

Notes on Building Academic Frameworks for Justice at King's:

A Conversation Starter for Academic Planning

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Judging by the prominence of “social justice” in King’s University College’s public-facing and identity-defining documents, the college leverages this concept both for academic differentiation as well as reputational advantage.¹ The language of the Strategic Plan (2017-2024) consistently references inclusivity, empowerment, critical thought, and ethical action:

Seeking sincerely to be a place of community and global engagement, we acknowledge in a special way the need to undertake initiatives to promote social justice; to redress historical injustices that have resulted in marginalization and discrimination; to improve access to higher education for historically disadvantaged individuals and communities; to speak “uncomfortable truths” (*Ex Corde Ecclesiae*) about the nature and origins of the problems of our time; and to promote the ethical use and equitable sharing of the world’s resources.²

While anti-oppressive educational frameworks are not explicitly mentioned in the Strategic Plan, we must acknowledge the need to renew our curricula and our pedagogies to lay the groundwork for racial and other forms of justice. A quick, informal scan of comparable Catholic colleges³ suggests that many of them are moving forward towards a practical realization of academic and epistemic justice. As King’s seeks to support students in becoming engaged global citizens, it could emerge as a leader among comparable post-secondary institutions in enshrining a quest for justice in its academic endeavours as well as in its social life.⁴

This document, therefore, respectfully submits that King’s should modify its policies, practices, goals and outcomes, curricula, pedagogy, research frameworks, and relationships to make its “sincere” commitment to social justice actionable and normalized in everyday culture. **It also argues that equity, diversity, and inclusion, embraced in rhetoric but neglected in practice, constitute an absolutely valid and vital lens for academic planning.**

I therefore place the following notes and suggestions in the context of the goals articulated (the italicized items below) in Section 1.1 of the Strategic Plan, which addresses academic planning.

¹ King’s Mission ([Mission Statement](#))

² A Place to Be, A Place to Become, King’s Strategic Plan (2017-2024), p. 4.

<https://www.kings.uwo.ca/kings/assets/File/about/Kings%20Strategic%20Plan%202017-2024.pdf>

³ I used the site <https://www.cccb.ca/evangelization-catechesis-catholic-education/canadas-catholic-colleges-and-universities/> to identify Catholic colleges and used each college’s search site to look for terms such as “racism” “Black” “Indigenous” and so on. A VERY informal scan.

⁴ While the focus of this conversation opener is racialized groups, many of the issues may pertain to other equity-seeking groups. Consultation with other equity-seeking groups on our campus is urgently needed.

1.1 Implement the College Academic Plan to distinguish King's as a centre of academic excellence

- Recognize diversity in intellectual traditions, cognitive styles, epistemic frameworks, and research questions as a key component of research and curricular excellence.⁵
- Recognize actions taken for diversity as a valid budget item.

1.1.1 Continually revitalize programs and pedagogy to ensure that students understand the body of knowledge specific to their discipline, and learn to think critically, communicate effectively, and gain an appreciation of the professional standards associated with each discipline.

- Renew programs and curricula by engaging in pedagogic dialogue with non-Eurocentric, non-White traditions, and build critical pedagogy and frameworks referencing other traditions into both research and curricula. A King's and Brescia ARWG survey participant remarked: "The curriculum of some elite courses reinforce colonial, Eurocentric ways of thinking... I feel extremely alienated, hurt, and frustrated when taking these courses." Almost all disciplines can incorporate an investigation of race into their curricula. A participant in Western's ARWG investigations noted, "We might attract more students if we broadened our areas of teaching to include parts of the world less often taught by people who look like us – and that will require more than an antiracism working group. It requires a commitment to racial justice and equity, and it requires resources."⁶
- Increase the number of courses that are race-related. Avoid making them "optional." The King's and Brescia ARWG survey found that "79% of survey respondents at King's and 80% of survey respondents at Brescia support more courses on history and achievements of people of colour; 69% of survey respondents at King's and 81% of survey respondents at Brescia are in favour of courses critiquing racism and colonialism in each discipline." The Western ARWG's recommendations include: "Increase the number of courses and programs focused on the study of and scholarship by racialized groups (e.g., Black studies, Indigenous studies, Jewish studies, Islamic studies, etc.)."⁷

⁵ See the University of Wisconsin's well-argued case in *Excellence and Diversity: A Guide for Hiring Committees* (2012). https://wiseli.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/662/2018/11/SearchBook_Wisc.pdf

⁶ Western President's Anti-Racism Working Group, *Final Report* (2020). <https://president.uwo.ca/pdf/arwg-final-report-to-president-shepard-fnl.pdf> (p. 18).

