Project Abstract (max 200 words)
Your abstract of your findings should include enough detail so that rationale, methodology and outcomes are clear. Use plain language as this abstract will be posted on the LTO website.

Researchers are paying close attention to how unconscious biases influence behaviour and decisions. This study’s purpose was to assess the degree that a group of health administration, informatics and alumni learners exhibited unconscious biases and to evaluate the use of an e-portfolio as a reflective tool to determine their awareness of their unconscious biases. The study utilized Pohan and Aguilar’s Personal Beliefs and Professional Beliefs About Diversity Scales. The results indicated that differences in one’s personal and professional beliefs with respect to retaining one’s mother tongue and learning in English might contribute to delays in the translation of documents and access to translators. Professional beliefs that segregate minorities on economic status and intellectual abilities may hinder supervisors’ offering professional development and promotional opportunities to minority employees. Because of the pervasiveness, subtlety, and complexity of aversive racism, the traditional techniques for eliminating bias that have emphasized the immorality of prejudice and illegality of discrimination are not effective. Although generalizations are limited by the study’s low response rate, this study begins to unravel reasons why aversive racism contributes to disparities in the workplace. In organizational decision-making unconscious biases presents a substantial challenge to the equitable treatment of members of disadvantaged groups.

Summary of Work Accomplished (max 1500 words)
Describe the study rationale (including supportive literature), project methodology, outcomes and potential application of outcomes.

Study Rational and Literature Review
Understanding unconscious biases is critically important to the delivery of inclusive health care because no matter how many laws are enacted or anti-discrimination training received, decisions made will align with a person’s unconsciously generated biases (Clements, 2014).

Malcolm Gladwell (2005) defines biases as the instantaneous impressions and conclusions that arise in our minds and influence our decisions. Clark’s 1954 (Abagond, 2009) classic doll study, replicated in 2006 with the same results, reinforces the power of these ingrained, unconscious biases. After being handed two dolls and asked by the researcher to respond to the question “Can you show
me the doll that looks bad?" (para: 7), the black child described the black doll as looking bad and the white as looking nice. Furthermore, when one receives information that contradicts one's deeply held unconscious biases, the brain simplifies the understanding process and relies on stereotypes and heuristics to inform decision making – rightly or wrongly. Information incongruent with one’s beliefs is quickly separated, labeled as information that doesn’t fit and discarded (Moule, 2005). Many egalitarians when asked if they are biased against blacks respond that they have black friends. This reduces the dissonance with their unconscious black stereotypical beliefs by convincing them that their black friends are exceptions. Dovidio and Gaertner (2005) label this equalizing thinking as absolution – I am not a racist because I have black friends (p. 2). The evolution of racism from open hostility to unknowingly making decisions based on one’s biased perceptions is aversive racism (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2005). Aversive racism systematically disadvantages marginalized peoples by influencing how qualifications are perceived and weighed. Aversive racism resulting from unconscious biases may account for why résumés with typically white names receive 50% more callbacks than those with highly skilled typically black named candidates (Ross, 2005). More importantly, the literature provides no reason to believe that the aversive racism found in the study of blacks is not applicable to other marginalized populations.

Lawrence Kohlberg (Schwind, Das, Wagar, Fssina & Bulmash, 2013) theorized that people move through six stages of moral development. Stage one behaviors are prescribed – do or be punished (i.e., Nuremberg defence of following orders). Stage two behaviour is reciprocal - an understanding that if I act one way you will reciprocate another way. With Stage three, interpersonal conformity, one acts in a socially acceptable manner. Stage four doing what is legally binding. Stage five practices distributive justice (greatest good for the most people). Stage six views people as being inherently good and should be treated justly. Understanding one’s level of moral development provides cues to understanding the underpinning of decisions.

**Study Methodology**

The Personal Beliefs About Diversity Scale (Pohan & Aguilar, 2001) is a 15-item scale that focuses on the diversity issues of race/ethnicity, gender, social class, sexual orientation, disabilities, language, and immigration from the participant’s personal sphere of relationship, raising children, treatment by others, living conditions and collective stereotypes. The Professional Beliefs About Diversity Scale, a 25-item scale, focuses on the same diversity items as the Personal Beliefs scale plus religion, instruction, staffing, segregation/integration, ability tracking, curriculum materials and multicultural versus monoculture education. A number of survey questions were negatively worded to indicate a more accepting response to the various issues. While awareness is the first step to self-regulation, reflection is a powerful tool to identify strategies for self-correction.

A digital e-portfolio is an electronic repository of one’s reflections. It provides a structured environment where users document their deep-seated beliefs and self-understanding. Portfolio users report their reflections highlight unconscious beliefs, allowing them to gain a more comprehensive understanding of their actual thought processes (Whitworth, Deering, Hardy & Jones, 2011). After administration of the
diversity scales, four e-portfolios were distributed to the study participants, one per week. Each e-portfolio consisted of a scenario that described the equity problems of sexual orientation, physical or mental abuse, ageism, and marital/family status. Standardizing the reflective questions across each portfolio allowed for themes to be combined. A post-study survey was conducted with a randomly selected sub-group of participants to assess the level of usefulness of the e-portfolio.

**Study Outcomes**

Sixty percent of the respondents responded with the most socially desired response (agree and strongly agree) for all the items on the Personal Beliefs Scale. The question that elicited the highest level of disagreement, however, was Question (Q)14 “It is as important for immigrants to maintain their first language, as it is to learn English” (62%). The respondents for Q10 “Many women in our society continue to live in poverty because males still dominate most of the major social systems in Canada” were almost equally split between all three responses (disagree, neutral, agree).

