

EDID and Faculty of Arts Academic Restructuring Open Forum

Condensed Notes

On 22 January 2021, the Faculty of Arts community met to discuss equity, diversity, inclusion, and decolonization (EDID) during academic and administrative restructuring. The following reflects some of the key concerns, opportunities, and recommendations heard during the breakout sessions and in plenary.

Concerns

1. How will restructuring impact ongoing indigenization and decolonization efforts (ie. class sizes growing too large for decolonizing pedagogies, stalling of curricular decolonization efforts because of slow in Indigenous hiring)? Concern that decolonization and indigenization have not been central to restructuring conversations to date.
2. Who holds the responsibility to progress EDID commitments and policy at the University of Alberta? Concern that individuals from underrepresented equity-seeking groups (ie. Black and Indigenous faculty) are either shouldering the burden of pushing EDID agendas or that they are being left out of important decisions.
3. How can EDID be built into a process of restructuring if the latter is reactive? Concern that the speed of restructuring means there is little time to reflect and make good decisions; at the same time, because everything is happening quickly, there is a concern EDID agendas may be left behind.
4. There is recognition among leadership that EDID cannot just be a buzz word but instead needs to be confirmed with meaningful actions, however, because EDID initiatives need financial support, how will leadership follow through on initiatives (ie. increasing the number of Black and Indigenous faculty members) given retrenchments?
5. Concern that cuts and layoffs will undermine EDID principles by disproportionately affecting women and BIPOC staff as well as other structurally vulnerable individuals (ie. pre-tenure faculty) while also exacerbating a culture of competition and undermining safe spaces for advocacy.
6. Concern that future managerial positions (academic and administrative) might not be filled by a diverse group of individuals following restructuring.
7. Concern that work-load imbalances following restructuring will disproportionately impact women and BIPOC faculty and staff to the detriment of their research or other work productivity. That burden of responsibility should be better reflected in annual assessment and recognition practices (FEC, ATSEC, PrepD).
8. Given that faculty/instructor identity factors into student experiences, recruitment, and future employment, concern that the hiring slow will impact strides made toward diverse representation and that restructuring will negatively impact retention if structures of support and belonging disappear.
9. Moving people to different units may create a loss of supportive relations (peer and manager) connected to identity and community, which will diminish EDID. Students (especially international students), staff, and faculty of colour often build smaller communities of trust. What happens when these communities are dismantled?

10. For staff and functions moving to the centre or out of departments, what is the commitment to EDID and creating an inclusive and welcoming environment that makes good on our priorities and goals? This is especially a concern with recruitment and student advising.

Opportunities

1. Restructuring invites us to look at other areas and ensure people from underrepresented equity-seeking groups are not disadvantaged (ie. research funding or awards).
2. Restructuring offers us the chance to look at leadership and accountability with regard to EDID. By examining policies and procedures and following through with actions, leadership can build community investment and trust.
3. Restructuring allows us to raise difficult questions about our goals and values. For example, if we increase the numbers of international students, what will we do to support them? Such questions are not new, but restructuring brings long standing issues to the surface. This is our opportunity to address these issues in a meaningful way.
4. Restructuring brings opportunities for collaboration to light we may have not thought of; new structures (such as Colleges) may be able to increase the visibility of and celebrate the work that others have already done and identify how to build on that work together. New collaboration opportunities may also exist in the reconfigured Faculty, with different units and teams generating new ways of thinking and relations.
5. Restructuring offers us the chance to make EDID principles systemic and therefore to act as an example to other Faculties.

Recommendations

1. Clarify specific mindsets and principles with respect to EDID when it comes to decision making around restructuring.
2. Continue to ensure spaces for discussions in the remote environment are inclusive by including ASL (when there are folks who need it) and adding pronouns to Zoom names.
3. Develop means for assessing the longer-term impact of cuts in terms of people and intellectual investments.
4. Help the Arts community to see how consultation feedback is shaping the restructuring process with specifics.
5. At every decision point, pause and ask questions: "How is this going to impact the most vulnerable people?" "How is this going to promote EDID going forward?"
6. Work to ensure the environment becomes safer in the short and long term, for example by clarifying relationships with important bodies on campus, such as the Office of Safe Disclosure, First Peoples' House, etc.
7. Work to create an environment where people feel safe being honest about their experiences on campus, including clarifying mechanisms for reporting and responding to problems and negative experiences.

8. Take into consideration the conversations (in the city, provincially, nationally) that are impacting EDID on campus and ask how we are serving affected communities in and outside Edmonton.
9. Implement the same training at all levels of the Faculty and University to ensure that the mission is shared and everyone has a stake in improving EDID efforts.
10. Faculty leaders should mentor up and ensure that Arts concerns and thoughts with respect to EDID are communicated to Central.
11. Extra effort needs to be made to retain staff members from underrepresented equity-seeking groups and to ensure that when positions are altered, the important relationships and communities that sustain the individual and their work are retained.
12. Be upfront about failures and honest when unable to honour EDID commitments or when these have fallen short, including recognition of how past steps toward progress have shaped the present (ie. historical equity gains benefiting white women).
13. Identify and work to remove barriers to Black, Indigenous, and other people from underrepresented equity-seeking groups wishing to serve on Faculty committees and in leadership roles.
14. Seek out and nurture Faculty, College- or University-wide initiatives, such as the creation of an institute designed to advance Black studies and support Black students and colleagues, or developing a certificate in EDID.
15. Seek out and assess possibilities for creative pathways to addressing underrepresentation, such joint hires of staff across departments or cluster hires of faculty at the Arts or College level.
16. Articulate explicitly what Arts is doing to promote EDID apart from consultation meetings.