⁷ Western President's Anti-Racism Working Group, *Final Report* (2020). <https://president.uwo.ca/pdf/arwg-final-report-to-president-shepard-fnl.pdf> (p. 21). See also: Merli Tamtik and Melissa Guenter (2019), "Policy Analysis of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategies in Canadian Universities – How Far Have We Come?" *Canadian Journal of Higher Education*, (49.3) <https://journals.sfu.ca/cjhe/index.php/cjhe/article/view/188529>

- Renew programs by hiring (and *retaining*) Black, Indigenous, and racialized faculty. Without diverse hiring, diverse curricula will remain a mirage. A participant in the King's and Brescia ARWG Survey notes, "I've only had one black professor in my entire four years here," and the KB-ARWG Report recommends: "us[ing] evidence-based and detailed employment equity guidelines endorsed by official academic entities such as the [Canada Research Chairs](#)." The Western ARWG Report notes, "Greater emphasis should be placed on hiring academics who study race-related subject areas and are able to provide more opportunities for students to study race and decolonization."⁸
- Instead of assuming we share common criteria for "professionalism" and "excellence," undertake a metacritique of these concepts, as well as what is meant by "effective communication" (whose languages are being suppressed?). Not immediately obvious to White academics and administrators is the contradiction between the language of professionalism and the language of equity. "Professionalism" has often been the pretext on which non-White persons have been excluded and stigmatized: they have chosen the wrong research area ("too specialized"), do not have enough publications in "recognized" journals ("just some community-facing work"), have advanced degrees from countries whose degrees are not considered valid measures of expertise, have unimpressive teaching evaluations, have not won grants, have made the wrong linguistic choices in their writing samples, and (never mentioned, but well-documented), have the wrong gender, surnames, skin-colour, hairstyles, or attitudes.⁹

1.1.2 Raise and promote our faculty's research profile in the public sphere

- Explicitly recognize, celebrate, and reward (through hiring, promotion, and tenure) research that is focused on specific marginalized groups (e.g., immigrants, racialized groups, Indigenous communities), community oriented, and that has non-traditional research outcomes.
- Create EDID research awards that specifically recognize excellence in research that intersects with equity, diversity, inclusion, and decolonization.
- Create research mentorship opportunities for emerging scholars from equity-seeking groups; such scholars face "race tax" burdens, impostor syndrome, lack of access to circles of academic and social support and mentorship that are more easily accessed by white scholars. First-generation immigrant scholars in particular may lack support circles.

⁸ Western President's Anti-Racism Working Group, *Final Report* (2020).

<https://president.uwo.ca/pdf/arwg-final-report-to-president-shepard-fnl.pdf> (p. 21).

⁹ Two key studies offer detailed case studies and analysis: *Presumed Incompetent: The Intersections of Race and Class for Women in Academia*, edited by Gabriella Gutierrez y Muhs et. al., University Press of Colorado, 2012; and *The Equity Myth: Racialization and Indigeneity at Canadian Universities*, by Frances Henry, et al.. UBC Press, 2017.

1.1.3 Formulate learning outcomes that will yield a transformative educational experience

- Make equity, diversity, inclusion, and decolonization the responsibility of all members of the community, including faculty, as they construct their syllabi. As Western’s ARWG report notes, “the institution needs to create an educational approach to teaching about Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) on campus, as a shared practice, and not simply as a concept.”¹⁰
- Include analysis of privilege and justice for equity-seeking groups among program learning outcomes, and college-wide learning outcomes. Across disciplines, as far as possible, articulate academic goals that are both clearly anti-oppressive and antiracist, and proactively supportive of diversity and decolonization of the curriculum.
- Engage sincerely with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s (2015) recommendations when outlining King’s degree outcomes.¹¹

1.1.4 Expand, diversify and co-ordinate high-impact learning opportunities for students, both curricular (through research projects, internships, immersive experiences, international travel and study) and co-curricular (in conjunction with all the student support services at the College)

- Support and fund projects that enhance social justice within our programs and beyond it as part of the “incubator” series.
- When undertaking study in communities that are racialized and/or impoverished, ensure adequate epistemic and cultural preparation. Avoid the white savior model, and require students to actively *learn from* the communities they interact with, rather than see themselves as helping them. Use a partnership or collaboration model, and be self-critical.

