

**“They think you are exaggerating”:
A Report on
Campus Racial Climate at King’s and Brescia**

**King’s and Brescia Joint Presidents’ Anti-Racism Working
Group**

November 2021

*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Land Acknowledgement

Brescia University College and King’s University College are located on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak and Chonnonton Nations. As members of institutions affiliated to the Catholic Church, and benefiting from Ministry funding, we are called upon to acknowledge the *truth* of the church’s and government’s centuries of involvement in the family separation, violence, resource appropriation, genocide, and ethnocide unleashed upon Indigenous Peoples. The members of the King’s and Brescia Anti-Racism Working Group (KB-ARWG) urge our institutions to go beyond land acknowledgements as words. We ask them to take responsibility for the process of *healing and reconciliation*.

Context

The King’s and Brescia Joint Presidents’ Anti-Racism Working Group (KB-ARWG) was established in September 2020 to facilitate a better understanding of the racial climate at King’s University College and Brescia University College. This understanding was intended to reflect the perspectives of Indigenous, Black, and other racialized community members, and members belonging to ethnic and religious minorities. We were invited to collect and analyze data in order to make recommendations aimed at rendering the King’s and Brescia campuses safer, more respectful, and more equitable environments in which to study, research, work, and live.

Data collection and framework for analysis

Work on the KB-ARWG's report was divided into two parts. Part 1 of the project, the **Campus Racial Climate Assessment Survey**, gathered data and undertook a quantitative analysis to address the following questions about King's and Brescia:

- what kinds of racism have campus community members experienced/witnessed?
- what are the perceptions of campus racial climate among community members?
- what ideas for concrete anti-racist actions have traction with the campus communities?

Part 1 resulted in the current report.

Part 2 of the project, **KB-ARWG Interviews**, will take its cue from Critical Race theorists and Indigenous scholars, privileging and amplifying the narratives shared by Black, Indigenous, racialized, and minoritized students and employees. Findings from the one-on-one interviews will extend and add qualitative depth to the recommendations. This part of the project will be completed and submitted in 2022.

Findings

Yes, racism is an issue: The majority of survey respondents perceived racism as an issue at King's and Brescia. At King's, faculty and students were most aware of racism as an issue, and senior administrators and professional officers were the least convinced that it is so. At Brescia, administrators and staff were slightly more aware of racism as an issue than faculty and students. Many of the most eloquent and heartfelt responses to the open-ended questions--responses that testified to racism--were from students at both institutions.

"I've only had one black professor in my entire four years here."

—Survey respondent (student)

Lack of diversity: The higher in the campus power structures we go, the less racial diversity there is. While there is greater diversity among students, there is much less diversity among staff, professional officers, and faculty. The majority of faculty either disagree that diversity is valued in recruitment, hiring, and retention of instructors, or feel they do not know if it is important to their institution. At King's, 40% of student respondents report they are **not** taught by faculty of colour, while at Brescia, 73% of students state that they are **not** taught by faculty of colour. Senior leadership is almost exclusively white.

Expressions of racism: Participants experienced or witnessed various manifestations of racism perpetrated by members of the community, on campus or virtually. Acts of covert racism such as jokes, slurs, microaggressions, intellectual put-downs, and so on, were more frequently witnessed or experienced than instances of overt racism such as physical assault or unwarranted interventions by campus police.¹ Most participants encountered racial hostility occasionally rather than frequently, but the overwhelming majority of those who reported frequent occurrences of racism were racialized.

Lack of inclusivity: A specific systemic expression of racism is that curricula and pedagogies in many disciplines are somewhat monocultural, white-centred, and white-affirming; non-white cultures and knowledge systems are treated as inferior or are excluded from the frame.² Black, Indigenous, and racialized persons, communities, histories, and concerns are underrepresented or misrepresented in many disciplines. Across the occupational groups surveyed (students, staff, faculty, and administrators), a significant percentage of racialized members report feeling excluded or dissatisfied with their institutional environment.

Denial of racism: While the majority of respondents agreed that racism is an issue at King's and Brescia, around a fifth of the respondents were unsure if this is so. Roughly another fifth felt that it is not an issue, and that racial grievance has no basis. Lack of awareness of racism often means that "[t]hose who name the problem [i.e., racialized people] can be seen as being the problem" (Smith, 2021).

Reporting and discussion of racism: Fewer than a third of the participants in each role (students, faculty, staff, administrators) felt there were safe institutional channels to report racism and seek redress. A significant percentage of the participants were unsure if such channels existed, with students feeling the least secure at King's, and staff reporting the greatest uncertainty at Brescia. Lack of discussion of racism also means that some of the positive actions and changes respondents knew of were not shared widely.

¹ **Microaggressions:** Verbal or behavioral indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that express implicit derogatory or negative ideas and insults toward people with marginalized identities.

² **Pedagogy:** The method and practice of teaching, especially as an academic subject/theoretical concept.

Monocultural: Ethnocentric, privileging a single culture. In Canada, this tends to be a culture of whiteness.

“I go to school every day wondering what I will go through that day and how many more times will I need to defend myself.”

--Survey respondent

The costs of racism: The very real trauma, exclusion, anger, alienation, and isolation experienced by Black, Indigenous, and racialized community members at King’s and Brescia is most poignantly revealed in the responses to the survey’s open-ended questions, some of which are excerpted throughout this document. The psychological costs of racism are well documented (e.g., Canel-Çinarbaş & Yohani, 2019; Arbona & Jiminez, 2014).

Support for anti-racist actions: The majority of community members at both institutions support anti-racist actions such as awareness-raising about racism, curricular change to reflect the history and achievements of people of colour, and hiring for diversity.

Recommendations in brief

1. Acknowledge the prevalence of individual and institutional racism, and create channels for reporting and discussing racism for both students and employees.
2. Build a bold, durable, functional, and effective equity framework, with anti-racism as a core element.
3. Fully involve senior administrators in anti-racism as a project.
4. Build anti-racism into recruitment, hiring, retention, and promotion of faculty.
5. Audit curricula and pedagogies; create inclusive curricula and use culturally-sustaining pedagogies.
6. Decolonize the curriculum, and launch an intentional and focused Indigenization program under the leadership of Indigenous scholars, Elders, and organizations.³
7. Educate and sensitize faculty, administrators, and staff in every unit that serves students and employees.
8. Audit and modify budgets, documents, policies, and practices to reflect awareness of implicit bias and to remedy exclusions.

³ **Indigenization:** In this context, valuing and amplifying Indigenous knowledge systems, methods, values, and land-based learning in our institutions. Western’s [Indigenous Strategic Plan](#) is a key reference point for such action.