



Framework to Address Anti-Black Racism

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Transformation: Charting a Way Forward



York University's mission statement reflects a community commitment to social justice. Over the years important work has been done by individual faculty, instructors, staff and students to advance equity and inclusion through research, curriculum, and service. At the same time, York administration recognizes that much more needs to be done to create the organizational change that is inclusive of and responsive to the needs of Black faculty, staff and students.

Between June and September 2020, President Lenton and Vice-President Cote-Meek met with over 120 members of Black communities at York University, including faculty, staff and students. The purpose of these meetings was to discuss their experiences with anti-Black racism on campus and to gather concrete suggestions for change. Fourteen written submissions from members of the York community were also received. A second round of consultations occurred during October and November during which a draft anti-Black racism framework was presented for discussion and feedback.

During the course of these meetings, many experiences were shared, including lack of personal and emotional safety, daily experiences of racial harassment, exclusion, discrimination, lack of representation, lack of respect and barriers to academic and career advancement. Students spoke about not seeing themselves reflected in the faculty, instructors, staff, administration and curriculum, racial profiling and surveillance while on campus, and lack of support. Suggestions on how to reduce systemic barriers and create greater inclusion were also shared.

We know that these experiences have impacted Black faculty, students, staff, and community members.

We understand and accept that racism and White supremacy have been part of academia since its inception. As a result, Black, Indigenous, and other racialized peoples have suffered in innumerable ways. We are sorry for the harm that Black students, faculty, staff, and community members have experienced.

We acknowledge the impact of the systemic issues at the university and through the development of this framework are committed to addressing anti-Black racism at York University. Our actions must be informed by consultations that will continue throughout the development and implementation of this framework and an equity strategy. We acknowledge that to dismantle the deeply ingrained structures of power and privilege that allow anti-Black racism to thrive, we require a strong, accountable and action-oriented way forward.

This framework incorporates the feedback and suggestions we received through the consultations and is the foundation for a more detailed roadmap that will outline actionable steps in the short, medium and long term. York University is committed to address systemic racism and will take steps to create change. Going forward, we will be responsible and accountable to the Black members of the community recognizing that bringing about systemic change is everyone's responsibility.

The overall effort of transformation is reliant on the engagement of the entire York University community, including the full participation of leaders across all areas, Faculties, administration and student services. Resources and tangible supports will be made available to foster the success of this work.



Guiding Values



This framework outlines overarching values, understandings and objectives to guide the university community in making impactful systemic change on anti-Black racism.

York University's vision is to combine academic excellence and inclusiveness to create maximum societal impact. York University strives to provide a broad demographic of students access to a high quality, research-intensive learning environment committed to the public good. The University's work is underpinned by the following values:

- We strive for **Excellence** in fulfilling all aspects of our mission.
- We are **Progressive**, encouraging open-minded inquiry, innovative approaches and forward-looking solutions.
- We uphold **Sustainability** – environmental, social and fiscal – as a vital compass for decisions and initiatives.
- We are passionate about advancing **Social Justice and Equity** through critical insight, creative problem solving, and socially responsible action.
- We champion **Diversity and Inclusivity**, embracing differing perspectives, peoples and ways of knowing, and fostering global fluencies and cross-cultural knowledge.

York University is also guided by our Racism Policy and Procedures, which outlines the following:

1. York University affirms that the racial and ethnocultural diversity of its community is a source of excellence, enrichment and strength.
2. York University affirms its commitment to human rights and, in particular, to the principle that every member of the York community has a right to equitable treatment without harassment or discrimination on the grounds prohibited by the Ontario Human Rights Code, including race and ethnicity.
3. York University acknowledges its ongoing responsibility to foster fairness and respect, to create and maintain a positive working and learning environment and to promote anti-racism.
4. Anyone in the York community who infringes a right protected by the Ontario Human Rights Code shall be subject to complaint procedures, remedies and sanctions in the University's policies, codes,

regulations and collective agreements as they exist from time to time, and to such discipline (including rustication or discharge) as may be appropriate in the circumstances.

