April 12, 2023

Dear Dr. Gilpin-Jackson:

We are a group of SFU faculty members who are interested in promoting open inquiry, viewpoint diversity, and constructive disagreement at SFU. We have reviewed the latest draft of the [Equity Compass](#) and would like to provide some feedback.

Please note that some signatories to this letter also signed the letter to you dated January 31, 2023, regarding an earlier version of the Equity Compass. We thank you for addressing some of our concerns in the revised version. In particular, we were pleased to see that academic freedom is now mentioned multiple times in the document. We appreciate that the importance of careful definitions is now explicitly recognized and that some terms have been defined more thoroughly. We applaud your office's suggestion to create a glossary of EDI terms and a "framework to implement SFU's respectful environment requirements". Clear communication regarding SFU's policies on academic freedom, human rights, and bullying and harassment is critical for the functioning of our community.

That said, we remain concerned about many issues, the most important of which are the following:

- The document is still silent on the interaction between academic freedom and the proposed EDI principles. Importantly, the word "safe" (used numerous times) appears to refer to something other than safety from physical harm, bullying, or harassment. Yet it is not defined. If an academic debate (permitted under SFU's academic freedom policy) causes an individual to feel "unsafe" (or "unwelcome", "unaccepted", or "unappreciated") – an apparent violation of the proposed EDI policy – which policy will take precedence? Vague statements such as "It [the Equity Compass] exists in the context of academic freedom as enshrined in our Canadian post-secondary context" do not adequately address this question. The university community needs clear information about the operationalization of both academic freedom and EDI principles, especially with regard to the situations in which they come into conflict.
- Words such as "accepted" and "appreciated" suggest that the planned EDI policies will govern individuals' *feelings*. However, individuals are likely to have a wide array of reactions in a given situation; enforcing policies that attempt to legislate feelings or thoughts seems impossible – and disrespectful to our diverse community. Policies should instead, we contend, focus on governing *behaviour* that is necessary for a productive and respectful work environment.
- Some jargon remains undefined, e.g., "anti-racism", "trauma-informed", "anti-oppressive", "appreciative approach", "cultural safety", and "psychological safety". As you note in the revised version, clear definitions are critical. We strongly encourage you

to create the planned glossary of EDI terms **before** releasing the next version of the document so that the proposal is understandable by the entire SFU community and we are all working with the same language.

- The document is self-contradictory in places. For example, "equitable employment practices" is a stated goal, where "equity" (as defined on p. 13) is the removal of "systemic barriers", **not** the engineering of equal outcomes across identity groups. Yet the document advocates discriminatory hiring practices ("preferential, limited, and/or targeted hiring to address the systemic and institutional underrepresentation of Indigenous and Black staff and faculty"). Such practices not only violate the principle of equity as it is defined on page 13 but also can hurt the hired individuals by creating uncertainty (in their own and in others' minds) about their professional qualifications.

- The meaning of the objectives listed under Goal #4 (Employment and Pay Equity) are unclear. Consider, for instance, the objective "Share data benchmarks and assist units to create target goals at all levels of the institutions to increase diversity where needed to reflect the communities we serve, especially in leadership positions and university governance structures". Does this statement mean that quotas based on identity groups will be established for all academic and administrative units? The term "inclusive excellence" could also imply the imposition of such quotas. Clarification is needed here, we believe.

- With reference to Goal #3 (Education and Capacity-Building), the document is unclear as to whether the planned EDI education for the SFU community will be mandatory and whether instructors will be required to make EDI "an integral component of their learning, teaching, research and work". Certainly, the cited SFU-ARC Call to Action #7 ("Develop **mandatory** intervention programs teaching cultural safety and anti-racism for all SFU employees…") is explicit on this point. We are deeply concerned that mandatory training will violate the academic freedom of everyone at SFU. Under the Collective Agreement, we have "the right to investigate, speculate, and comment **without reference to prescribed doctrine**". The implication of this statement is that the administration may not enforce adherence to particular ideologies, including via the Equity Compass.

- With respect to the definition of diversity on p. 13:
  - We ask that you include "political opinion", an important aspect of diversity in an academic environment, to the list of "identity dimensions".
  - The revised definition refers to the demographics of "the British Columbia and/or Canadian population", not the Canadian population, as before. However, the British Columbian and Canadian populations are quite different, demographically; the "and" in the "and/or" is thus confusing. In general, how will under-representation be determined without a clear, well-justified choice of reference population? Moreover, how is the goal of "demographic representation" realistic given the ever-changing demographics of the Canadian population?

- ○ We reiterate our concern about the special program to hire at least 15 staff and 15 faculty members who are Indigenous, where "Indigenous" includes "Aboriginal (First Nations, Status, Non-Status, Metis, or Inuit) and people from **global** Indigenous populations". Why would SFU preferentially hire non-Canadian Indigenous candidates (as opposed to non-Indigenous Canadian candidates) if the goal is to create a community that is reflective of the British Columbian or Canadian population?
- The Indigenous Acknowledgement, specifically the phrase "we are uninvited guests and/or settlers", represents the opinions of some individuals in the Equity Office, not of all SFU community members. We request that this phrase be deleted. Alternatively, the words "Simon Fraser University (SFU) and its" could be deleted and signatures added (as in the Report Acknowledgements).
- While we fully support Goal #3 (Accountability), we reiterate our request for clear criteria for measuring the effectiveness of EDI initiatives and evidence-based justification for the increased hiring of EDI personnel at SFU.
- We reiterate our request that you add a statement to the definition of "Inclusion" on page 14 to clarify that the notion of inclusion extends to community members who express unpopular or controversial opinions within the limits of Canadian law.
- We reiterate our concern that the Equity Compass is, in part, based on recommendations from the report "Radical Inclusion: Equity and Diversity Among Female Faculty at Simon Fraser University". This report is based on seriously flawed methodology, as explained in our first letter.
- We reiterate our concern that the document is silent on immigrants to Canada, who make up a large proportion of the Canadian population in general and of the SFU community in particular. How does the Equity Compass ensure that faculty, students, and staff who are first-generation immigrants to Canada, especially those whose first language is not English, are welcomed and supported at SFU?
- We reiterate our request that you add academic freedom as an "example" under each EDI theme.

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