

January 31, 2023

Dear Dr. Gilpin-Jackson:

We understand that you are seeking feedback on the Equity Compass project. We, a group of SFU faculty members who are interested in promoting open inquiry, viewpoint diversity, and constructive disagreement at SFU, have reviewed the draft and would like to respond to the questions you pose on the last page of the draft.

What We Like

- Under “Implications if SFU takes no action” on p. 3, we are pleased to see listed
 - The “lack of ... understanding of key terminologies”. We are concerned about the widespread use of EDI “jargon” by administrative units, specifically terms whose meanings seem to differ from their dictionary definitions (e.g., “White supremacy”, “sexual violence”, “racism”, ...). Unnecessary conflict may arise when such terms are used in communications to a general audience, especially if definitions are not provided.
 - The “lack of accountability on advancing EDI.” We are concerned about accountability from multiple perspectives. In particular, we would like to see clear criteria for measuring the effectiveness of EDI initiatives, evidence-based justification for the increased hiring of EDI personnel at SFU¹, and greater caution that EDI initiatives do not infringe on the academic freedom² of faculty, students, and staff or negatively impact the culture of respectful, open dialogue at SFU.

What Is Missing

- The document is silent on academic freedom and its interaction with the proposed EDI principles despite the fact that one of us brought up this question in a meeting about the Equity Compass. Academic freedom is guaranteed in our Collective Agreement, and the SFU “What’s Next” survey identified that “academic and intellectual freedom” is the most important guiding principle for future work at SFU for faculty. The omission of discussion of the implications of the proposed EDI principles for academic freedom is therefore a serious oversight. In addition to including a general discussion about the operationalization of both academic freedom and EDI principles, we ask that you add a

¹ The SFU “What’s Next?” survey highlighted the community’s concern over hiring administrators at a far higher rate than teaching or research faculty over the last several years.

² The SFU Collective Agreement defines academic freedom as “...the right to investigate, speculate, and comment without reference to prescribed doctrine, as well as the right to criticize the University, Association, and society at large”.

statement to the “Inclusion” section on p. 8 to clarify that the notion of inclusion extends to community members who express unpopular or controversial opinions within the limits of Canadian law. We also ask that you add “academic freedom” as the first principle in the list of “Equity Compass Principles” on p. 9 to be consistent with SFU’s Strategic Research Plan for 2023–2028 (which lists “critical thinking and academic freedom” and “a culture of inquiry” first on the lists of core values and approaches to enact these values, respectively). Finally, we request that you add academic freedom as an “example” under the themes “Respect and Belonging Structures”, “Education and Capacity Building”, “Inclusion and Belonging Culture”, and “Equity Governance, Policy, and Leadership” on p. 11.

- On p. 8, the following definition appears: “**Inclusion:** An inclusive community where all are welcome, safe, accepted and appreciated in learning, teaching, research and work.” We would like to see clear definitions of the terms “welcome”, “safe”, “accepted”, and “appreciated” in this context. In particular, does “safe” imply something other than safety from physical harm, bullying, and harassment? If so, how can SFU ensure a “safe” environment while upholding its commitment to academic freedom where opposing ideas are bound to clash? Moreover, disagreement, which is enshrined under SFU’s academic freedom policies, could lead an individual to feel the opposite of “welcome”, “accepted”, or “appreciated”. How will SFU reconcile this conflict in policies?
- On p. 9, we would like to see a clear definition of the term “antiracist”. In particular, does it mean “opposed to discrimination against individuals on the basis of race”, or does it mean “supporting policies that result in equalities of outcomes across racial groups” (as per Ibram X. Kendi³)?
- On p. 7, “a diverse SFU” is defined as a community of individuals who are “representative of Canada’s current and evolving population”. This definition raises several questions for us, namely
 - Does diversity include political and religious⁴ diversity of the Canadian population?
 - How does the Equity Compass ensure “a diverse SFU” that represents faculty, students, and staff who are first-generation immigrants to Canada, especially those whose first language is not English? The document is silent on immigrants to Canada, who, according to Statistics Canada, represent “the largest share of the population (23%) in over 150 years and continue to shape who we are as Canadians”.⁵
 - The notion that the SFU community should be representative of the Canadian population seems to be in conflict with SFU’s application to BC’s Office of the Human Rights Commissioner for permission to hire at least 15 staff and 15

³ Kendi, I.X. (2019). *How to be an Antiracist*. Random House Publishing Group.

⁴ Statistics Canada (2021). <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-627-m/11-627-m2021079-eng.htm>

⁵ Statistics Canada (2022). <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/221026/dq221026a-eng.htm>

faculty members who are Indigenous, where “Indigenous” includes Aboriginal (First Nations, Status, Non-Status, Metis, or Inuit) and people from **global** [our emphasis] Indigenous populations”. Why would SFU preferentially hire non-Canadian Indigenous candidates if the goal is to create a community that is reflective of the **Canadian** population? Clarification, including an explanation as to why British Columbia is not the chosen target population, is needed.

Additional Considerations

- For surveys to be informative, SFU must ensure that the respondents are representative of the target population. For example, the “Radical Inclusion: Equity and Diversity Among Female Faculty at SFU” report is included as a “background source” on p. 9. However, this report was based on comments from only 11% of members of Academic Women. Not all female faculty at SFU are members of Academic Women, and some members of Academic women are retirees. Moreover, the report was not open to a vote or individual signatures; it was simply released by the president under the group’s name. Those members who disagreed with the report but worried about expressing their views openly due to potential harassment had no opportunity for input. For these reasons, we believe that the report is not representative of the experience of current female faculty at SFU more broadly, and therefore its conclusions should be treated with caution.
- The “special programs for preferential and cluster hiring” listed on p. 11 under “employment equity” are of serious concern to us. Hiring based on group identity rather than on merit may undermine the excellence of SFU’s teaching and research. Moreover, such programs may cause others to see the hired individuals in stereotypical ways and wrongly undervalue their work. More worryingly, such programs can damage the self-confidence of the hired individuals by causing or exacerbating imposter syndrome. Finally, requiring applicants to specify their identity group can force those who want to be considered based on the quality of their research, teaching, and contributions to intellectual life either to suppress their identity or to forgo applying.

Thank you for considering our feedback. We request that you provide a response to the points we have made.