To realize our vision, live our values and meet our commitments, we must work to remove the barriers placed on Black faculty, staff and students' access and success. As York Professors Carol Tator and Frances Henry (2009) have noted:

At every level, our universities must become responsible, accountable, and answerable to the diverse constituencies within its walls, as well as the racialized and Indigenous communities within Canadian Society. We believe it is time to move beyond studies, task forces and inquiries related to racism. Action is needed now to address the direct and indirect structural and systemic barriers deeply embedded in the White culture of the Canadian academy.¹

This framework is also informed by the following understandings:

1. **Anti-Black racism is pervasive and entrenched in Canadian society.** Anti-Black racism is defined as “prejudice, attitudes, beliefs, stereotyping and/or discrimination that is directed at people of African descent and is rooted in their unique history and experience of enslavement and colonization.”² Anti-Black racism is embedded in all institutions and York University is not immune to this fact. As a site of knowledge creation and dissemination, it is essential that York challenge and discontinue the reproduction and reinforcement of anti-Black racism.
2. **White supremacy is the root of anti-Black racism.** White supremacy stems from the belief, conscious or unconscious, that white people are superior and should therefore dominate all other racialized groups. It is an ideology that centres and assumes the inherent importance of White lives, realities and knowledge. “This notion of race emerged in the context of European imperial domination of nations and peoples deemed “non-White” and was used to establish a classification of peoples. There is no legitimate scientific bias for racial classification. It is now recognized that notions of race are primarily centered on social processes that seek to construct differences among groups with the effect of marginalizing some in society.”³

1 F. Henry & C. Tator, “Introduction: Racism in the Canadian University”, Racism in the Canada University: Demanding Social Justice, Inclusion & Equity, p. 38

2 <https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2017/ex/bgrd/backgroundfile-109127.pdf>

3 OHRC Policy Guidelines, 2009, p.11. www.ohrc.on.ca Ontario Human Rights Commission



3. Anti-Black racism has led to the exclusion of Black people from the academy.

Black people have been excluded from full participation in academia. Black community members have been underrepresented as professors, staff including administrators, instructors, undergraduate students, graduate students, and post-doctoral students. Further, they are underrepresented in the physical spaces of the university and have not been sufficiently included in the curriculum. Black voices, experiences, cultures and histories are still mostly absent from University life and structures.

4. Black thought and ideas must be included and acknowledged.

In the academy, whiteness and western ideologies have been celebrated and centred as the dominant loci of knowledge and thought. It will take an enduring commitment to acknowledge and situate the experience and knowledge of Black, Indigenous and racialized people to begin to bring academia into balance.

5. Black people are not a monolithic group.

Kimberlé Crenshaw describes intersectionality as, “a lens through which you can see where power comes from and collides, where it interlocks and intersects.”⁴ While all Black communities have faced anti-Black racism, the way racism is enacted and experienced is complicated by gender identity, gender expression, (dis)ability/abelism, sexual orientation, class, religion, place of origin, language(s) spoken, family status, marital status and other aspects of identity. The African diaspora is multi-faceted, multilingual, multi-faith and multi-ethnic, and this diversity needs to be clearly acknowledged so that the humanity

of Black people can be understood. The diversity of Black communities is a source of strength. As Professor Andrea Davis writes, “Our journeys will look different from each other’s, as will our stories, but we have the potential to write an incredible narrative that just may transform the world.”⁵

