

GBC's Anti-Racism Strategy: Now you see it, now you don't?

Locals 556 & 557 Concerns on Slow Progress to Date

To: George Brown College Board of Governors

Cc: BSSN, GBC SA, Local 557, Local 556

As we all know, the unprecedented events of 2020 turbocharged and refocused the conversation on racial equity and anti-racism, and we were relieved when the George Brown College (GBC) administration announced its *Plan to eliminate racism at George Brown College* last July; including the framework for a comprehensive *Anti-Racism Strategy*.¹

However, 10 months later a number of issues have been observed that seem to give strength to the voices expressing fear that the GBC administration's commitment may not be quite as strong as broadcasted, and that it may not result in the substantive change that the administration promised.

At this point, we at Local 556 (representing all FT and PL professors and instructors, as well as all FT counsellors and librarians at GBC) and Local 557 (representing all Support Staff) have become increasingly concerned about the (lack of) implementation of (i) the equity and anti-racism measures included in the 2019 consultancy report for GBC, and (ii) the measures announced as part of the Anti-Racism-Strategy in the summer of 2020.

We therefore would like to share the key reasons for our concerns, in order to draw attention to current issues and to request actions that would support the implementation of the Anti-racism Strategy to which the GBC administration has so strongly committed. Implementation of anti-racism measures must become an integral part of GBC's administrative and educational structures, not a temporary initiative that is easily dismantled.

We are outlining these concerns because we are proud to be a part of a college that has been a leading post-secondary educational institution; importantly in terms of its approaches to issues related to Indigenous peoples, anti-racism, equity and diversity. GBC adopted its *Race and Ethnic Relations Policy* over 30 years ago, and we must take the events from 2020 and the ongoing racial injustices as a reminder to actively honour our college's commitment to address issues of racism, particularly anti-Indigenous and anti-Black racism.

THREE KEY REASONS WHY WE ARE CONCERNED

1. Delays: Are they deliberate?

In July 2020, the GBC administration stated:

*"George Brown College is committed to the elimination of systemic racism. It will critically analyze its programs, practices, policies and processes with a view to ensuring they reflect the strongest possible commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion."*²

*"The journey ahead involves listening to hard conversations, self-reflecting on our own biases and complicity, and creating real change."*³

Notably, GBC should have been well on into that journey at the time, since the administration had initiated the process almost two years earlier – or had it?

¹ George Brown College. [The Plan to Eliminate Racism at George Brown College, July 16th 2020.](#)

² George Brown College. [George Brown's College Anti-Racism Strategy, July 7th 2020.](#)

³ George Brown College. [George Brown's College Anti-Racism Strategy, July 7th 2020.](#)

- In 2018, the GBC administration commissioned an in-depth equity audit of its programs, practices, policies and processes.
- In September 2019 the GBC administration received the external researchers' report, including a set of specific recommended actions with timelines for implementation, which were to be made public.
- In late July 2020, and by now in the midst of an unprecedented racial justice crisis erupting during an equally unprecedented global health and economic crisis, the College's Student Association publicly expressed dismay at (i) lack of access to the full report (which was initially only accessible to selected staff with password) and (ii) delays in implementing anti-racist measures in general.⁴ (The report including recommendations was subsequently posted on the GBC website and is currently available without password protection).
- In January 2021, almost half a year since the GBC administration's *Anti-Racism Strategy* was conceived and promoted, the Student Association again deplored the lack of significant anti-racism measures and "meaningful action" at GBC.⁵

Considering all these factors, we seem to lack the action plan, clear deliverables, timelines and accountability measures that should already be in place at this point.

Requested action: Monthly status updates on each of the actions the GBC administration announced in 2020, mandatory for the Office Anti-Racism, Equity and Human Rights Services to provide.

2. *Employee Survey: Designed to defeat the purpose?*

The GBC Anti-Racism Strategy document announced an Employee Equity Survey for late fall 2020, recognizing that GBC "must understand our current equity demographics. This will allow us to understand how to address identified gaps in our workforce."⁶ While a survey was indeed launched, its deployment and design were not conducive to identify such gaps:

- Not anonymous since managed internally (HR):
 - No guarantee that data would be anonymous to the employer; and employees expressed great concerns that asking for job functions meant participants would be identifiable – predictably, the response rate of 35% was lower than third-party equity surveys (including a seal of anonymity) tend to achieve
 - Notably, previous research of this nature at GBC was conducted by a third-party provider – (e.g., Employment Equity Reports 2012/2013 to 2017/2018): Equity, Diversity and Succession Planning at George Brown College, provided by E. B. Harvey (Urban Dimensions Group Inc.).⁷
- Lack of race-based data: Participants could not identify their race:
 - The survey asked about "viewpoints of College employees on equity, diversity and inclusion" without intent to compare across demographic data
 - In doing so, GBC contravened the BlackNorth Pledge that our president signed in July 2020 "in another step to combat systemic anti-Black racism"
- Lack of diversity found within the study sample :

⁴ Student Association. "Open Letter to GBC." Dated July 23, 2020.

⁵ SA Student Association (@sagbc). January 6, 2021.

⁶ George Brown College. [George Brown's College Anti-Racism Strategy, July 7th 2020.](#)

⁷ George Brown College. [Review of George Brown College Truth and Reconciliation and Anti-Racism/Diversity](#), p.43.

