Sheridan | Office of the President

Ena Chadha, LL.B., LL.M.
Chief Commissioner
Office of the Chief Commissioner
Ontario Human Rights Commission
180 Dundas Street West, Suite 900,
Toronto, ON M7A 2G5
(submitted by email: cco@ohrc.on.ca)

April 28, 2021

Dear Chief Commissioner Chadha,

RE: Actions to address systemic discrimination

Sheridan welcomes the Ontario Human Rights Commission's recent letter to all Ontario universities and colleges, calling on institutions to identify the actions taken to create and sustain equitable and inclusive environments. Sheridan's five-year strategic plan, Sheridan 2024, codifies our institutional commitment to fostering equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI). As expressed in our publicly available *Statement of Commitment to Equity, Diversity and Inclusion*, Sheridan is committed to upholding the values of EDI in our teaching, learning and working environments to ensure they are free of discrimination and harassment, in compliance with the requirements of the Ontario *Human Rights Code*.

Sheridan has publicly shared that we recognize discrimination and oppression are products of systemic, structural, individual and institutional failures – including our own. We will continue to challenge ourselves to consider how our actions have the potential to negatively impact learners and colleagues from diverse backgrounds, which includes the need to create spaces where faculty, staff and students can disclose, report and seek support without fear of reprisal. We have a duty to remove systemic barriers to participation and have taken a number of actions to provide equitable and inclusive learning environments.

1. Legislative Compliance

Sheridan rigorously observes and adheres to documented procedures that afford every community member with a process to raise discrimination and harassment concerns in accordance with the legal principles of procedural fairness and due process, as per the requirements of the Ontario *Human Rights Code*. The Centre for Equity and Inclusion (CEI) is Sheridan's centralized entryway for reporting and addressing discrimination and harassment concerns and complaints. Sheridan has a strong and clear policy

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framework to guide the fair and timely handling of concerns and complaints relating to discrimination and harassment. For example, our [Discrimination and Harassment Policy](#) (last revised January 23, 2020), [Sexual Violence Policy](#) (last revised January 1, 2020) and [Accessibility Policy](#) (updated December 15, 2016), exist under the purview of the Centre for Equity and Inclusion.

The Discrimination and Harassment Policy and Procedures:

- Create role clarification amongst various Sheridan departments/offices when it comes to jurisdiction and complaint-handling.
- Emphasize that creating and maintaining a working and learning environment that is free from discrimination and harassment is a shared responsibility and underscore the duty of managers, supervisors and instructors to act when they know, or ought reasonably to know, that discrimination or harassment has occurred.
- Outline CEI's undertaking to provide confidentiality to the people who access its services, but clarify the limits of this undertaking (e.g. where the individual may pose a safety risk to themselves or others, where the sharing of information is reasonably necessary to investigate the complaint, etc.).
- Describe three approaches to dispute resolution (personal resolution, facilitated resolution and formal resolution) and emphasize alternatives to a formal investigation.
- Establish set timelines for completing investigations and other forms of dispute resolution.

We've also launched a new Academic Accommodation Policy for Students with Disabilities, which captures Sheridan's responsibilities and procedures and provides guidance on how to ensure that Sheridan meets it duty to accommodate the disability-related needs of students, as required by the Ontario *Human Rights Code*.

2. Data Informed EDI Practice

Sheridan collects and uses data to inform its EDI initiatives. This empowers us to take stock, assess progress and be accountable.

2.1 Equity & Inclusion Audit

In 2018, an equity and inclusion audit was conducted of Sheridan's programs and services, written policies and procedures, and informal and formal practices. The audit identified gaps in Sheridan's general and population-specific EDI initiatives compared to the best practices of other post-secondary institutions. Since the audit, Sheridan has made significant progress in the following areas:

- Institutional commitments to EDI and anti-racism;

- Increased accessibility of information; and,
- Improvements relating to EDI infrastructure.

2.2 Addressing Concerns through Investigations, EDI Assessments and Inquiries

Sheridan acknowledges systemic discrimination including anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism exists, including in our organization. Sheridan takes its duty to identify, address and prevent systemic discrimination seriously, as per the requirements of the Ontario *Human Rights Code*, and as set out in our own Discrimination and Harassment Policy. We have taken meaningful steps to better understand the needs and experiences of students who are seeking more respectful, equitable and inclusive academic environments through, for example, interpersonal and systemic investigations, facilitated resolutions, consultations, equity assessments, and panels of inquiry as appropriate. In the last 2 years, the Centre for Equity and Inclusion has conducted or facilitated 15 formal investigations, 18 facilitated resolutions, approximately 430 issue-specific consultations, 2 formal equity assessments, and 1 program-specific panel of inquiry. These processes involve internal experts, as well as independent, external, expert-led teams. Sheridan takes the recommendations seriously and actions them as appropriate. Our Centre for Equity and Inclusion has also conducted 55 training and education sessions on human rights and equity-related topics for students, faculty and employees, and other members of the Sheridan community.

2.3 Employee Self-Identification Census

In March 2020, we invited all employees to participate in Sheridan's first-ever self-identification census that captured six domains of diversity (gender, race and ethnicity, Indigenous self-identification, disabilities, sexual orientation, and faith/creed). The resulting report provides a baseline to contribute to our efforts to leverage the diversity, perspectives and lived experiences of everyone in our organization.

2.4 Employment Systems Review

In January 2021, Sheridan launched an institution-wide Employment Systems Review to embed diversity and inclusion into recruiting and hiring practices. The review marks our continued efforts to improve our practices, informed by quantitative and qualitative data.

