



University
of Victoria

MEMORANDUM

Date: 10 June 2011
To: David Turpin, President and Vice-Chancellor
From: University Human Rights Committee
Re: Meeting held 21 March 2011

Thank you very much for meeting with us on March 21, 2011. We value the opportunity to discuss the issues we have considered over the course of the year with you and other members of the university executive and hope that you find our comments constructive. This memo will summarize the discussion and make some recommendations on the three themes that were the focus of our meeting. In addition, we will update you on some of the initiatives that resulted from our meeting last year.

Format and purpose of meeting

Many people found our 2010 meeting difficult for a variety of reasons. We reflected this in our memo to you and made a series of recommendations to attempt to increase the value of these meetings for everyone involved. Five of these recommendations were fully implemented and it seems that the value of the meeting did increase quite significantly. We will attempt to continue these practices in the future.

The Chairs and Vice Chairs of EDAG and EMAG as well as the UHRC Chair met regularly between advisory group meetings this year to discuss the themes that were emerging in each advisory group. Over the course of the year the two advisory groups reached consensus on three major themes: (1) Indigenous issues; (2) disability and accommodation; and, (3) diversity and inclusion. The commonalities among themes as well as the differences were discussed at length.

Theme 1: Indigenous Issues

Both EMAG and EDAG have spent considerable time this year discussing Indigenous issues. The UHRC would like to see the services and programs that have been successful in supporting the recruitment and retention of Indigenous students continue. These programs include Our Elders' Voices, community-based education and the LE, NONET program. All of these programs look at Indigenous students as whole, complex people and attempt to consider the academic, cultural, emotional and physical needs of Indigenous students. They also provide important links to Indigenous communities. While outreach programs to Indigenous high school students

(examples include the externally funded mini-University and the STEM initiatives and the base funded recruitment travel for the Indigenous Community Liaison and Outreach Coordinator) must continue, the outreach /recruitment needs for prospective Indigenous adult learners and graduate students must also be prioritized.

The UHRC is concerned that Indigenous staff seem to have received fewer dedicated supports than students or faculty. In terms of recruitment of Indigenous staff, it is important to create opportunities for new and prospective Aboriginal staff to connect with existing Aboriginal staff, address practical needs like housing, childcare and eldercare, provide paths to employment for Aboriginal graduates and ensure Aboriginal people are involved in recruitment, hiring and Human Resources more generally. Providing professional development opportunities, career planning, mentorship with an Aboriginal focus and a designated individual to listen in confidence to any job concerns of Aboriginal staff will all assist with retaining Aboriginal employees.

Both UVic and Aboriginal employees will benefit from the building of a strong, enduring connection. To that end, some group or individual in the university (possibly Human Resources, Indigenous Affairs, existing Indigenous staff, Equity Office or others) could assume responsibility for engaging Indigenous employees shortly after they begin at UVic to address any adjustment issues and meet with them during their probation period. The university could learn about specific challenges and barriers facing Indigenous employees by collecting feedback about experiences with recruitment, application, selection processes, career progression and the use of exit surveys. Any action or strategies employed by the university should support reciprocity and reinforce Aboriginal identity development and professional identity development.

Recommendations:

- 1. We recommend that the continuation of LE,NONET be fully funded with base budget dollars and that the principles identified as necessary for Indigenous student success in the original LE,NONET project are fully integrated in the ongoing program.**
- 2. We recommend that someone (possibly Indigenous Affairs or Human Resources or EQHR) explore ways of supporting Indigenous staff. This could involve designating one person as a contact for Indigenous staff or developing a specific Indigenous staff development program. Indigenous staff should be consulted on what would be most helpful.**

Theme 2: Disability and Accommodation

This is a topic that comes up year after year as one of the top priority items for discussion. Although progress has been made (one example is the closing of S Hut and the opening of a new exam centre), there is more that can and should be done to allow students, faculty and staff with disabilities to feel welcome and part of our community, and be able to successfully study or work at UVic.

There is a need for greater focus and understanding of invisible disabilities (which include chronic fatigue, fibromyalgia, depression and mental illness). Accommodation requirements for such conditions are not fully understood and consequently, faculty and staff with invisible disabilities encounter challenges and barriers when trying to develop acceptable workplace accommodation plans with supervisors, managers or unit leaders. As well, the current system (combined with stigma) often results in situations where students with disabilities end up submitting multiple requests for academic concessions.