6. Black liberation and Indigenous resurgence are different but inextricably linked.

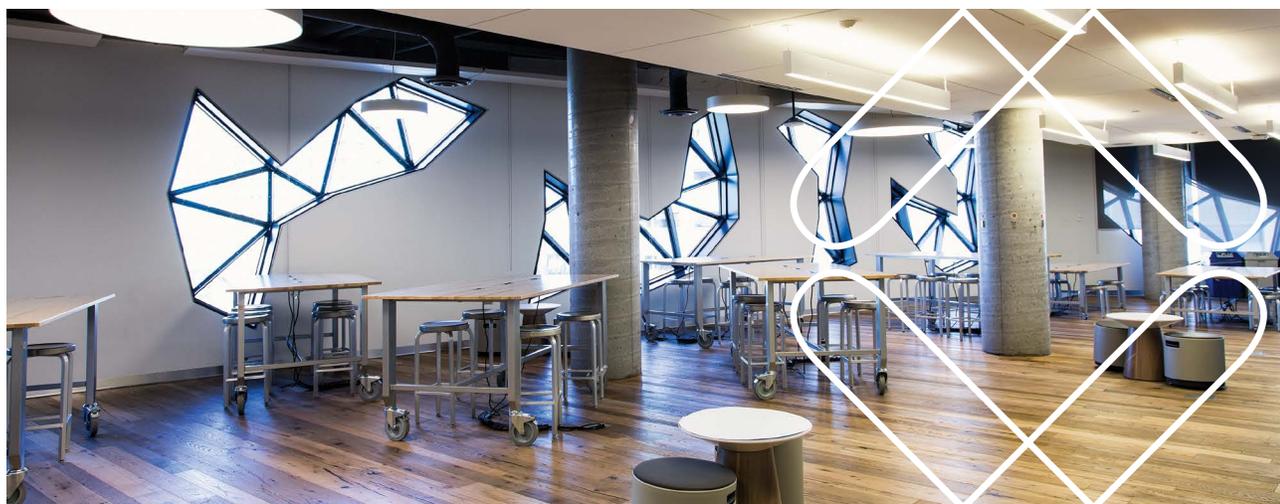
As we work to repair relationships with York’s Black faculty, staff and students, we recognize that commitments outlined in the Indigenous Framework must continue. Both efforts involve dismantling systems and structures that allow racism to exist.

7. The way forward is based in restoring the communities that have been harmed to a place of dignity and respect.

Restorative justice is a paradigm that can lead to greater change than punitive models. Restorative justice is the practice of resolving harm done by focusing on repair. It engages communities in the solution, and it requires broad participation in the restoration. Restoration allows for the dignity of people and communities to be considered as solutions are generated. It is not a hierarchical model but rather a horizontally designed system that recognizes the humanity in all peoples and sees them as worthy and capable. Through processes like talking circles, community members are engaged across their differences to bring about new connections and pathways. Restoration leads to transformation and unknown possibilities.

4 <https://www.law.columbia.edu/news/archive/kimberle-crenshaw-intersectionality-more-two-decades-later#:~:text=Crenshaw%3A%20Intersectionality%20is%20a%20lens,class%20or%20LGBTQ%20problem%20there.>

5 https://journals.msvu.ca/index.php/atlas/article/download/5340/pdf_57/



Objectives



In an effort to build respectful and inclusive relationships with Black faculty, instructors, staff and students at York University and to transform York's ways of knowing and being, York University is committed to meeting the priority objectives outlined below. Each of the objectives is important in addressing anti-Black racism from a holistic perspective. The University's approach to addressing anti-Black racism will not be piecemeal or sporadic, or only actioned during times of crisis. York's approach will be holistic, with a comprehensive methodology – keeping sight of the need to shift culture in all areas and at all levels of the University.

REPRESENTATION

- *Ensure that Black people are represented in all areas of the university – Board of Governors, senior administration, all staff, tenured faculty, instructors, undergraduate and graduate students.*
- *Review recruitment/admissions, hiring, retention and advancement practices of the university with an anti-racism, equity and inclusion lens.*

The University is committed to increasing the numbers of Black faculty and staff in all Faculties and departments and at all levels of the University, including at the leadership level. This commitment includes ensuring that opportunities are created for advancement.

The University is also cognizant of the need to address the barriers faced by Black people in the hiring and admissions practices of the University. The University must also work to retain Black faculty, instructors, students and staff once they become members of the York community. Mentorship is recognized as important in creating success for Black faculty, instructors, staff and students.

Representation is a key consideration for creating inclusion at the University. Black faculty, students and staff have consistently stated that the University must do a better job of ensuring that its population is reflective of Black communities – including the diversity within Black communities based on intersections with gender identity, gender expression, ethnicity, language, disability, creed, sexual orientation, family status and other aspects of identity.

SAFETY

- *Create an environment where Black people feel physically, psychologically and emotionally safe.*
- *Establish new, culturally safe mechanisms for complaints about racial discrimination and harassment that are available in both English and French languages.*

Black faculty, instructors, students and staff have indicated that they do not feel safe on campus. They have identified experiences ranging from microaggressions to racial profiling. The University must consider the respect, dignity and safety of Black people, including visitors to our campuses, when establishing and enacting community safety policies, procedures and programs. Furthermore, Black faculty, instructors, students and staff must have safe physical spaces where their knowledge and experiences are understood and centred.

