

November 25, 2020

To our fellow students in the Faculty of Science,

In the past few months, we have been presented with overwhelming evidence for the need for immediate equity, diversity, and inclusivity (EDI) initiatives within our community. However, as conversations and initiatives about EDI at all levels of our university move forward, students *must* be consulted. Therefore, we—your student representatives—have decided to share this joint update on the ongoing actions and conversations we have been engaged in to strengthen equity and inclusion within our shared community.

The evidence for the need for action is overwhelming. The recent incident surrounding a [professor's use of the n-word in class](#), as well as the subsequent [letter that was released and signed by multiple professors](#) in support of the use of racial slurs in the classroom signals a profoundly disappointing lack of understanding on what creates a safe, welcoming, and inclusive classroom environment. This incident and others like it are not issues of “libertés surveillées” or of “the student always being right”—they are simply questions about being a compassionate human being. In this instance, the use of the full n-word—a word which for hundreds of years and up to the present day is used to demean and dehumanize Black people—deprived many students, especially Black students, of a safe and welcoming classroom environment. There is no part of academic freedom that licenses professors to use racial slurs, including the n-word, and no reason that concepts and sensitive subjects can only be taught if these racial slurs are also used. A university brimming with diversity of thought is a shared ideal, but a university where people cannot agree to treat others with compassion, dignity, and kindness is merely toxic. We believe that this incident alone signals the need for immediate improvement to our Faculty and University EDI knowledge to heal these divisions.

Further evidence for the need to create effective and immediate EDI initiatives can be seen in the lack of representation of the diverse student body in [upper management and faculty](#).¹ Systemic racism pervades throughout our institution, creating implicit biases, stereotypes, and assumptions that marginalize Black, Indigenous, and students of colour. We support students' calls for more [diverse faculty](#), the need for more [effective EDI training](#), and explicit and immediate action to foster a more equitable and inclusive community. It is the responsibility of all members of the university community to uphold the principles of EDI, particularly in upper management.

In the past few months, we have been engaged in [various ongoing initiatives](#) to create a more equitable and inclusive Faculty. We have also met with various members within the Faculty over the past few weeks to work together in creating a more inclusive campus. Many of these meetings have included positive statements regarding the need for students' voices in EDI conversations moving forward. In addition to these meetings, a few weeks ago, we sent a [letter to the Dean of the Faculty of Science](#) demanding a response from the Faculty regarding the recent incidents. During a meeting with the Dean, the Dean expressed his commitment to improving EDI within the Faculty of Science through improving education on EDI issues, engaging all members of our community in EDI conversations, and funding initiatives to improve EDI within the Faculty.

¹ Massie, M. The Diversity Study (2017).

Though these statements are a significant first step, we know that meaningful change requires sustainable action. By sharing these commitments from the Faculty more broadly with you—our fellow students—we hope we can work together as a community to ensure that students *continue* to have a voice in conversations about EDI moving forward. The first steps are often the most difficult, but they don't need to be taken alone. We encourage students to reach out to one or more of the signees of this letter if they want to get involved with EDI work within our Faculty and across our campus. We also invite students interested in supporting the initiatives and ideas described in this letter to join us by [signing here](#).

Signed by:

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