

# **Briefing Note: SFSS BIPOC Committee on SFU Anti-Racism Efforts**

Prepared by Co-Chairs of the Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) Committee: Balkees Jama (At-Large) and Matt Provost (VP Student Services)

Prepared for: SFU Administration Meeting with Joy Johnson and Rummana Khan Hemani

October 19, 2020

## **BACKGROUND**

### **SFU Athletics Team Name Harm**

After years of advocacy from Black students and athletes at SFU, we have seen SFU Athletics Department change the name away from the “Clan”. Throughout the name change process Black athletes and POC organizers were met with gaslighting, trauma and racism. Former SFU President Andrew Petter’s statement regarding the name change lacked acknowledgement of the Ku Klux Klan connotations, racism, and Black athletes’ experiences. The former president framed the name-change as his decision, disregarding the amount of work and emotional labour that went into this movement from Black students and athletes. Even with the statement’s vague acknowledgement of trauma, the lack of resources provided for those harmed directly violates SFU’s commitment to the Okanagan Charter and causes much more harm to BIPOC. Though the [Report on the Clan Team Name Change](#) published touched on some concerns, there were no tangible commitments to redressing harms caused by the team name and its name-change process.

### **Indigenous Student Exclusion**

Indigenous students' voices are being underserved by SFU. Reconciliation projects that are occurring through the Aboriginal Reconciliation Council are being done without proper consultation with key community stakeholders, and Indigenous student voices. By not including these community members SFU is upholding values that do not validate the mandate of “reconciliation”. We need to acknowledge the past and not recreate harm in the present. Indigenous students are the key to reconciliation efforts at any educational institution. As stated in the [Diversity Meter Survey](#),

“Indigenous Persons reported the lowest agreement for the indicator that assessed if they believe they are treated fairly and with respect at SFU.”

There have been a number of instances where Indigenous students have been disregarded, and we are still seeing the impacts of those in the present day. The Atrium in Saywell Hall is one example of how Indigenous students' needs were disregarded by the university, and even to this day Indigenous students do not have priority over this space. This has broken trust and relationships with the university from past Indigenous alumni.

### **Lack of BIPOC resources**

BIPOC folks at SFU do not have adequate services that meet our needs. As of right now there are no Black and Indigenous counsellors at SFU Health and Counselling Services. The lack of mental wellness support for BIPOC students at SFU is another barrier that must be addressed. Adequate and appropriate support needs to be prioritized for the BIPOC community at SFU. Safe spaces and resources that address Anti-Blackness and anti-racism on campus are essential.

### **SFU Lack of Race-based Data Collection**

While the meaningful collection of data is not a solution itself to systemic racism, it is long-overdue, and a necessary first step in identifying specific barriers. SFU's [Diversity Meter Survey](#) report, Black and Indigenous people have noticeably higher rates of exclusion and barriers at the University. The 2017 [UN Report of the Working Group of Experts on Anti-Black racism in Canada](#) highlights that there are challenges that Black Canadians particularly face, that are not necessarily shared with other racialized group when it comes to structural discrimination in health, socio-economic status, poverty, education and systematic racism. SFU must take this into account.

### **Lack of BIPOC in SFU Senior Administration, Faculty, and Staff**

The report shows that there is significant underrepresentation of BIPOC folks in senior administration roles at SFU, as well as faculty and staff positions. Most notable lack is Black and Indigenous people in these roles, there being zero in senior admin roles.

## KEY CONSIDERATIONS

### Established Black Student Support In Other Universities

There are established support programs, centres, and initiatives to base SFU's Black student support initiative off of in Eastern Canada and the US. An example is Black empowerment center in student services at the University of Guelph [Supporting the Needs of Black Students / Student Experiences](#). Throughout the process of building support systems, reparations are needed to support Black and Indigenous folks on campus. This is to validate that Anti-Racism and EDI initiatives are key to building trust and to reinforce that BIPOC students are prioritized on campus.

