Student Services
Anti-Black Racism Action Plan
October 2020
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF TRADITIONAL TERRITORY

McGill University is located on land which has long served as a site of meeting and exchange amongst Indigenous peoples, including the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabeg nations. McGill honours, recognizes, and respects these nations as the traditional stewards of the lands and waters on which we meet today.
In May 2020, the Associate Provost (Equity and Academic Policies) and the Deputy Provost Student Life and Learning, directed Student Services to develop an action plan that would contribute to the improvement of the Black student experience at McGill. The process was to help inform the university’s commitment to a campus-wide anti-Black racism **action plan**¹, (released in September 2020) and to be framed by the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion **Strategic Plan**² 2020-2025 (released in May 2020), specifically strategic direction #1, the Student Experience. The Student Services Anti-Black Racism Working Group, co-chaired by Martine Gauthier (Executive Director, Student Services) and Charlene-Lewis Sutherland (Equity Education Program Administrator, TLS), developed this Action Plan over Summer and Fall 2020.

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Contributors

Working Group Membership

- Brent Madigan, Manager of the Local Wellness Advisors and Access Advisors, Student Wellness Hub, Student Services
- Charlene Lewis-Sutherland (co-chair), Equity Education Program Administrator, Teaching and Learning Services
- Emily Love, Manager, International Student Development & Communications, International Student Services, Student Services
- Kathleen Bateman, Associate Director of Wellness and Outreach, Student Wellness Hub, Student Services
- Kayin Kareen Queeley, Case Manager Crisis Response, Office of the Dean of Students
- Martine Gauthier (co-chair), Executive Director, Student Services
- Melissa Anne Cobbler, Wellness Advisor, Student Wellness Hub, Student Services
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- Ommu-Kulsoom Jumada Abdul-Rahman, Student Recruitment Associate, Enrollment Services
- Pascale Caidor, Diversity and Engagement Program Officer, Faculty of Medicine
- Stephanie Babb, Program Manager, Mastercard Foundation, Student Services
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Staff Consultants

- Ariunaa Bayarsaikhan, Data Analyst, Student Service
- Carlene Gardner, Director of the McGill Office of Religious and Spiritual Life, Student Services
- Charly Courage, Digital Communications Associate, Student Services
- Lina Di Genova, Director Strategy and Assessment, Student Services
- Rick Hink, Director of Communications, Student Services
- Robyn Obermeyer, Associate Director-Communications, Student Life and Learning
- Rojarra Armbrister, Communication Advisor, Student Services
- Shanice Yarde, Equity Education Advisor, Office of the Provost and Vice-Principal
- Vera Romano, Director, Student Wellness Hub, Student Services
- Veronica Amberg, Associate Director Branches Program, Recruitment and Communications, Enrolment Services

Student Consultants

- Maxiene Ceril, VP External, Black Students Network
- Sarah Towle, Student Engagement Coordinator, Campus Life & Engagement, Student Services
Development Process

The Student Services Anti-Black Racism Working Group met weekly over a period of four months, from late May to September 2020 to develop an action plan with short, medium, and long-term objectives to be implemented by Student Services. In order to clarify the work of the group, the co-leads developed a set of questions with the direction of Shanice Yarde (Equity Education Advisor) to help members feel empowered to fully and authentically engage in constructive dialogue and action. These questions included:

- What expertise and/or experiences can I contribute to this workgroup?
- What do I see as my main role on this workgroup? Secondary role?
- How do my experiences around race impact my ability to fully and authentically engage in this workgroup?
- What are the challenges and/or barriers for me to engage fully and authentically in this workgroup as it relates to my race?
- In what ways can I stretch myself so that I can contribute to this work more fully and authentically?
- Setting challenges/barriers to engagement aside for a moment, what do I truly wish to contribute to this work?

Following the articulation of the working group’s mandate by Charlene and Shanice in early July 2020, the group broke into three sub-groups to identify action items within the framework of the University’s EDI strategic goals. An additional working group, led by Charlene and Ariunaa Bayarsaikhan (Data Analyst), developed the framework for the Black student needs assessment. The working groups consulted S2 directors, staff and students to help guide the development of the action items.

Working Group Commitment and Mandate

Student Services is committed to excellence in providing services to McGill’s student body, which includes confronting any barriers to thriving for Black and racialized student populations. The connections between the social impact of racism and mental health for racialized communities are well documented. Numerous studies report a long list of negative outcomes including high levels of anxiety, stress, risk of depression, and damaged self-esteem that are directly related to impact of racism.

