

AMS Equity Office Proposal

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1 – INTRODUCTION

Pressure continues to build campus-wide for creating and sustaining a cultural shift to address the social factors contributing to the worrying events of last year and to prevent their repetition in the future, namely the racist and sexually violent chants at CUS Frosh, the wearing of a culturally inappropriate headdress at the Block Party, and the series of heavily publicized sexual assaults in the fall of 2013. These events are not unique instances and they did not spontaneously materialize, but instead they are a culmination of a community-wide lack of awareness and understanding. They are the consequences of rampant stereotyping, racist ideologies, insufficient cultural recognition of forced colonial assimilation, and normalized gendered sexual violence.

The Draft Recommendations of the Task Force on Intersectional Gender-Based Violence and Aboriginal Stereotypes¹, created in response to these events and their greater context, note that “responsibility and awareness must be championed by all members of the community” (pg. 6), further espousing the necessity of “resources [being] made available to foster equality” (pg. 7). The AMS, as a large and capable institution, has here a clear directive for action.

The formation of outreach and education programs is necessary for all organizations on campus of suitable size, based on mutually agreed upon goals, such as those laid out in the UBC Intercultural Understanding Strategic Plan². In the past, the AMS has undergone several key pushes towards becoming a more equitable workplace and student union, yet it is becoming increasingly clear that a reactive approach to inclusion is, at best, marginally efficient, and at worst, entirely missing the point. It is becoming increasingly necessary to prevent issues of equity before complaints arise, and to foster a community environment of inclusion, creative and directed educational outreach, facilitated by trained individuals operating within set educational goals.

Within our scope, we have the capacity to interact with constituencies representing thousands of students, reach out to hundreds of student clubs, and draw on professional expertise throughout the university’s administration. Not capitalizing on such a strategically beneficial position would not only be a detriment to our hopes as an organization to remain accountable and accessible, but would also compromise the efficacy of the UBC-wide push for change. At this moment in time, the AMS is compelled into action for all future generations of students, in the knowledge that our contribution to the culture shift occurring has the genuine potential to fight inequalities and discrimination.

2 – CONTEXT

2.1 - Inefficiencies of current structure

At present, the Equity Commissioner primarily represents equity in the AMS. Their role is primarily policy-intensive, serving to provide information and resources to guide university lobbying on equity issues, as well as liaising with other equity bodies at UBC. Two other offices are also directly involved: the AMS Ombuds Office, reporting to AMS Council, is responsible for conflict resolution on AMS-specific matters, and the AMS Sexual Assault Support Centre, which takes a dual approach, by educating the community on sexual assault and rape culture, and by providing support for survivors.

¹ <http://vpstudents.ubc.ca/files/2014/03/IGBVAS-Recommendations-for-Community-Consultation2.pdf>

² <http://president.ubc.ca/files/2012/04/hupintstratplndraft2012apr.pdf>

The shortfalls of the current structure are evident. A 10hr/week, annually transitional, student position that is dependent on allocation of funding by the relevant student executives, lacks the professional experience, time, and long-term stability to meaningfully direct the resources of the AMS to a substantial culture shift. Though lobbying and policy review is an essential function of the VP Academic office, the position as it currently stands cannot be expected to make up for the AMS' equity obligations as an institution. As few others have had the necessary resources or time, the SASC has become the defacto source of all equity outreach at the AMS. Though their central mandate encourages participating in education and outreach as it relates to preventing sexual assault and violence, their operations are not sufficient to support the need for intercultural fluency initiatives and broad-based equity training. The SASC also agrees that such an educational center is necessary to increasing inclusion and community awareness of these issues at UBC.

2.2 - The AMS and other Canadian universities

The Student Society of McGill employs two Equity Commissioners who investigate equity complaints, chair the Student Equity Committee, and plan Social Justice Days. They are currently also planning an Equity Conference for 2015. A comparative report in 2013-2014³ on the SSMU Equity Structure describes our equity structure as follows, albeit with some misunderstandings:

One Equity Commissioner, staff position, runs the Office of Diversity, which falls under the portfolio of the salaried executive position of Vice President Academic and University Affairs. However, as the Office of Diversity is a resource for clubs, the salaried executive position of Vice President Administration and the Student Administrative Commission also help oversee it in its capacity as this resource. Further, there is a second paid staff member, the Mental Health Commissioner, whose role is related to Equity but whose position is separated from it. (p. 12)

The report overwhelmingly praises SSMU's relative successes, compared to the other schools in the report. Until recently, the AMS website had a section for equity that included a copy-pasted description of the UBC Equity Office, giving the impression that we had our own office inside the AMS, likely the cause of SSMU's misunderstanding. The report mentions that the "Equity Office initiatives are vague" (13) and that "Key Project and Reports from the 2013-2014 VP Academic Office are largely unrelated to Equity" (p. 13).