- Currently George Brown consists predominately of faculty who do not identify as a minority. As this perspective would be over-represented within the study, the data would be grossly skewed to a more favourable results towards inclusion, equity and diversity. As such the scope if racism within George Brown would be inaccurately represented, thus the purpose of this study. It would be actually do more harm as issues experienced amongst the racialized, Indigenous and equity seeking faculty invalidated.

*As in all business ventures, ‘what gets measured gets managed’, so it’s essential that we collect data on race and ethnicity, including from Black employees, to understand where we have gaps and when we are making progress.*⁸

- GBC therefore remains out of step with current developments:
 - Statistics Canada has started to include details about race in its monthly employment data in order “to add to the (survey’s) ability to provide insights on populations of interest and assist in making evidence-based decisions.”⁹
 - Ontario’s Anti-Racism Act, 2017 (ARA) includes the commitment to “identify and monitor racial disparities in order to eliminate systemic racism and advance racial equity”; with reporting standards (already mandatory for PSOs) that were developed in consultation with the Information and Privacy Commissioner and the Ontario Human Rights Commission.¹⁰

Requested action: External provider to design, deploy and analyze a NEW survey that is aligned with both the BlackNorth Pledge and the Ontario Anti-Racism Act requirements to identify a baseline in terms of equity, diversity and anti-racism by collecting race-based data with results strictly anonymous to the employer. This information should subsequently be used to support the development of policies and programs that are aimed at increasing the presence of Indigenous, Black and other racialized, equity-seeking groups into all functions of the College, including roles in senior administration.

3. Anti-Racism and Equity Advisory Committee: Current Status?

The Advisory Committee was a key component of the announced Anti-Racism Strategy. Terms of Reference were completed on July 6, 2020 and announced on the GBC website.¹¹ Seven months later, the Committee is tour knowledge still incomplete, having less than half of the number of members with divisional representation, as identified in the Terms of Reference.

The announcement during the summer and brief 4-week nomination period at the end of a summer in the midst of a global pandemic may have had something to do with this. Further, it was specified already in the announcement that employees will not be given any relief of duties or paid time dedicated to the task as compensation to serving on this Committee, which further contributes to a culture of inequity in which unpaid labour is disproportionately assigned to women and specifically to racialized women .

Of note, the Committee is to be chaired by the Director, Anti-Racism, Equity and Human Rights Services. However, that position should be accountable to the committee, not chairing it. The Terms of Reference do, however, permit that the Director may delegate the chairing to a member of the Anti-Racism & Equity team,

⁸ [Blacknorth. The Pledge.](#)

⁹ Reuters. [Statistics Canada to start collecting race-based jobs data from July.](#)

¹⁰ Government of Ontario. [“Anti-Racism Data Standards - Order in Council 897/2018 - Data Standards for the Identification and Monitoring of Systemic Racism.”](#)

¹¹ George Brown College. [George Brown College Anti-racism Committee Terms of Reference.](#) Edited Final; July 6, 2020.

and for the sake of confidentiality and the independence of the Committee, we strongly feel that should be a requirement, rather than simply a recommendation .

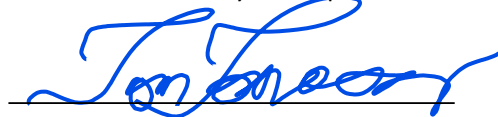
We are not aware of any action plan or even substantive discussions from the two meetings the truncated Committee has had to date.

Requested action: Complete the assembly of a fully functional Anti-Racism and Equity Advisory Committee that (i) is chaired by a Committee member and not a staff member of the Anti-Racism, Equity and Human Rights Services and (ii) whose quarterly meetings are an integral part of the monthly Anti-Racism-Strategy status update, with meeting minutes available for documentation; and (iii) providing relief time for faculty and staff so they can participate effectively on the committee.

In conclusion: We are at this point very concerned about the current status of the GBC Anti-Racism Strategy, but remain hopeful that the implementation will be supported through the transition to a new administration and will be an integral part of the new administration’s responsibilities and accountabilities; thus ensuring that GBC regains the momentum promised during the summer of 2020.

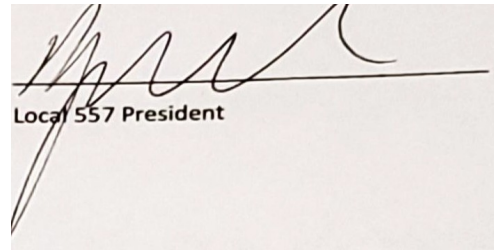
Indeed, the urgency of meeting systemic racism with meaningful action has been recently reiterated by the CDC whose Director declared racism a “serious public health threat,”¹² as well as by the Ontario Human Rights Commission, which continues to call on Ontario Universities and Colleges to “address systemic discrimination

We look forward to your response,



Local 556 President

Wednesday April 21, 2021



Local 557 President

¹² [NPR \(April 8, 2021\). CDC Director Declares Racism A 'Serious Public Health Threat.'](#)

¹³ [Ontario Human Rights Commission \(April 14, 2021\). “Letter to Universities and Colleges on actions to address systemic discrimination.”](#)