As a collective, the working group committed to addressing the climate of anti-Black racism within their roles at McGill University and specifically with respect to student experiences. This work was rooted in McGill University’s Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Strategic Plan, as well as many other calls to action from within McGill’s student and staff community. The group recognized this unique opportunity to work alongside other initiatives that attempted to challenge anti-Black racism. However, the group also purposefully acknowledged and honoured the work that came before and the many generations of people who have advocated for change and promoted Black student experiences and Black student success.

For service providers engaging in work that supports student wellness, it is critical to centre anti-racism work. Furthermore, as part of Student Services’ larger commitment, anti-racism work directly assists students in navigating "obstacles that may impede their ability to have a successful and enjoyable student experience" (McGill Student Services, 2020). Finally, this work is wholly aligned with Student Services’ core values of student centeredness, transparency, inclusivity, integrity, sustainability, collaboration and accountability.

Working Group Vision

Our vision is to lead and model the creation of a campus climate that attends to the needs of Black and racialized students. To foster an environment where Black students can thrive, we have to acknowledge and confront not only historic and existing systemic inequities, but also the anti-Black racism which impedes our students’ success.

Working Group Values

We do this through meaningful action, affirmation, empowerment, promotion, interdependence, dignity, belonging, accessibility, integrity, social sustainability, collaboration and accountability.

Student Services Anti-Black Racism Focus Areas and Objectives

The following focus areas and objectives guided the development of the action plan:

- **Better Understand Black Student Needs**: Create multimodal platforms for the articulation and evaluation of student experiences and needs;
- **Develop Trust with Black Student Community**: Create opportunities for engagement with Black student groups and Black stakeholder groups that support Black students;
- **Name and Interrupt Racist Practices**: Identify areas where policies and practices related to student services result in racist and/or inequitable outcomes;
- **Create Space for Black Student Wellness/Healing**: Build and adequately resource spaces where students can focus on their wellness and healing;
- **Offer Educational Opportunities**: Design and deliver educational programming for staff members and students that will foster a greater understanding of systemic racism and create a more inclusive campus climate.

From Ideas to Action

As the working group divided into different sub-groups, it was important that each group approach its work in ways that would coherently contribute to the larger project. In addition to regular check ins, a set of questions and reflections was drafted to guide the sub-groups’ work:

**Guiding Document Reflections**

- Based on the guiding documents, are there any reflections that you would like to share with this specific working group?
- With regards to this specific working group, does anything feel missing from the guiding documents?
- What part of the guiding documents inform this working group’s work?

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1 Cite guiding documents.
Alignment with Your Workplace

- How can your individual workplace engage with the guiding documents? The university’s strategic plan for EDI?
- What is one thing from the Student Services Anti-Black Racism Working Group that you can bring back to your functional area?

Creating Action Plans

- What work is already being done on campus, in this regard? (student and staff spaces)
- What are four action items that can be created for Student Services to work on the:
  - Short term (6-9 months)
  - Medium term (1-2 years)
  - Long term (3-5 years)
- What equitable measures of accountability can be created for each item?
- What are some concerns around the proposed action items?
- How have you applied an intersectional lens to the action items?
- What is one thing you will share out to the group at the next meeting?

From these questions, the sub-groups reported back to the Working Group. Out of their work, we identified four main commitments to action for Student Services.

Our Commitments

Student Services’s activity in dismantling anti-Black racism on campus is organized around four main commitments:

1. Assess the Needs of Black Students;
2. Promote Black Student Wellness, Success and Support in Sustainable Ways;
3. Raise Student Awareness about Anti-Black Discrimination, Oppression and their Effects on an On-going Basis
4. Enhance the Capacity of Student Services Staff to Create and Maintain Respectful, Accessible, and Inclusive Student Life and Learning Spaces for Black Students

These activities are grouped according to the time frame for their implementation: short term (6-9 months), medium term (1-2 years) and long term (3-5 years).

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Short term</th>
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<td>Six to nine months</td>
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Commitment #1:
Assess the Needs of Black Students

Short-term and On-going

Student Services’ Anti-Black Racism Action Plan includes a campus-wide assessment of the specific realities of McGill’s Black student population. Our team understands that the Black student community has been at the forefront of expressing their needs and are the experts in their own experiences. By centering the student voice in our assessment planning, we will help promote wellness and success as our students themselves define them. Students will be asked to consider a range of interactions, including those with our staff members. With this feedback, we will improve upon existing programs, trainings and planning. Furthermore, students will be able to offer their perspectives on respect and inclusion, which have been identified as priorities for our campus community.

For almost a decade, our teams have collected data that includes the respondent’s self-identified racial identity. This data demonstrates that students of colour often have a different—and unfortunately unfavourable—experience on campus. Our current assessment will go further in unpacking how the Black student community understands and moves through campus.