The University of Toronto Student Union⁴ has a full-time Vice-President of Equity, whose portfolio deals with various campaigns, including support for Idle No More, the "No Means No" campaign, and End the Blood Ban. Mental health is also under the mandate of the VP Equity. Clubs are required to send one executive representative to attend mandatory training, which includes an equity component. Several of the major annual events listed on their website are related to equity, such as the Unity Through Diversity series, targeted at promoting intercultural awareness and celebration of diversity, and the eXpression Against Oppression series, workshops, seminars, art shows, performances, and large-scale keynote speaker series.

The Queen's University Alma Mater Society employs a Social Issues Commissioner to oversee the eponymous Social Issues Commission. The Social Issues Commissioner's position involves supporting committees, briefing and advising AMS Council on equity issues, holding workshops for

³ <http://ssmu.mcgill.ca/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/Report-SSMU-Equity-Structure-2013-2014.pdf>

⁴ <http://utsu.ca/equity-social-justice/>

the student body and AMS services, sitting on various University committees, advocating and lobbying for anti-oppression action with Queen's Administration. They also maintain the SIC office and answer students' questions.⁵

2.3 - Previous equity initiatives within the AMS

After the AMS Equity Office was dissolved in March 2010 due to widespread dissatisfaction, not a whole lot has changed. Under the former structure, a student Equity Coordinator oversaw the training of mandated Equity Officers for clubs, expending thousands of dollars on training materials and labour hours for a program that ultimately drew much scorn for being unnecessary and intrusive. In the final survey commissioned to gauge clubs' perspective on the office⁶, the punitive nature and reactive approach to equity, as well as the overall failure at communicating its goals to the public stood out as the most noteworthy complaints. Its main flaws in retrospect were that it lacked professional guidance, it forced clubs to partake in training that often was not directly beneficial to their day-to-day operations, and it poorly communicated its purpose to the people it affected most.

A former AMS Equity Commissioner, Brett Sinclair, wrote an internal AMS Equity Strategic Planning review. The take-home message is that equity policy and programming continue to direly require attention in the AMS. The process of creating equity programming never progressed beyond conversations with UBC Access and Diversity, as no one could dedicate themselves to making it a reality. The time is truly ripe to make it happen now, as the foundations for it are here. We possess a wealth of institutional knowledge on equity at UBC, we have learned a great deal from past endeavors, and there is sufficient momentum on campus from the Task Force Recommendations and other strategic initiatives.

2.4 - Current UBC-V campus context

The AMS Academic Experience Survey Report (2014)⁷ notes, "There were significant increases in reporting feeling uncomfortable due to gender, race or ethnicity, sexual orientation and religious beliefs. These results, as well as the results of questions around knowledge of other cultures and indigenous cultures, indicate a strong need to continue work towards creating a more inclusive and equitable campus culture" (5).

Furthermore, this proposal coincides with a campus-wide reevaluation of educational resources on gender-variance that is currently occurring. The UBC Equity Office and UBC Access and Diversity Office are working on a resource compendium for faculty and staff for increasing their awareness of transgender and gender non-conforming people, so as to contribute to a more conscious campus culture, empower staff and faculty to adequately respond to students' gender variance when it is brought up, and prevent avoidable misunderstanding and conflict. Task Force Recommendation #6 also suggests the formation of an Intersectional Gender and Sexual Diversity Strategic Plan.

Treating diversity in gender, ethnicity, and sexuality as things to be celebrated and culturally recognized is essential, especially at an educational institution. The AMS is in a critical position to demonstrate its commitment to proactive equity practice. This should ideally take two forms; internally, we must commit to ensuring that principles of equality and inclusion are always maintained in our operations, and externally, we must take on an increased leadership role in the

⁵ <http://www.myams.org/about-your-ams/sic-social-issues-commission.aspx>

⁶ 2010 Equity Office Survey. AMS Archives.

