March 5th, 2014

AMS Submission Re: Task Force on Intersectional Gender-Based Violence and Aboriginal Stereotypes Report

Dear Task Force Members,

The AMS would first like to thank the Task Force for opening up this important report to all members of the UBC Community and for doing extensive consultation. This is a very important document that will shape UBC for many years to come, and the AMS would like to commend the Task Force for making ambitious recommendations. These thoughts and comments are the collaborative work of the AMS Executive, the Aboriginal Students’ Commissioner, the Equity Commissioner and the AMS Education Committee. This submission will speak to each recommendation one by one, and will conclude with some overall commentary.

**Recommendation 1**
This is a fantastic and ambitious recommendation, and the AMS would request student representation on all of the review committees. It is implicit in the recommendation that these policies be reviewed soon, rather than just on the regular review cycle, and the AMS is in favour of this. Recommendation 1.2 is somewhat vague, and it is unclear exactly what a university-wide Respectful Environment Policy would look like. The AMS is in favour of a strong policy that holds all members of the UBC community including students, staff, faculty and administrators to the same standards. Many top-tier universities have implemented university-wide policies such as this. The AMS equity commissioner in the last few years has done some reviews of these policies and the Respectful Environment Statement, and we would be happy to provide these for the review process. Recommendation 1.3 is important, and something the AMS Aboriginal Commissioner is currently working on for the AMS. We are very open to collaboration on this.

**Recommendation 2**
The AMS is in favour of this recommendation.

**Recommendation 3**
The AMS cannot stress the importance of this enough. Having an identified central body to oversee and support these recommendations is key to their success.

**Recommendation 4**
Again, identifying responsibility is key. As well as *Valuing Difference*, how will *The Intercultural Promise* be incorporated into the Equity Action Plan?

**Recommendation 5**
The AMS is in favour of this recommendation. We are glad to see a commitment for Faculties and departments taking ownership.

**Recommendation 6**
The AMS is in favour of this recommendation. We wonder why there is the specific focus on transgender and gender diverse people, and suggest that perhaps the mandate could include issues of sexuality as well.

**Recommendation 7**
This is a very important recommendation, and the AMS would encourage UBC to become a leader in these issues at an even broader scale than just the higher education sector.

**Recommendation 8**
The AMS is in favour of this recommendation. It parallels with the existing Global Fund that is jointly run by the AMS and the Global Lounge.

**Recommendation 9**
This is an ambitious goal that the AMS is in favour of. There are a few concerns with the implementation of this recommendation. We hope that the equity requirement does not become a “check box” course, rather, it engages all students from all backgrounds in meaningful ways. We wonder about the possibility of this requirement being fulfilled through non-course learning. For example, this could be met through relevant community engagement, such as volunteering with the Sexual Assault Support Centre on campus or a similar organization off-campus, or being an equity ambassador. A list of relevant organizations could be created, and a certain number of hours could be required. This would also make it clear that these issues are not just academic in nature, but are inherently tied to our relationships with our communities.

It is somewhat unclear whether a new specific course will be created for the equity requirement. The AMS is in favour of, whenever possible, utilizing existing courses, however, there might be a capacity issue, and the AMS would be in favour of creating a specific course, or a few specific courses, to meet this requirement. This stems from a concern for those who are majoring in these areas, that their courses do not experience a sudden influx of students who may not be as interested or as knowledgeable in the course material, which could negatively affect their learning. This also may solve a concern for students who are in programs with a tightly controlled schedule, and few
 electives where scheduling may be an issue, such as engineering. Having a course that is specifically targeting and built for engineering students would ensure that the course is tailored to their area of study and fits within their time table. As well, for programs with few electives, it is important to ensure that this requirement fits with other requirements and does not add to workload. For example, engineering students have 6 required Arts credits. It might make sense to change that to 3 Arts credits and 3 credits for this equity requirement.