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2.5 Listening Tour

From November 2019 to March 2020, Sheridan completed a robust inclusion listening tour to gather valuable insights about the lived experiences of our students, faculty and staff across our programs and Faculties, reaching about 300 community members for a total of approximately 50 hours of engagement.

3. Community Engagement

3.1 EDI Advisory Council

Sheridan established an EDI Advisory Council in June 2019 to act in an advisory capacity to our senior leadership team on all matters pertaining to equity, diversity and inclusion. The Council has wide representation from our students, faculty and administrative employees that takes into account the diversity of lived experiences.

3.2 Black History Committee

Every year, our Black History Committee creates events and supports the execution of initiatives generated by the pan-institutional committee, including keynote speeches from prominent members of the Black community, film screenings and numerous student-centred events featuring successful Black Sheridan alumni. Our most recent events were recognized by Academica Group Daily News.

3.3 Employee Resource Groups

Sheridan is forming Employee Resource Groups to enable individuals with shared characteristics or common interests to support one another. Pilot groups will launch in fall 2021.

4. Accountability

4.1 EDI Benchmarking Tool

Sheridan developed an EDI Framework based on the *Global Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Benchmarks* that is creating an effective college-wide structure for measuring progress.

4.2 Public Accountability

Sheridan has openly discussed its commitments to equity, diversity and inclusion on its institutional social media accounts and has archived community-wide letters on its Inclusive Communities webpage.

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Specific commitments we made last June are posted in our newsroom. Progress reports are shared quarterly with our Board of Governors and published on the Inclusive Communities site. We have shared four updates this academic year with students and one with alumni in February 2021. We will continue to be transparent.

5. Special Programs

In 2021, Sheridan developed Guidelines on Special Programs to guide the implementation of special program initiatives, as per section 14 of the Ontario *Human Rights Code.* Within our Honours Bachelor of Music Theatre Performance program for example, Sheridan recruited eighteen new part-time/partial load faculty members who self-identified as Black, Indigenous and/or racialized. In that same program, we also filled two full-time faculty positions under the auspices of a special program framework to attract Black and Indigenous faculty and help to address the under-representation of racialized groups.

6. Education and Training

6.1 Required Training for all Employees

In the summer of 2020, Sheridan implemented mandatory training on human rights, unconscious bias, anti-oppression and anti-racism for all employees. This training is in addition to the legislated training that all employees are required to take. Part-time employees are compensated for their time to complete this training.

6.2 Cultural Awareness

In our Honours Bachelor of Music Theatre Program, our "Expanding the Lens" training and awareness series has engaged industry guests to lead workshops for faculty on anti-racist theatre, contemporary Indian dance and cultural responsiveness.

Sheridan also launched an Indigenous Education Series for the Sheridan community to provide a baseline understanding about the history, original relationships, treaties, assimilation policies, and contemporary issues that affect Indigenous peoples.

Going forward, Sheridan will provide training on conflict resolution to senior administrators, program managers, and other individuals with significant responsibility in the workplace and for advising or supervising students.

Sheridan's Wellness & Counselling team has received additional training on identifying and addressing racialized PTSD and working with Black and racialized students. Our Student Affairs department is engaging in ongoing reflective practice

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work to advance EDI and cultivate a social justice mindset. This has included anti-racist collaborative conversations to build support for anti-racist reflection, growth, and action.

6.3 Curriculum

Sheridan's programs go through an established review cycle, which includes an examination of curriculum. As an outcome of the equity assessment, we are in the process of enhancing the process -- beginning with our arts-based programs -- to add an inclusion lens for re-thinking canonical staples and diversifying curriculum materials to include a much broader range of perspectives.

7. Engagement with External Communities

7.1 Commitments to EDI Charters

Sheridan has signed on to and endorsed several Charters to further solidify our commitment to fostering EDI initiatives:

i. College and Institutes Canada's **Indigenous Education Protocol**, which recognizes and affirms our responsibility and obligation to Indigenous education.

ii. The **Dimensions Charter** which commits us to prioritizing EDI research initiatives.

iii. The Indigenous Works' **"Luminary" Charter Planning Initiative** to advance Indigenous learning, research and innovation for economic well-being through increased cooperation and collaboration among Indigenous businesses, communities, institutions and organizations.

iv. The Regional Diversity Roundtable's **Diversity & Inclusion Charter**, which is designed to foster inclusiveness and equity in Peel Region.

v. The **Black North Initiative**, which commits signatories to specific actions and targets designed to dismantle systemic anti-Black racism and create opportunities for underrepresented members of the community.

vi. **Industry Canada's 50-30 Challenge** which calls on organizations to diversify their boards and senior management positions to achieve gender parity – or 50% representation – and to attain significant representation – 30% – of other underrepresented groups, including racialized persons, people living with disabilities, and members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community. Sheridan has reached these targets on both the President and Vice Presidents Committee (PVP), and the Board of Governors.

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vii. We are a **Pride at Work Canada** member, which commits us to be more inclusive and to celebrate employees of diverse gender expression, gender identity and sexual orientation.

We will continue to empower students to deal constructively with interpersonal conflict by improving student training/resources related to conflict management and problem-solving, and by ensuring that students are familiar with Sheridan's Student Code of Conduct and EDI principles. We are also developing EDI training for students on human rights, unconscious bias, anti-oppression and anti-racism.

While we recognize that there is more work to be done, Sheridan is deeply committed to respecting human rights principles and to abiding by the requirements of the Ontario *Human Rights Code.* We are committed to eliminating all forms of discrimination and harassment on our campuses and in our academic and work environments, and to fostering a climate that recognizes the dignity and worth of every member of our community.

Sincerely,

Dr. Janet Morrison,
President and Vice Chancellor
Sheridan

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