⁷ <http://www.ams.ubc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/AMS-Academic-Experience-Survey-2014.zip>

campus community, guiding necessary conversations and changes in modes of thought on all equity matters.

It stands to reason that increasing the availability of training, initiatives, and professional equity guidance for our student leaders, student clubs and individual students would improve cultural fluency, awareness of gender/sexuality diversity, and adaptation of intersectional anti-oppressive practices, among others. This would send a strong positive message that the AMS values the core principles of equity and is determined to uphold them by dedicating an office to continue the culture shift necessary for effective inclusion at UBC. We cannot successfully and justifiably take a position on UBC's actions and policies on equity if we do not have an entity that furthers equity internally within the AMS. The systemic manifestations of discrimination that occur at universities require reform.

3 – PROPOSAL

3.1 - Equity Office structure

The Equity Commissioner recommends the formation of an AMS Equity Office, operating as a 'small s' service under the Executive Director. One permanent staff member with educational programming experience, equity or social justice-related education, and administrative experience would be the manager, and student staff would be hired as required. The Office would run as a pilot for one year, and its transition into a permanent AMS service would be contingent on successfully leading educational campaigns, providing consultation and showing tangible results.

Below the benefits of this structure are compared and contrasted with a student-run equity office operating under the SSM.

Model:	Pros:	Cons:
<i>Service reporting to Executive Director</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased long-term potential • Greater accountability • Access to professional contacts and expertise from EO manager • Emphasis on outreach • Quality educational content and delivery • Could be run as a one-year pilot project pending permanent approval, though this might limit the quality of candidates for the position 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater cost • Harder to cancel program or change function once it is created
<i>Service reporting to Student Services Manager</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less expensive • Can later be transitioned to a 'small s' service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less professional guidance • More risk due to frequent student staff turnover • Lacks stability in AMS structure

The relationship of the Equity Office with other entities in the AMS would primarily consist of providing an internal service. The equity training requirements within the AMS would be met, as well as serving as a valuable consultation resource for executives, council, and staff. It is necessary, as well, to clarify that this office would have no punitive function, and would not serve to enforce or penalize in any way, except by making suggestions in existing policy and protocols, rather than dealing with specific complaints. The educational mandate ensures that any specific cases would be referred appropriately elsewhere; SAC would retain oversight of clubs, the Advocacy Office would continue handling student cases with the university, and the Ombuds Office would continue conducting internal conflict management.

An Equity Office under trained, professional guidance would best fit the current structure. Other Canadian universities, to varying degrees of success, have implemented student-run equity offices, equity commissions, and dedicated student executive positions to Equity. The AMS, however, is in dire need of experience in equity. Student positions, while valuable in other areas, are not sufficient to fulfill our institutional needs and fulfill the desired services, such as the development of targeted equity education campaigns and the delivery of inclusion, conflict avoidance, and intercultural fluency training.

It is no longer effective to outsource our considerable demands for inclusion training for student leaders, student staff, and permanent staff, essential to achieving the equity proficiency that is quickly becoming the standard in higher education. As well as the considerable internal factors outlined in section 2, the AMS, to put it bluntly, does not exist inside a vacuum. We have an obligation to contribute to public awareness and education. A more culturally fluent, diversity-proficient campus is in everyone's best interest.

Equity Initiatives Fund

As well, it is recommended that the AMS further demonstrate its commitment to equity by instituting an equity initiatives fund, mirroring the Sexual Assault Initiatives Fund. Factors to be considered in the feasibility of such an endeavor would include:

- Current role of resource groups' funding for student-led initiatives
- Accessibility of external funding
- Availability of funds within the AMS
- Distribution/adjudication of funds

3.2 - Mandate of the Office

Internal equity facilitation

- Creating and delivering equity workshops as needed
- Compiling resources on organizational inclusion strategies and conflict prevention
- Consulting internally when requested on equity-related matters
- Referring parties requiring advocacy or conflict resolution appropriately, such as to the AMS or UBC Ombuds Office, Advocacy Office, SAC, and/or Human Resources
- Training student leaders on active witnessing, intercultural understanding and other topics as they arise

Scope: clubs, constituencies, resource groups, services, Executives, Student Council, and AMS employees