Due to the legacy of historical injustices, doing meaningful work with underrepresented and marginalized communities means engaging in a holistic harm reductive framework that includes everything from planning to data collection and dissemination. Every effort will be taken to carefully create measured steps to guide the needs assessment process. Our goal is to be respectful and intentional, so that data can be used to generate change that is both consequential and substantive.

This project is based on McGill’s own Strategic EDI Plan, which outlines McGill’s vision for creating a more inclusive learning and working environment. To enable this vision, the Strategic plan acknowledges historical inequities and commits to substantial redress in future initiatives.²

With these considerations in mind, the Strategy, Assessment and Evaluation group will:

Framework

Center anti-oppressive and Indigenous theoretical frameworks, allowing us to approach our work from a healing focused and reparative lens.

- Recognize how research, healthcare and education spaces have been harmful for communities of colour.
- Make a strong investment in Culturally Responsive Evaluation:
  - Promotion of alignment of practices with culture and community;
  - Use of measures and designs that consider cultural context;
  - Incorporation of community cultural context;
  - Engagement with and respect of cultural influence.

³ [https://fnigc.ca/ocap](https://fnigc.ca/ocap)
• Act with appreciation for OCAP (Ownership, Control, Access, Possession) principles as governed by FNICG (First nations Information Governance Centre).  

  o Provide timely access to data for affected communities.

• Create spaces for dialogue across cultures using the 4 R’s (Kirkness, Barnhardt)

  o Although originally created with Indigenous communities in mind, this framework for dialogue is also relevant here given the marginalization experienced by Black communities in institutions of higher education. As per Kirkness and Barnhardt there is a need for a transformative landscape that addresses, “the need for a higher educational system that respects them for who they are, that is relevant to their view of the world, that offers reciprocity in their relationships with others, and that helps them exercise responsibility over their own lives.”

  o The 4 R’s are Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity, and Responsibility.

• Respect Anti-Oppressive Principles

  o Intersectional lens which advocates for the disaggregation of data.

  o Looking beyond one or two identities and examining the ways in which systems are organized to create compounded experience of oppression.

Process

This process will use the elements above in the creation of all instruments, the dissemination of information, and in measuring accountability.

• Hold specific focus groups led by BIPOC (Black Indigenous People of Colour) facilitators to find out what questions should we be asking of the Black student community.

• Conduct a comprehensive and intersectional survey (derived from student focus groups) to establish the barriers, needs and experiences faced by the Black student community.

• Invite Black student community members to assist in analyzing and making meaning of the anonymous data that has been collected.

• Plan a future focus group to engage the community in our findings and clarify any ambiguous information.

• Remunerate for all students who give their time to assist this project.

• Hold interactive sessions where the data collected can be shared with community members.

• Translate knowledge gained, including the report itself, infographics and other programs and resources to be planned and developed.

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Commitment #2: Promote Black Student Wellness, Success and Support in Sustainable Ways

Our action plan sets out find sustainable ways to support the wellness and success of our Black students.

In the short term, Student Services will:

- Prioritize representation from Black students, Indigenous students, and students of color on Student Services’ advisory committees and advocate for their inclusion on other committees (ex. CSS); and,
- Perform a sub-unit analysis of the supports offered to Black students, Indigenous students, and students of colour.

In the medium term, Student Services will:

- Develop on-going, consistent programming that supports Black students, such as participation in Black History Month, wellness-focused weeks for Black students, panel discussions/events on anti-racism, caucuses for students, collaborations and helping facilitate events with BSN and others, etc. Student Services areas should develop programming that directly relates to the gaps found in their unit reviews.

In the long term, Student Services will:

- Advocate for dedicated physical and virtual space for Black students and lead the search for said space;
- Advocate for bursaries and scholarships for incoming Black students;
- Contribute funding for Black student initiatives;
- Dedicate funding to a work-study position to support Black students and student groups on campus; and,
- Develop a tri-mentoring program in collaboration with the McGill Black Alumni Association to connect Black students with Black Faculty/Staff and Alumni.

These measures are not an exhaustive list of solutions to sustainably promote the wellness and success of our Black students. They do, however, represent an important part of our response to calls in the Strategic EDI report to “promote student wellness, success, and support, especially for those from underrepresented groups.”
Commitment #3: Raise Student Awareness about Anti-Black Discrimination, Oppression and their Effects on an On-going Basis

In the short-term, Student Services will:

- Advocate within the university administration for additional resources (financial and human) to be dedicated to the EDI online Systemic Racism education module (already in development), so that its scope can be expanded to include anti-Black racism content;

- Advocate within the university administration to make the EDI online Systemic Racism education module mandatory (or cross-unit) for the entire McGill community (student, staff, & faculty); and,

- Advocate within the university administration for additional resources (financial and human) to be dedicated towards Black History Month 2021.