1.1.5 Build dynamic partnerships and opportunities that encourage students, alumni and faculty to fully engage with contemporary challenges and make meaningful social infrastructure contributions.

- Create “infrastructure” for dismantling racism in the public sphere; and charity (in this case anti-racism) begins at home—at King’s.

¹⁰ Western President’s Anti-Racism Working Group, *Final Report* (2020).
<https://president.uwo.ca/pdf/arwg-final-report-to-president-shepard-fnl.pdf> (p. 4).

¹¹ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Calls to Action* (2015).
http://trc.ca/assets/pdf/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf

- Support and fund initiatives like Western’s Head and Heart series that engage collaboratively with Black, Indigenous, and racialized groups around our community in expanding our common world of knowledge.

1.1.6 Create a comprehensive transition-to-university experience for first-year students, including honing of academic skills, theme-focused interdisciplinary exploration, cultural enrichment, and living and learning programs.

- Conduct more research on the specific experiences of Year 1 students from equity-seeking groups, and collect data on their experiences.
- Avoid using a deficit model of international and racialized students. Celebrate the languages they speak and write in, the intellectual traditions they hold to, the writing habits they are taught.¹²
- Pay more attention to linguicism (linguistic racism) in course and curriculum requirements.

1.1.7 Increase accessibility by developing academic pathways for students from diverse backgrounds, by including themes and content in courses to engage their interest, and by facilitating their success through specific transitional-year programming

- Support and proactively arrange education for senior administration, committee members, EPC, faculty, professional officers and staff about anti-Black, anti-Indigenous racism, and measures to promote campus diversity. There not only has to be some shifting of the very definitions of what each discipline’s research field is, but there also has to be some willingness to be educated and to educate oneself about why equity-seeking groups are expressing dissatisfaction with current curricula and pedagogy. That is a lot of additional labour for faculty, administrators, and committee members responsible for planning. They should be supported in doing that labour; otherwise, their participation in the process of building educational equity will be a matter of grudging compliance, rather than of active inquiry, debate, insight, empathy, and acknowledgement of privilege and the need for inclusivity. Western’s ARWG report suggests: “Create interactive/experiential training for all faculty, staff and students... mandated across campus and implemented by experts.”
- Support faculty as they allow their current curricula and research plans to be troubled by non-Eurocentric, decolonial, anti-oppressive, and antiracist perspectives. Racialized faculty are particularly vulnerable when they teach material that facilitates a critique of racism. A King’s and Brescia ARWG survey participant noted: “I have read racist

¹² For a summary of concerns about linguicism, see Savini, Catherine (2021), “10 Ways to Tackle Linguistic Bias in Our Classrooms,” <https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2021/01/27/how-professors-can-and-should-combat-linguistic-prejudice-their-classes-opinion>

comments on my teaching evaluations which has greatly impacted my well being....
[T]he evaluations....can inflict great damage on women and racialized people.”

Articulate a policy on how to deal with classroom disruption, allegations of reverse racism and favouritism, irrelevance of the curriculum, lowered teaching evaluation scores for racialized faculty discussing race in their classrooms, etc. Create an atmosphere at King’s where Black literature is not considered of interest only to Black students, or Indigenous history of interest only to Indigenous students.

The democratization of education, and greater participation in university education by racialized people, people with disabilities, LGBTQ2+ people, and people from a range of minoritized positions means that faculty and administrators cannot serenely go on doing what they think is excellent research, teaching, and administrative work in their fields, if research, curricula, pedagogies, policies and practices ignore the life-worlds, interests, intellectual contributions, and struggles for justice and representation, of the growing number of equity-seeking participants in the post-secondary universe.