External equity facilitation

- Coordinating and overseeing campaigns for promoting cultural fluency and diversity
- Collaborating on new ventures and helping support existing ones for equity education
- Administering the funding of initiatives that exist to improve quality and inclusivity of campus culture through an Equity Initiatives Fund

Scope: broader UBC community

University liaison

- Facilitating delivery of equity training for AMS by UBC professionals, when our in-house trained educators require support
- Consulting on equity policy
- Partnering to improve resources currently provided by E & I and A & D
- Collaborating with VP Academic and University Affairs Office on necessary equity lobbying
- Advocating directly for students' needs when viable

Scope: VP Academic, UBC Equity & Inclusion, UBC Access & Diversity, VP Students

3.3 - Hiring

The manager must be ready to apply principles of inclusion and substantive equality to running an outreach-oriented office.

Hiring criteria should include:

- Experience managing staff, maintaining budgets, and overseeing projects
- Minimum Bachelors degree, preferably in social justice-related disciplines, or comparable work experience
- Background in anti-oppressive operational frameworks
- Experience planning educational events, workshops, and seminars, or facilitating them
- Knowledge of organizational equity policies and policy review would prove useful
- Comfortable and experienced in a large organization

3.4 - Pilot year

The first year would be run as a pilot year, in which the hired candidate (as per the criteria outlined above) would transition into the position. The focus for the pilot year would be developing and implementing equity training for AMS staff and students belonging to AMS organizations (clubs and constituencies). The staff member in charge of the office would also be tasked with creating educational campaigns for the broader community, coordinating with the VP Academic and University Affairs Office on university policy, serving as a resource on equity for the AMS community, and collaborating with the UBC Equity and Inclusion Office to represent the student voice in their initiatives.

At the end of their term, their success would be evaluated based on how well they have benefitted the AMS and our students, through the provision of equity training workshops, consultation on equity policy, and implementation of educational campaigns.

4 – BUDGET

The following is, in many ways, based on SASC's 2013-14 budget, and well as reasonable expenses that come with the implementation of a new office.

4.1 - Salaries

Depending on years of experience and education acquired, the Equity Office Manager's salary may range from \$45,000 to \$50,000 a year. The pay rate scaling corresponds to the level of educational attainment and work experience that can be expected from the candidate. We would, in effect, be paying for professional skill; a candidate with a Bachelor's degree, with 2-3 minimum years of equity education could be hired for approximately \$45,000, while more experience (3-5 years) would correspond to an increase to \$47,000, and finally, a candidate with a Master's degree would require a salary of at least \$50,000. Benefits are an additional annual 22% of the salary.

Student staffers could be hired as required. Assuming an average of \$11.25/hr at 10 hr/wk for 8 months and 20 hr/wk for 4 months, hiring one student employee would cost \$7,200 per year.

4.2 - Base costs

Base budget:

Office Supplies	\$200
Library	\$400
Furniture	\$2,000
Retrofitting	\$2,500
Equipment	\$3,000

Total: \$8,100

We are currently looking for spaces within the New SUB to accommodate the office. The availability of space, as well as the type of space it is, will determine the cost. Retrofitting would only be required if no current space is suitable.

4.3 - Pilot year budget

Below is a comparison of the 2013-14 SASC budget, and our proposed budget.

<u>Sexual Assault Support Centre:</u>		<u>Equity Office:</u>	
Salaries & Wages	\$92,007	Salaries & Wages	
Benefits	\$17,391	Manager	\$47,500
Telephone/Fax	\$1,200	Student Staff	\$7,200
Office Supplies	\$200	Benefits	\$8,977
Postage/Courier	\$60	Telephone/Fax	\$1,200
Miscellaneous Expense	\$584	Office Supplies	\$200
Photocopying & Administrative	\$500	Postage/Courier	\$60
Professional Development	\$2,000	Miscellaneous Expense	\$343
Advertising & Promotion	\$11,000	Photocopying & Administrative	\$500
Library	\$200	Professional Development	\$1,000
Furniture & Equipment	\$500	Advertising & Promotion	\$7,000
Volunteer Training	\$3,000	Library	\$200
Volunteer Appreciation	\$2,000	Furniture & Equipment	\$500
		Volunteer Training	\$900
		Volunteer Appreciation	\$600
Total:	\$130,642	Total:	\$76,180

The pilot year would cost a combined total of **\$84,280**.