To help improve our understanding and be a more inclusive community, faculty, staff and students need more education about the full spectrum of disabilities (visible and invisible), the university's legal duty to accommodate and the processes, procedures and available resources. Whenever possible, educational sessions about disability issues should invite representatives from the relevant groups to participate (for example, Faculty Disability Caucus or Faculty Disability Committee of the Faculty Association, Resource Centre for Students with a Disability (RCSA), Society for Students with a Disability, etc.). We also need to keep in mind the burden that a self-advocacy model puts on individuals at a time when they are already at risk. Currently, there is a resource centre for students with a disability and the VPAC has a web site with information about accommodation. However, some faculty and staff are uncertain where to go to seek information, assistance or guidance. Consideration should be given to both the need for a locus of assistance and guidance for faculty and staff and to whether resources of the RCSA are sufficient to enable it to fulfill its mission.

Recommendations:

- 1. Commit to a robust and systematic plan for educating the university community, in order to raise awareness about disabilities and accommodation (and related stigma and discrimination). We recommend ongoing financial support for the work of the Mental Health Task Force including the mental health first aid workshops.**
- 2. Create a more extensive and comprehensive resource centre (virtual or otherwise) where people with disabilities, and those who are seeking to accommodate and support them, can go for information and direction. There is already a VPAC website that addresses this issue for faculty. A comprehensive resource centre could also provide equipment to help make UVic more accessible. Consideration might be given to the possibility of the Welcome Centre offering some or all of these services.**
- 3. Encourage academic units to work collaboratively with students with chronic health issues on developing early proactive accommodation plans to help reduce the need for academic concessions or appeals.**
- 4. The central fund, located in HR, for accommodation for staff and faculty has been in place for several years now. We recommend that it be reviewed to see if it is meeting its intended objectives. Some questions that might be asked are a) Does the fund take discrepancies in departmental means into account in allocations (i.e. is the 50/50 cost sharing with all departments an equitable method of allocation)? b) Are all departments**

aware of the fund? c) Are there additional complementary opportunities to support accommodation in the workplace?

Theme 3: Diversity and Inclusion

As the University of Victoria strives to be one of the best universities in the world we can benefit from continuing to develop our strengths by recruiting the most talented people from the full range of diversity. We need to both build on our current strengths and to recognize and remediate our weaknesses. We appreciate and value the resources UVic provides and the important work done by many groups to support diversity and inclusion. Examples of the many contributions and contributors to a welcoming and supportive learning environment include the University Human Rights Committee (UHRC), the Diversity Conference, Multifaith Services, the Diversity Advisor in the Provost's office, numerous public events of the Human Rights Volunteer Program at Equity and Human Rights, the Positive Space Network, diversity and inclusion workshops for faculty and staff, equity statements on postings, and the inclusion of equity and diversity statements into the service plans of units.

Childcare and eldercare responsibilities fall to students, faculty, and staff alike. Foregrounding care giving (for both children and the elderly) will advance the university's strategic goals to become more diverse and distinctive. The costs of such care tend to rest more heavily on the shoulders of lower income people who are underrepresented at UVic and may well be overrepresented among visible minority communities. Establishing care giving as a priority is particularly important to women who disproportionately fulfil caregiving roles in our society. No one should have to forego or underperform in education or employment at UVic due to family care responsibilities. The UHRC is most interested in the recommendations of the Childcare Task Force and sees potential in the proposal concerning the Queenswood property. The UHRC believes that eldercare is an issue that warrants further consideration and intends to look into this further in the coming year.

Recommendations:

- 1. Increased representation of visible minority faculty and staff on campus is necessary for UVic to meet or exceed labour force availability. All students, and especially visible minority students, will benefit from the role modeling thus provided. In order to accomplish an increase in visible minority people on campus we suggest more diversity training that addresses attitudinal barriers and helps to create inclusive environments, and more support and resources to those areas and groups currently working to advance diversity and inclusion at UVic. We see a need for a comprehensive analysis in order to determine where gaps exist in ensuring inclusiveness and diversity in recruitment and retention of students, faculty, and staff and increased attention to equitable and fair practices in student hiring. In addition to existing training for faculty on recruitment, we see a need for training sessions for people involved in recruitment and selection of staff and students to aid in ensuring fair and equitable selection processes across the institution.**

2. An increased presence of international students, faculty, and staff will strengthen UVic by expanding our global awareness and help us to succeed in training our students to be fully productive citizens who contribute positively to the improvement of our rapidly globalizing world. Some of the measures in (1) above will contribute to the recruitment and retention of international students, faculty, and staff. In addition, we suggest building better support networks through greater outreach to local communities of people of international origins, providing better housing opportunities for international students to live and learn with each other and with domestic students, and the creation of a Global lounge where domestic and international students can meet and share. We were excited to hear that consideration is being given to a new position—possibly an AVP International and are fully supportive of such a position and the focus it might bring to our recommendations in this area.

We thought we would also provide brief updates on two projects that arose from our meeting last year.

Task Force on Written Hate Messages

Early in the process it was decided to form a smaller working group to meet concrete objectives in collaboration with a larger task force to provide input, advice and suggestions.

