

MEMO

To: SJU Community

From: Peter Meehan, President and Vice Chancellor

Date: February 26, 2021 RV

Subject: President's Working Group on Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion
Phase 1 – Working Group Report and Recommendations

On April 20, 2020 interim President and Vice Chancellor, Scott Kline announced to our community that an Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) initiative and the formation of the President's Working Group on EDI were being launched. The announcement followed Universities Canada members endorsing seven "[Inclusive Excellence Principles](#)" as part of their ongoing commitment to advance equity, diversity, and inclusion and the development of individual action plans.

At SJU we are engaged in a [three-phase approach](#) to this commitment. During Phase 1 the President's Working Group on EDI was created and tasked to take an inventory of current EDI initiatives; identify institutional strengths and challenges; review promising practices; and formulate baseline recommendations to be used in the development of the action plan. I am pleased to report that their work is now complete and that their findings have been summarized in a report with recommendations.

Thank you to the EDI Working Group for this critical preparatory work and their commitment to advancing this initiative. I encourage everyone to read the attached report to learn more about their recommendations that will be guiding us in the next phase of this process.

Phase 2 – Development of an Action Plan will be led by the President's Advisory Group. Cristina Vanin and Mike Gourlay will continue their work on this initiative as co-chairs and will be joined in this phase by SJU's Chancellor, Bruce Rodrigues; Indigenous educator Tammy Webster; Jessica Vorsteveld, Director of Student Affairs; Leslie Moss and Jenny Fu, our two student representatives; one staff member; one member of our CAS; and one full-time faculty member. In particular, we are pleased that Mr. Rodrigues and Ms. Webster bring a breadth of knowledge and experience to this initiative as you will see from their brief biographies provided below.

I want to take this opportunity to thank all of our community members and stakeholders who are supporting and working with us through this important process. Equity, diversity and inclusion are fundamental to St. Jerome's identity as a Catholic university. As such, the movement for racial justice challenges us to identify and express our solidarity with all people, as well as to identify what our unique and collective contributions to the implicit gospel values of racial justice and equity ought to be.

President's Advisory Group on Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion BIOGRAPHIES

Bruce Rodrigues has an outstanding track record in Ontario's publicly funded education system, with a commitment and passion for putting students at heart of his work reflecting his deep devotion to student success that has been the hallmark of his career. He is currently the government appointed Supervisor for the Peel District School Board and was brought in to support the disruption and dismantling of a long history of systemic, anti-black, African, Caribbean racism within the Board. Mr. Rodrigues is the former Deputy Minister of Education and Early Years and Child Care in the Province of Ontario, who has a long history of involvement with issues related to equity, diversity and inclusion. He has a strong demonstrated commitment to issues of peace and justice. He was responsible for the creation of the Equity Secretariat at the Ministry while Deputy Minister.

Before joining the ministry, Mr. Rodrigues was the CEO of Ontario's Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) where he led a new strategic plan for the organization and worked to modernize the provincial assessment program. He has held several senior leadership roles including as Director of Education of the Toronto Catholic District School Board and Associate Director of Education of the Waterloo Catholic District School Board.

Mr. Rodrigues is also a seasoned educator of over 33 years. He was a secondary school teacher, where he taught Math, English and the Social Sciences. He also held positions of vice-principal, principal and superintendent before becoming director.

Tammy Webster, Anishnabe Kwe of the Kitigan Zibi Algonquin First Nation, is currently employed as Indigenous Lead Teacher in the Waterloo Catholic District School Board, where she has worked for 19 years. She supports the education system in deepening its understanding in Indigenous ways of knowing and being as well as implementing the Equity and Inclusive Education Action Plan. Ms. Webster has her Principal Qualifications as well as an MA in Education from York, Bachelor of Education in Elementary Teaching and Education from Western, BA in Leisure and Recreation Studies and a BSc from the University of Waterloo.

She currently sits as Anishnabeg Outreach's Board President, a member of Wellbeing Waterloo Region Connector's Hub, Sustainability Working Group and First Nations, Métis and Inuit Advisory and Advocacy Circle. She is also the interim Co-Convenor for the Region of Waterloo Anti-Racism Advisory Working Group and a contributing writer to the Community Editorial Board for The Record. Ms. Webster has also been the Co-Chair for Waterloo Region Aboriginal Academic Advisory Committee (WRAAAC), is a founder of Honouring First Nations, Métis and Inuit Graduation Ceremony, and sits on Region of Waterloo Children's Planning Table as well as various working groups.

Ms. Webster somehow finds the time to be on boards and committees where she can present a voice for urban First Nations and ensuring that the voice is present in decisions. She relies on her circle of knowledge keepers and elders for input in areas where they offer more in-depth knowledge and understanding. They help her remain grounded in decisions and ensure that the vision for future generations remains positive and healthy and includes an Indigenous lens.