Recommendation 10
The AMS would like to see significant student representation on the Orientations Committee. It would be appropriate for the undergraduate societies of each of the major faculties to be represented. AMS representation alone is not enough for there to be significant collaboration and buy-in from students on campus. The University does not have authority over the AMS or its subsidiary organizations, and if there is not student collaboration and buy-in on measures taken, such as requiring University orientations to occur before student orientations, undergraduate societies will not cease their activities, but will likely move their activities off campus. The AMS is open to a conversation about shared goals and expectations for orientations leaders, as well as creating a community of practice in which follow up takes place to ensure these values are reflected through the actions of the community. Follow up is key to reconnect and offer a safe space for students (and staff and faculty) continue to reflect and discuss how they are applying these things in their lives and what challenges they face in doing so. We cannot stress enough that this must be a collaborative process where undergraduate societies have a significant voice and vote.

If the University creates equity training as outlined in 10.2, the AMS would welcome a conversation around opening this training up to other types of student leaders on campus such as leaders of undergraduate societies, leaders in the AMS, student senators and club executives.

Recommendation 11
The AMS supports this recommendation, and would very much like to be part of the creation of this module. We are concerned that if sufficient resources are not allocated to this, it will become a standard “check box” that students go through without really learning anything.

Recommendation 12
The AMS looks forward to collaboration on these guidelines, with clear delineation on which enforcement mechanisms the AMS is responsible for and which enforcement mechanisms UBC is responsible for.
Recommendation 13
The AMS has strong apprehensions about this recommendation. At the in-person consultations with Task Force members, it was clear that the university is committed to and understands the importance of collaboration with students and the AMS. The tone of this recommendation does not adequately convey this. The wording of accountability begins to sound as if student led organizations are under the control of the Faculties and the University. The AMS is cautious following the CUS chants when there were clear violations of the boundary between collaboration and dictation on the part of the University. In the current form of this recommendation there is no assurance provided that the relationship between the University, the AMS and students as a whole would be taking those lessons into account, potentially setting up an unbalanced relationship between student groups and the University. For the goals and recommendations of this report to be successful, it must be a collaborative relationship, and while we understand that the university has expectations if resources are being provided, the wording of this recommendation does not sufficiently recognize this.

Recommendation 14
The AMS supports this recommendation.

Overall Commentary
The focus on colonialist violence is very important. We are looking forward to seeing an aggressive response and course of action confronting and acknowledging white privilege, attempts to decolonize UBC’s modes of knowledge production, working to relinquish the authority that UBC as an institution has, and advocating for pragmatic actions concerning indigenous engagement. We hope to also see a commitment to seeing UBC better protect and respect the rights and freedoms of indigenous populations outside of Canada that are affected by the University’s actions and research areas. This document acknowledges that we are guests, and to fully put this in practice, this document must be approved by our host communities with them retaining full autonomy and freedom from the University. If there is an attempt to teach the UBC community to respect what is captured in acknowledging this land, then it ought to also be the case that the words spoken are truly put into practice.

We have some concerns about the composition of the Task Force itself, and hope that moving forward, there will be more presence of indigenous people and communities, as well as students, on the Task Force and on whatever body implements these recommendations. As well, most of the committee members were from a background in academia and it is important moving forward for there to be more representation from people ‘on the ground’.
Some concerns about terminology have been raised, and moving forward we would suggest to the University to strive to educate the entire campus community on why certain terminology is more or less appropriate, and to always ensure that the University is using the appropriate terminology. Definitions around Aboriginal, Indigenous and First Nations, as well as sexualized violence and gender-based violence should be clarified.

Given that UBC is a research institution, it was surprising not to see a recommendation on research. The AMS believes that part of Recommendation 7 could be recognition that part of championing equity in our communities involves supporting research within our institution on equity issues.

Overall, the AMS supports these recommendations, and looks forward to working with the University on them. The AMS is very pleased to see Goal 5 acknowledge and commit to the significant resources that may need to be invested to fully implement these recommendations. Faculties will need increased funding to be able to hire people with the appropriate expertise and anti-oppression training, and the departments of Gender, Race and Social Justice and First Nations Studies will need increased funding to support curriculum creation. Recommendations alone will not foster a culture of equity on campus nor teach students to be people who take responsibility to prevent and speak out against violence and injustice. Many of the recommendations are very ambitious, and we hope that the University does not commit to these without committing also to the financial implications because this will ultimately dictate how successful the recommendations can be.

Sincerely,

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