Between July 2010 and March 2011 the working group met five times on their own and twice with the larger task force. Initially, discussion was focused on structure, membership, potential action items and the group agreed upon a draft mandate. We recognized the difficulty in arriving at a precise definition for written hate messages yet also saw that it was important to be clear about what we were addressing.

Early in October we partnered with the SGI Student Club (a Buddhist organization) and EQHR's volunteer program to show *Tongues Untied* in connection with the Victory over Violence exhibit.

We met a number of times with staff from UVic Communications to discuss taglines, images, a communications plan, reporting mechanisms and conversation cafes. Communications provided us with five different images and three possible tag lines for consideration by the larger task force.

On March 9, consensus was reached on the attached poster. A soft launch is planned for May/June and a hard launch for fall 2011.

SCRATCHING THE SURFACE: a UVic Educational Equity Review

The Best Practices in Educational Equity research project was initiated in spring 2010 to identify the areas of strength and challenge at the University of Victoria (UVic). A Task Group was initiated by the Educational Equity Advisory Group which together with the Employment Equity Education Advisory Group make up the University Human Rights Committee. This Task Group-

Professor Barb Whittington and Grace Wong Sneddon together with research assistant Cole Little, designed the project, directed the research and will complete a report in early June 2011. Funding for the eight month project came from the Provost's Office.

With the renewal of the institution's strategic plan, this inquiry proved to be a timely endeavor to understand how an institutional vision in reality meets the needs and lived experiences of the people it serves. It was our intention that inviting UVic students, staff and faculty to reflect on equitable practices and barriers could provide specific recommendations as well as identify areas of future work for the consideration of the Educational Equity Advisory Group and the UHRC. It appears that the research has provided a wonderful opportunity to "Scratch the Surface" of educational equity at UVic and the recommendations will prove to be a useful blueprint for future equity initiatives.

Recommendations of the UHRC to President Turpin – May 2011

- 1. We recommend that the continuation of LE,NONET be fully funded with base budget dollars and that the principles identified as necessary for Indigenous student success in the original LE,NONET project are fully integrated in the ongoing program.**
- 2. We recommend that someone (possibly Indigenous Affairs or Human Resources or EQHR) explore ways of supporting Indigenous staff. This could involve designating one person as a contact for Indigenous staff or developing a specific Indigenous staff development program. Indigenous staff should be consulted on what would be most helpful.**
- 3. Commit to a robust and systematic plan for educating the university community, in order to raise awareness about disabilities and accommodation (and related stigma and discrimination). We recommend ongoing financial support for the work of the Mental Health Task Force including the mental health first aid workshops.**
- 4. Create a more extensive and comprehensive resource centre (virtual or otherwise) where people with disabilities, and those who are seeking to accommodate and support them, can go for information and direction. This location can also provide equipment to help make UVic more accessible. Consideration might be given to the services the Welcome Centre can offer with this. There is already a VPAC website that addresses this issue for faculty.**
- 5. Encourage academic units to work collaboratively with students with chronic health issues on developing an early proactive accommodation plan to help reduce the need for academic concessions or appeals.**
- 6. The central fund, located in HR, for accommodation for staff and faculty has been in place for several years now. We recommend that it be reviewed to see if it is meeting its intended objectives. Some questions that might be asked are a) Does the fund take discrepancies in departmental means into account in allocations (i.e. is the 50/50 cost sharing with all departments an equitable method of allocation)? b) Are all departments aware of the fund? c) Are there additional complementary opportunities to support accommodation in the workplace?**
- 7. Increased representation of visible minority faculty and staff on campus is necessary for UVic to meet or exceed labour force availability. All students, and especially visible minority students, will benefit from the role modeling thus provided. In order to accomplish an increase in visible minority people on campus we suggest more diversity training that addresses attitudinal barriers and helps to create inclusive environments, and more support and resources to those areas currently working to advance diversity and inclusion at UVic. We see a need for a comprehensive analysis in order to determine where gaps exist in ensuring inclusiveness and diversity in**

recruitment and retention of students, faculty, and staff and increased attention to equitable and fair practices in student hiring. In addition to existing training for faculty, we also see a need for training sessions for staff/student hiring committees and for those involved in student recruitment and admissions committees to aid in ensuring equity in selection processes.

8. An increased presence of international students, faculty, and staff will strengthen UVic by expanding our global awareness and help us to succeed in training our students to be fully productive citizens who contribute positively to the improvement of our rapidly globalizing world. Some of the measures in (1) above will contribute to the recruitment and retention of international students, faculty, and staff. In addition, we suggest building better support networks through greater outreach to local communities of people of international origins, providing better housing opportunities for international students to live and learn with each other and with domestic students, the creation of a Global lounge where domestic and international students can meet and share. We were excited to hear that consideration is being given to a new position—possibly an AVP International and are fully supportive of such a position and the focus it might bring to our recommendations in this area.