### Addressing Repeated Exclusion of BIPOC Students, Staff, Faculty, and Senior Administrators

Barriers to BIPOC students at SFU exist because programs, policies, and practices were created without BIPOC directly involved. There is a history of exclusion of BIPOC, particularly Black and Indigenous communities at SFU. When SFU built the Saywell Hall Atrium, which was intended for Indigenous students, FNSA did not have priority to book for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Awareness Week. If we want to move forward so that Indigenous students can succeed at this university, accountability and action must be taken to amplify and work with Indigenous student leaders.

Ontario College of Art & Design University, known as OCAD University, [hired 5 Black tenured faculty](#) members in efforts to immediately address underrepresentation of Black Faculty. The principles driving the fast track tenure faculty appointments were decolonization, diversity, and equity. VP Equity at the University of Calgary Melinda Smith noted how white women in academia has increased a lot, but not much growth for BIPOC.

### Framework for Accountability

When discussing EDI initiatives, it is important that we have a clear point of accountability for immediate and long-term anti-oppression initiatives. This would ensure that BIPOC community members, including students, are well-informed and respectfully consulted along the way. Accountability includes regular updates and meetings. Students must be included, and appropriately compensated, throughout the process for their labour.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **SFU President to Release a Statement as SFU President on Name Change**

While it was the former President who released the statement on the name change, he was the spokesperson of SFU. To [begin redressing harms](#) caused by the 'Clan' name and its problematic changing process, we ask that Joy Johnson release a public statement acknowledging that SFU is dropping the name due to its racist connotations and association with the Ku Klux Klan. Address the colonialism, violence, and trauma towards specifically Black athletes due to the name. Publicly acknowledge the harm inflicted and unpaid labour forced on Black students and athletes, and commit to providing resources for BIPOC, with specific resources for Black athletes.

### **Respectfully Consult Indigenous Student Leadership**

Release a statement that recognizes the harm that has been done to key community members and dedicate time and resources to the [FNSA Calls to Action](#) regarding Indigenous student leadership and the First Peoples Gathering House to commit to real reconciliation.

### **Delegate funding for resources for BIPOC at SFU**

Hire more Black and Indigenous counsellors ASAP. Begin steps to establish a centre dedicated to supporting Black students at SFU, and allocate support uniquely for Black athletes. This should also include but not limited to compensating Black and Indigenous students for their emotional labour for consultative and advocacy work. SFU is currently benefiting and relying on the labour of Black and Indigenous students, our labour and advocacy is being used to better this institution through our experiential knowledge. SFU needs to stop undermining the experiential knowledge of Black and Indigenous students.

### **Collect Race-based Data Collection at SFU**

Collect disaggregated race-based data through SFU [Institutional Research and Planning](#) where students can self-identify upon admissions. Track the data throughout service delivery at SFU as well.

## **Establish Points of Accountability to Develop an SFU Anti-Racist Equity Strategy**

It is essential for SFU to establish a Vice-President Equity role, to lead, develop, and carry out the implementation of an anti-racism equity strategy, with a focus on Black and Indigenous folks. As an immediate action to show commitment to anti-racism until then, hire a short-term hiring under the Office of the Associate VP Students & International focused on Black and Indigenous empowerment. Their role would include focusing on recruitment, retention, service delivery, inclusion on campus. Meaningful anti-racism efforts also include the immediate appointment of Black and Indigenous people on EDI Executive Sub-Committee.

## **Fast-Track Hire Black and Indigenous Faculty**

Hire Black and Indigenous tenured faculty immediately. [The Employment Equity Act \(1995\)](#) states that “every employer shall implement employment equity by... instituting such positive policies and practices and making such reasonable accommodations as will ensure that persons in designated groups achieve a degree of representation...”.

## **REFERENCES**

- [SFU Athletics & Recreation: Report on the Use of the Clan Team Name](#)
- [Diversity Meter Survey](#)
- [UN Report of the Working Group of Experts on Anti-Black racism in Canada](#)
- [The Employment Equity Act \(1995\)](#)
- [African American/ Black Students Success Centre](#)
- [OCAD U Cluster Hiring 5 Black Tenured Faculty](#)