Black faculty, instructors, students and staff have indicated that the University must do more to provide a clear message and create an environment wherein anti-Black racism is not tolerated and incidents of anti-Black racism are swiftly and effectively addressed.

KNOWLEDGE CREATION

- *Recognize York University's role in producing research and ideas that have reinforced anti-Black racism.*
- *Ensure that Black scholarship is represented in the curriculum, research, information resources and collections in all disciplines.*
- *Support specific initiatives and research that address anti-Black racism in Faculties and organized research units.*
- *Increase funding for scholarships, bursaries and other forms of financial aid in support of Black students.*

The University will work to recognize and support Black scholarship by ensuring that knowledge created by Black scholars is included in the curriculum.

The invisibility of Black scholars' work in the curriculum, research, information resources and collections has served to elevate whiteness and denigrate Black



ideas and thought. As Professor Audrey Kobayashi writes, “Whiteness as denigration is the dominant form of academic racialization. It denigrates the work of academics of colour not directly, but by valuing the Eurocentric.”⁶

York University’s curriculum, research, information resources and collections should be inclusive of the voices and experiences of Black people. Professor Carl James notes, “...there must be curriculum, and resources, that speak to every student sitting in the classroom. Even in math or sciences, an inclusive school would have curriculum in which every student can see something about themselves or their experiences reflected.”⁷

The work of Black scholars enriches the teaching, research, innovation, information resources, collections and overall learning environment for our students. Black scholarship must be taken up in the curriculum, research, information resources and collections in all disciplines at the University – from the humanities to engineering. Knowledge produced by Black scholars will enhance our students’ learning and ensure that they are better prepared to thrive in a diverse society.



Black students and faculty have identified the ways in which anti-Black racism has limited access to academic resources – including grants, fellowships and scholarships. To support Black knowledge production and dissemination, there must be sufficient funds in place to move research forward – particularly for the research units and programs at the University that are focused on studying the African diaspora. In terms of sustainability, this requires supporting researchers in grant applications and promoting recruitment to these programs. Financial barriers must also be reduced for Black students.

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS

➤ *Provide culturally relevant and bilingual resources to address the catastrophe of anti-Black racism including identifying relevant accessible community resources.*

Recognizing that anti-Black racism has a significant impact on the psyche of individuals, the University will ensure that culturally responsive resources are available to support the mental health and well-being of Black faculty, students and staff.

Black faculty, students and staff consistently spoke of the daily harms they experienced at the University. Black members of the York community experience a disproportionate level of emotional, psychological, intellectual and spiritual distress as they engage with people and ideas that regularly demean their knowledge and existence. The City of Toronto notes:

It’s not only overt racism that harms Black people’s mental and physical well-being. Anti-Black racism takes many forms. Black Torontonians frequently experience undue mistrust and scrutiny as part of daily life, in workplaces, schools, public spaces, or during interactions with public institutions. Common experiences are microaggressions, difficulty in accessing appropriate care and support, and even disbelief from care providers when expressing distress or trauma.⁸

6 A. Kobayashi, “Now You See Them, How You See Them: Women of Colour in Canadian Academia”, *Racism in the Canada University: Demanding Social Justice, Inclusion & Equity*

7 <https://thelearningexchange.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/spring2018-en.pdf>

8 <https://www.toronto.ca/community-people/get-involved/community/toronto-for-all/anti-black-racism-mental-health/>

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- *Develop additional opportunities for the York community to engage Black communities outside the university.*
- *Support Black-owned businesses by ensuring local Black-owned vendors and suppliers are aware of contract opportunities.*

York University is located in one of the most diverse neighborhoods in Toronto. “Visible minorities” comprise 69% of the population compared to the City of Toronto average of 51%, with Black people being the largest racialized group in the area.⁹ The University is in a position to establish new relationships and deepen existing relationships with surrounding Black communities building on initiatives such as the York University-TD Community Engagement Centre. Part of developing relationships and trust with Black people involves supporting and strengthening their communities.

York University should also continue to partner and collaborate with external organizations that focus on addressing anti-Black racism and reducing barriers to educational opportunities for Black people.

