support, the Office of Student Mental Health, Systems Strategy and Policy will explore additional ways to offer and communicate the availability of needed services. As a starting point, [the MySSP student support service](#) is available to all U of T students and was expanded to offer telephone appointments in 146 languages, with immediate counseling available in Mandarin, Cantonese, English, French, and Spanish. The [Employee & Family Assistance Program \(EFAP\)](#) offers counselling in over 200 languages, and clients may request counsellors from specific ethnic backgrounds or with particular lived experiences. The EFAP platform also provides articles, videos, and toolkits on anti-racism. To raise awareness of these services, the University will work to publicize the availability of these supports and will examine how [Navi](#), U of T's chat-based virtual assistant tool, may be expanded to better help students find anti-Asian racism resources and support services on our campuses.

8 Resources – Funding, Staffing, and Research

While resources at the University are limited, we recognize that material support can be an important facilitator of new initiatives to combat anti-Asian racism and contribute to the specific needs of the University's Asian members. In particular, we know that there are concerns about whether existing funding and scholarships for international students – the majority of whom are from Asian countries – are sufficient to meet their needs. The University recognizes these concerns and in 2021-22, provided \$65.7M in merit and need-based grants (exclusive of U of T graduate fellowships) to approximately 5,700 distinct undergraduate and graduate international students. This represented 23% of the total student support provided by U of T in 2021-22.

The Division of University Advancement (DUA) actively raises funds for Asian research initiatives – for example, the Asian Pathways Research Lab at the Asian Institute, and other initiatives at the Faculty of Arts & Science and at University College. Donations have also been secured to support Tamil Studies at UTSC and Jain and Sikh Studies at UTM. For the past 27 years, over 80 students from Hong Kong have been supported in their studies at U of T with significant renewable scholarships. Funds have also been established to recognize students engaged in anti-racism, such as the Bosco Law Award for Student Leadership in Anti-Racism and Inclusion, as well as for students pursuing research and scholarship in Asian studies, including the Daisy Ho Contemporary China Special Undergraduate Projects Fund, the Dr. David Chu Scholarship in Asia Pacific Studies, and the Man Family Scholarship. DUA will continue to propose, solicit, and receive gifts in support of Asian studies, as well as for scholarships and bursaries for all students, including international students from Asian countries.

We are very proud of the extensive collection and services that the University of Toronto Libraries provides for Asian and Asian Canadian Studies. The collections, research support, programming and spaces offered by the entire library system – including the Cheng Yu Tung East Asian Library, the Richard Charles Lee Canada-Hong Kong Library, the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, and the

libraries at UTM and UTSC – together provide a cultural and intellectual centre for Asian and Asian Canadian Studies in Toronto. The U of T Libraries offer a diverse range of materials in East Asian, South Asian, and Southeast Asian languages, including books, serials, AV media, special collections, archives, and rare books. The Libraries also regularly host programming and exhibits that feature Asian and Asian Canadian subject matter. In the realm of visual art, exhibitions and pieces that engage with pan-Asian experiences and subject matter can frequently be found at the Art Museum on the St. George campus, the Blackwood Gallery at UTM, and the Doris McCarthy Gallery at UTSC. To promote these offerings more widely, the University will explore ways to amplify communications that call attention to these important assets and engage members of the broader public.

Conclusion

We would like to reiterate our thanks to the members of the Anti-Asian Racism Working Group and all those who participated in the consultation for sharing their experiences and challenging anti-Asian racism at the University of Toronto. The resulting recommendations have provided a concrete foundation upon which a more equitable and inclusive U of T community may flourish.

We acknowledge that anti-Asian racism is an issue that we must tackle with the same force and commitment as we do other forms of discrimination. The history of anti-Asian racism in Canada is a deeply shameful part of this nation's past, and its resurgence in society today must not be tolerated. We stand firm in our condemnation of all forms of racism, discrimination, hate, and bias. As a result of this important working group initiative, we commit to an increased vigilance in identifying and confronting anti-Asian racism at the University of Toronto and in society at large. We will also continue to support initiatives that contribute to the well-being and success of Asian faculty, librarians, students, and staff. We hope that the measures taken in response to this report will result in members of the U of T Asian community feeling protected, included, and seen as deeply valued individuals and contributors to our collective and shared success.

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