

News Report: Systemic Racism at TRU

TRU is one of the top 50 universities in Canada with 5,464 international students from 113 countries. But a diverse student demographic does not demonstrate that TRU is free of systematic racism and working successfully to remove racism and discrimination from its campus.

According to IRCC Anti-Racism Strategy 2.0, racism is an act of any personal or infrastructural behavior that, consciously or unconsciously, targets people of a certain race or ethnicity with stereotyping, antagonism, exclusion, and/or violence. And discrimination happens when a person or group is treated unfairly or unfavorably if this is due to their race, national or ethnic origin, color, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or expression.

Though most of us are familiar with the term racism, it is crucial to understand it properly. Often, racism is not visible straight away and is frequently systemic; it is also not always conscious or explicit.

As mentioned by the Government of Canada, systemic racism and institutional discrimination consist of organizational, social, or administrative practices that disadvantage racialized people. These may be unintentional. They appear neutral but exclude racialized people, often with differential discrimination based on other identity factors.

TRU identifies systemic racism is enacted through commonplace social systems, institutions, and practices like rules, laws, and regulations that maintain unfair and avoidable socioeconomic inequalities between racial or ethnic groups.

Although TRU's definition of systematic racism aligns with the definition of the Canadian Government, being a post-secondary institution, having only definition is not enough. People want to see the result; people want the data that can demonstrate the current situation of racism and discrimination at the TRU campus.

As stated in TRU EDI Action Plan, given the diversity of its campuses— TRU has a versatile student demographic. From the university's annual database, among the entire student demographic, 10% of students belong to Indigenous ancestry and 19% are international. 33% of the student body at TRU Kamloops campus is international.

Though these percentages provide the idea of how many of the student population are from different races, cultures, and ethnicity, it is clearly stated in the EDI Action Plan that EDI-focused diversity statistics have not yet been gathered. The university used self-declaration and service access to gather statistical data on students to determine their gender, Indigenous ancestry, and domestic/international status.

TRU Anti-Racism Task Force Report was published on March 31, 2021, and among the four recommendations and goals of the report, the major one is “gathering data”. The report demonstrates in various ways how data is important to make racism visible, and how data can measure the progress and digress of removing racism from the TRU campus.

“TRU became serious about the Anti-Racism Task Force Report because of the accreditation for receiving funds from IBE,” said Dr. Monica, one of the co-chairs of the Task Force. She also stated that even though the report has four different goals, in the end, all these goals link to the importance of getting the data safely and securely to demonstrate TRU’s accountability to remove racism and discrimination from campus.

Not having the data does not mean there are no incidents of racism on campus. An international student living at TRU McGill Housing said, “the receptionist is always disrespectful, rude, and unhelpful to me, which makes me feel excluded.”

Lack of data collection is already troubling the research, and receiving insufficient funding to work on data collection is even more tragic. “TRU does not have enough funding to support EDI and anti-racism resources, and it is crucial to disclose the data securely. We often gather data through surveys which is not enough to support a research team,” said Tehmina, the EDI

researcher at TRU. Most of the researcher works with TRU by term contract and receive funding for their working terms. Without proper funding, it is hard to keep up with the work.

But TRU understands the importance of gathering data in this sensitive issue. In December 2021, they hired a researcher, Evelyn Asiedu. She is working towards collecting data. “My research method is cultural mapping- asking people questions, understanding their experiences and stories depending on qualitative data,” said Evelyn. She aims to amplify peoples' voices with evidence. By April 2023, Evelyn desires to produce a report or summary that can help TRU understand the gaps and take action to remove racism for good.