

COVID-19 and Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has had profound and continuing impacts on the professional and personal lives of University of Alberta Arts faculty, staff, and students.

These are tough times. Restrictions on international travel and the closure of borders have left many in our UofA community particularly isolated, unable to visit cherished relatives and friends. Those with disabilities and chronic health conditions might be feeling especially worried and vulnerable, while those who have historically faced exclusion may be feeling even more marginalized. Indigenous peoples, Black communities, and People of Colour have suffered disproportionately from the effects of COVID-19. The same is true of people with disabilities, the poor, and members of other historically excluded groups. The closure of campus and the shift to working and learning from home also brought increased insecurity into the lives of members of our LGBTQIA2S+ community. The economic consequences of the pandemic have also exacerbated inequality, as many face significant financial precarity.

The COVID-19 virus, along with our collective efforts to contain the pandemic, have had ramifications on equity, diversity, and inclusion. Here, we acknowledge some of the many pandemic-related EDI issues our UofA community will need to grapple with, no doubt for years to come. The list that follows is not exhaustive. It is instead meant to guide our UofA Faculty of Arts community as we tackle the significant EDI challenges currently before us.

People With Disabilities

The pandemic brought new barriers into the lives of people with disabilities. Many are at heightened risk of contracting COVID-19, and physical distancing is especially difficult for those who require assistance from support workers and caregivers. The shift to online learning may have eased the obstacles for some, while generating new challenges and exclusionary obstacles for others.

Caregiving

The emergency closure of the University of Alberta campus in March 2020, as well as the suspension of daycare for young children and the sudden transition to homeschooling for children in Kindergarten through Grade 12, brought dramatic upheaval into the lives of many faculty members, ATS instructors, staff, and students.

Those with young children were forced to devise ways to care for and teach their dependents while simultaneously fulfilling their teaching, work, and study obligations. The consequences for research productivity, teaching effectiveness, administrative excellence, and plain old learning have been stark. The pandemic also created new pressures and uncertainties for those members of our Faculty of Arts community who care for elderly parents or spouses, and tend to the needs of ill or disabled loved ones.

Racism

Across the world and here in Edmonton, incidents of anti-Asian (and, particularly, anti-Chinese) racism have spiked. Insults, threats, and even physical assaults against Chinese Canadians and Chinese international students have surged since the pandemic began. Instructors, students, and staff of Asian descent may well have faced increased racism inside the (virtual) classroom, in meetings, and in their daily lives. The murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police in May 2020 brought heightened attention to longstanding issues of anti-Black racism in the United States. Within Canada, questions of structural violence and systemic racism took on added urgency, with attention to Black and Indigenous lives alike. While racism and violence are certainly not new, the strains of the pandemic have created an additional layer of stress on our BIPOC Arts community members.

Campus Closures

The closure of the UofA campus meant that most of our university community began working and studying from home. For some of us, home is not a safe place and there are numerous reports of an uptick in domestic violence linked to the major social and economic stresses of the pandemic. Be attentive to this difficult reality, be supportive, and know that there are resources available. The transition to working and learning from home also meant that online meetings with video became standard practice. Yet many of us can feel uncomfortable broadcasting our highly personal spaces over Zoom. Some have partners, housemates, or children they don't want to reveal to their peers/coworkers/supervisors. Others may feel uneasy or even unsafe showing their highly personal or humble spaces. Still others might not have a webcam or adequate bandwidth. Explicitly providing staff, students, and colleagues the option of participating in online meetings with their cameras off can help people feel safer and more included.

Resources

The Arts Pedagogy Working Group (APWG) developed the document [Barriers to Equity, Diversity and Inclusivity \(EDI\)](#), which addresses EDI and remote online teaching, outlining

steps to build more inclusive online classrooms for remote teaching ([self-enrol](#) in the eClass for access to all documents and materials).

The Arts Faculty Evaluation Committee (FEC) and the Academic Teaching Staff Evaluation Committee (ATSEC) jointly prepared guidelines to support the evaluation process for the coming years to help Arts members to address Covid-related challenges when completing annual evaluations.

For an extensive list of resources, including managing your health, safety, and well-being during the pandemic, see the webpage [COVID-19 Information for the U of A Community](#).