In the medium term, Student Services will:

- Ensure that the new S2 EDI Advisor position collaborates with members of Teaching and Learning Services on the Our Shared Spaces portfolio, which uses a peer-based educational programming model for anti-oppression and anti-racism initiatives. Together we can then collaborate to expand programs with the goals of
  1) adding/expanding anti-Black racism content,
  2) making the program more broadly accessible to the student body, and
  3) complementing the online education module; and,

- Dedicate resources to coordinate the aforementioned peer-based programs.

In the long term, Student Services will:

- Implement a sustainable anti-Black racism peer education program wherein peer ambassadors will be recruited and trained to facilitate workshops/conversation spaces students and support with social media awareness campaigns;

- Deliver anti-Black racism educational programming and awareness campaigns during annual events such as Orientation, Black History Month and Queer History Month; and,

- Secure permanent funding for the S2 EDI Advisor to raise ongoing student awareness about Black discrimination, oppression and their effects.
Commitment #4: Enhance the Capacity of Student Services Staff to Create and Maintain Respectful, Accessible, and Inclusive Student Life and Learning Spaces for Black students

In the short term, Student Services will:

- Share resources including, but not limited to: any and all McGill-specific data [campus climate, discrimination, sense of belonging], benchmarks from similar Canadian campuses, anti-racism glossaries, anti-racism reading materials, campus partner content (e.g. Equity Office], non-academic anti-racism resources (e.g., art or activism based).

In the medium term, Student Services will:

- Integrate equity materials into the on-boarding process for all S2 employees;
- Utilize the performance dialogue process to encourage EDI training;
- Adapt existing workshops on anti-racism so that they are specific to roles within Student Services (ex. student-facing roles, management roles, etc.). Training should include, but not be limited to anti-oppression, anti-racism, racism and mental health, BIPOC resilience/care strategies, and unpacking the pillars of whiteness and white privilege in a multicultural workplace.
- Develop smaller discussion groups led by staff volunteers to make space for conversations related to the training subject matter;
- Develop Equity in Hiring/Inclusive Staffing or Anti-Discrimination training for Human Resources staff;
- Evaluate and review the employee “life cycle” and determine required levels of knowledge with respect to EDI for employees in different roles and experience levels. This can complement the behavioral competencies and contribute to a curricular approach to staff development; and,
- Ensure that staff training (especially around the topics listed above) is clearly represented within the Student Services Strategic Plan.

In the long term, Student Services will:

- Build training into the professional competency framework for each unit, including sections about understanding EDI/Anti-Black Racism, to be used in individual progress reports;
- Develop specialized groups within Student Services to develop anti-racist curriculum;
- Facilitate community dialogue after taking the “It Takes All of Us” (anti-racism) modules, allowing staff to debrief and share what they have learned and increasing buy-in for the module (and any future modules).
- Collaborate with OD (Organizational Development) and LDP (Leadership Development Program) to examine their future anti-racism trainings and encourage staff to attend them.
Next Steps: Accountability and Reporting

Student Services is accountable for the items articulated in this action plan. In order to deliver on this commitment, Student Services will adhere to the following accountability framework:

Student Services will distribute and report on the action plan widely. This includes:

» Posting it on the Student Services website under the [EDI tab](https://www.mcgill.ca/studentservices/equity-diversity-inclusion);

» Incorporating the action plan into the forthcoming Student Services Strategic Plan;

» Establishing a standing item on the agenda of the Committee on Student Services, a sub-committee of Senate, to report on the progress of implementation;

» Providing an annual update to the Enrollment and Student Affairs Advisory Committee ([ESAAC](https://www.mcgill.ca/esaac)), chaired by the Deputy Provost (Student Life and Learning), on the progress of the action plan.

» Provide the original working group members with an update on progress twice annually;

» Incorporate responsibility for reporting and accountability into the new S2 EDI Advisor role;

» Incorporate responsibility for reporting and accountability into the S2 EDI Advisory Committee.

Student Services is committed to taking the actions identified in this report; in fact, some elements, such as the hiring of an EDI Advisor, are already underway. As implementation continues, updates will be posted as indicated above to share our results with the community.