DATA COLLECTION

- *Collect and analyze disaggregated race data from students, staff, instructors, faculty and alumni.*
- *Collect data on anti-Black racism incidents and complaints.*
- *Data collection will be utilized to identify gaps and trends that signal systemic racial disparities so that appropriate actions can be taken.*

At the faculty level, the University collects data on the representation of the four designated groups outlined in the Employment Equity Act, including visible minorities. This data is now disaggregated by specific racialized groups, so we know more about the representation of Black faculty members within the university. The University does not collect self-identification data from students; however, York is currently developing a student census. The same data collection processes should be

implemented for staff, contract faculty and students. In addition, the quantitative data should be complemented with qualitative data which will help in the interpretation of the findings.

Disaggregated race data collection and analysis, collected with careful consideration of privacy and confidentiality, will contribute to advancing racial equity for Black faculty, students, staff and administrators. Similarly, collection and analysis of data on anti-Black racism incidents and complaints on campus will bring to light any systemic issues at the University. As the Government of Ontario notes, “By identifying and monitoring systemic racial disparities, public sector organizations will be better able to close gaps, eliminate barriers, and advance the fair treatment of everyone.”¹⁰

Both self-identification data and complaints data can also be used to assess the effectiveness of University initiatives to address anti-Black racism. The University will endeavour to have individuals with anti-racism expertise on the team responsible for the collection and analysis of the data.

EDUCATION

- *Ensure all students, instructors, faculty and staff receive ongoing education in understanding and addressing anti-Black racism, starting with the leadership of the University.*

To eliminate anti-Black racism from our campus, it is imperative for all members of the York community to understand the roots of anti-Black discrimination including intersectionality, and to gain the knowledge and skills to combat it. Leaders, faculty, instructors, staff and students should learn about White supremacy and colonialism, its impact on York University and Black people and work to assess their own personal values.¹¹ It is particularly important for University leadership to engage in education, self-reflection and self-examination.

The University recognizes that education is “...useful, effective, and successful when it is timely, planned, related to improved performance and organizational environment, and located within a systematic and ongoing change process.”¹²

9 <https://www.toronto.ca/ext/sdfa/Neighbourhood%20Profiles/pdf/2016/pdf1/cpa27.pdf>

10 <https://www.ontario.ca/document/data-standards-identification-and-monitoring-systemic-racism/introduction>

11 Anti-Racism in Higher Education – A model for change <https://soundideas.pugetsound.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1071&context=rj>

12 <https://www.racialequitytools.org/resourcefiles/james3.pdf>

DECISION-MAKING

- *Consider the impact of any decisions related to policies and programs on Black communities.*
- *Include Black members of the university community in decision-making processes.*

All policy and programming decisions at the University must be filtered through an anti-Black racism lens that considers the needs, experiences and histories of Black peoples. An example of an anti-Black racism impact assessment tool is the City of Toronto’s Confronting Anti-Black Racism Unit’s “Anti-Black Racism Analysis Tool for a Radically Equitable COVID-19 Response.” The document outlines clear operational principles and questions, noting that:

“Through years of research, advocacy, and organizing, Black communities in Toronto have highlighted the impact of direct and systemic anti-Black racism on Black Torontonians and has called on policy-makers and community groups to adopt an Anti-Black Racism Analysis in developing and implementing policies, programs and practices to address the needs of Black communities and achieve transformative change.”¹³

Black people also need to sit at decision-making tables as active and empowered participants. Diversity of thought and perspective based on the lived experiences of Black people will only serve to enhance decision-making and ensure that an anti-Black racism lens is applied appropriately.

ACCOUNTABILITY

- *Create an Anti-Black Racism Advisory Council within the Division of Equity, People and Culture.*
- *Engage in regular updates and evaluation on the implementation of this framework.*

York University pledges to implement this framework, ensuring that voices of Black faculty, students and staff are heard and considered throughout the implementation process. The University will create an Anti-Black Racism Advisory Council with an understanding that the diverse and intersectional identities of Black faculty, instructors, students, staff and administrators must be represented and that such a council will also include allies from the university.

The University will also engage in a yearly review on the progress of the implementation of this framework.



13 https://settlementatwork.org/sites/settlementatwork.org/files/ABR%20COVID-19%20Analysis%20Toolkit_Final.pdf