One of the first priorities of the EDI Advisor will be the creation of the S2 EDI Advisory Committee, which will receive continuous feedback on the implementation of this plan. We encourage community members to participate in this important conversation. To get involved, or to express interest in sitting on the Advisory Committee, contact Caroline Arpin at caroline.arpin@mcgill.ca.
Glossary of Terms

Before the Working Group began its work, it was important that members mobilized language in the same way. The purpose was to gain “a shared understanding of these terms [to] facilitate productive conversations on EDI”. It was understood and acknowledged that many terms, particularly those related to EDI, are defined and applied in many different ways. Furthermore, the language in this area is constantly evolving with nuance and greater understanding of experiences and positionality. The terms below were researched and drawn from different disciplines and areas devoted to equity and inclusion.

• **Racism:**
  o Prejudice based on race and reinforced by systems of power.
  o Aspects of society that openly or subtly make whiteness normal and valuable while making racialized communities invisible or devaluing, stereotyping and labeling people of colour as “others” who are different or inferior.
  o Academia... is one of the social sites in which race as a social relationship is constructed, in a tangle of stratifications, exclusions, privileges and assumptions.

• **Anti-Racism:**
  o Anti-racism is a process, a systematic method of analysis, and a proactive course of action rooted in the recognition of the existence of racism, including systemic racism. Anti-racism actively seeks to identify, remove, prevent, and mitigate racially inequitable outcomes and power imbalances between groups and change the structures that sustain inequities. It recognizes the historic nature and cultural contexts of racism and focuses critically on systemic racism.
  o Anti-racism aims to ensure the absence of unfair treatment, which includes exclusionary or discriminatory practices.

• **Individual Racism:**
  The beliefs, attitudes and actions of individuals that support or maintain racism. Individual racism can be conscious or unconscious. It can be active or passive.

• **Institutional Racism:**
  The network of structures, policies and practices in systems and institutions that discriminate, oppress and disadvantage racialized people.

• **Systemic Racism:**
  o The conscious or unconscious policies, procedures and practices that exclude, marginalize and exploit racialized people. Systemic racism is supported by institutional power and by powerful ideas, often unexamined ones, which make racism look normal and justified. For example, institutions that do not have effective complaints procedures, or performance appraisal and promotion processes that use equity competencies, make it possible for individuals to be racist.
  o Systemic racism consists of organizational culture, policies, directives, practices or procedures that exclude, displace or marginalize some racialized groups or create unfair barriers for them to access valuable benefits and opportunities. This is often the result of institutional biases in organizational culture, policies, directives, practices, and procedures that may appear neutral but have the effect of privileging some groups and disadvantaging others.

• **Equity:**

Equity, unlike the notion of equality, is not about sameness of treatment. It denotes fairness and justice in process and in results. Equitable outcomes often require differential treatment and resource redistribution to achieve a level playing field among all individuals and communities. This requires recognizing and addressing barriers to opportunities for all to thrive in our University environment.

• **Diversity:**

Diversity describes the presence of difference within any collection of people. In discussions of social equity, diversity addresses differences in social group membership related, for example, to race, Indigenous identity, class, gender identity or expression, sexuality, disability, ethnicity, and religion. Discussions about diversity linked to access and equity require knowledge and understanding of historical and contemporary experiences of oppression and exclusion. Diversity should be understood as uniting rather than dividing. The term calls upon us to appreciate both differences and interconnectedness, and to recognize and respond to systemic and institutionalized discrimination.

• **Inclusion:**

Inclusion refers to the notion of belonging, feeling welcome and valued, having a sense of citizenship. It also speaks to a capacity to engage and succeed in a given institution, program, or setting. Inclusion calls for recognizing, reducing, and removing barriers to participation created by social disadvantage or oppression, and can result in the reimagining of an institution, program, or setting.

• **Institutional Change:**

Reforming policies or developing new policies that redress past harm or seek to prevent it from happening again and require individuals to make different choices or change their behaviors.

• **Intergenerational Trauma:**

Historic and contemporary trauma that has compounded over time and been passed from one generation to the next. The negative effects can impact individuals, families, communities and entire populations, resulting in a legacy of physical, psychological, and economic disparities that persist across generations.

Examples of intergenerational trauma include the ongoing legacies of slavery of people of African descent, as well as the impacts of racial segregation, and the long histories and contemporary forms of racial oppression and violence directed at Black and racialized individuals and communities.

• **Racialization/Racialized:**

Racial identities are not fixed categories. They are shaped by history, nationality, gender, class and identity politics. Racial designations often differ from country to country. The term racialization or racialized makes explicit the ways in which we are socialized to differentiate groups of people on the basis of superficial physical characteristics where white is the norm. It emphasizes the active process of categorizing people while at the same time rejecting “race” as a scientific category.