Forty-four percent of the respondents selected the most culturally diverse response (agree and strongly agree) on the Professional Beliefs scale. Q16 “Whenever possible, second language learners should receive instruction in their first language until they are proficient enough to learn via English instruction” elicited the least culturally diverse response (strongly disagree and disagree) (68%). Q17 “Teachers often expect less of students from the lower socio-economic class” was almost equally distributed between all three responses. Q20 “Large numbers of students of colour are improperly placed in special education classes by school personnel” evoked a higher number of neutral responses (62%).

While respondents personally believed retaining one’s mother tongue is as important as learning English (Q14), professionally the majority agreed that English should be the language of instruction (Q16). The cognitive dissonance created between personally believing retaining one’s mother tongue is important and professional believing that English is the language of instruction may account for the delays in translating documents and accessing translators. The professional belief that expectations are less for poor children (Q17) and the strong neutral response that minorities should be segregated in the classroom (Q20), suggests a large number of the respondents may be struggling to manage their personal bias, whereby they discriminate on the basis of socioeconomic status. This bias potentially hinders supervisors from offering professional development, training and promotional opportunities to minority employees. The post survey statement that “I will do nothing differently” may be evidence of absolution (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2005) as respondents try to rationalize their unconscious beliefs between what is legally binding and what they personally believe. The stronger reaction of the HIM respondents may be attributed to the fact that information management (formally health records) was female dominated and viewed as a low status health care job.

Minimizing the influence of unconscious biases falls into two categories: strategies that assist learners to become aware of their biases and strategies to help learners reduce the impact of their biases on their decisions (Teal, Gill, Green & Crandall, 2012). These strategies aim to gauge the influence of unconscious biases while the reflective activities begin awareness, resolution and amelioration of biases.
Encouraging interactions with diverse groups forces the person to face their biases and take immediate and sustainable steps to curb their covert influence on decisions.

**Potential Application of the Study**

This study indicates that unconscious biases existed in the study group. The next step is to conduct a focused, generalized study using the diversity scales to assess the degree to which our health leaders, mentors and educators.

**Evaluation of Project’s Success (max 600 words)**

*Explain how you know that the project was successful (Include evidence of rigorous evaluation.)*

While generalizations from case studies are limited and this study's low response rate makes any conclusions based on the inferential statistics suspect, this study was a success because it indicated unconscious biases existed and it influenced the thinking of students. This exploratory research provided insights into why aversive racism may contribute to continued workplace disparities. Composite continuous indices were calculated for each scale by averaging the respondents’ answers together. The Personal Beliefs index had a score of 4.05 out of a possible 5.0. The Professional Beliefs index had a score of 3.59 out of a possible 5.0. Overall, these index scores denote that the respondents reported moderately high levels of agreement on the diversity issues, assuming an absolute average value of 3.0. Using these indices in an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was performed as a confirmatory test of the levels of significance amongst the collapsed demographic variables. There were no statistically significant differences between group means as determined by a One-way ANOVA. While the \(X^2\) identified possible differences in the program groups, the ANOVA demonstrated that these differences might have been the artifacts of the size differentials among the groups.

**Transferables (max 500 words)**

*List and describe knowledge gained in this project and how that knowledge could benefit faculty members in the Ryerson community.*

As Ryerson’s mission is to address societal needs by providing students with curricula that balance theory and application, and prepares them for global careers, diversity must be taught from a sustainable perspective. McShane and Steen (2012) are clear that most institutions of higher education teach diversity from a surface perspective: observable demographic physiological differences such as race, ethnicity, and physical capabilities. Surfacing one’s deep seated beliefs through personal reflection is the most effective way to begin to understand how these enduring traits influence decision making and the social order of what one perceives is socially, economically and environmentally acceptable. This study has the potential to positively impact how diversity is taught at Ryerson.

The respondents’ strong selection of the most culturally diverse responses and the composite indices high level of agreement for the two scales align with Canada’s Charter (Schwind, Das, Wager, Fassina & Bulmash, 2013) of Rights and Freedoms. While respondents personally believed retaining one’s mother tongue is as important as learning English (Q14), professionally the majority agreed that English should be
the language of instruction (Q16). The cognitive dissonance created between personally believing retaining one’s mother tongue is important, and professional believing that English is the language of instruction may account for the delays in translating documents and accessing translators. The professional belief that expectations are less for poor children (Q17) and the strong neutral response that minorities should be segregated in the classroom (Q20), suggests a large number of the respondents may be struggling to manage their personal bias, whereby they discriminate on the basis of socioeconomic status. This bias potentially hinders supervisor’s from offering professional development, training and promotional opportunities to minority employees. The post survey statement that “I will do nothing differently” may be evidence of absolutism (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2005) as respondents try to rationalize their unconscious beliefs between what is legally binding and what they personally believe. The stronger reaction of the HIM respondents may be attributed to the fact that information management (formally health records) was female dominated and viewed as a low status health care job.

Unconscious biases result in practitioners giving preferential treatment toward one group. Banks and Banks (1993) argue that multicultural and sensitivity training materials are ineffective in the hands of leaders who have negative attitudes and beliefs toward culturally diverse people. Instructors minimize the influence of unconscious biases by designing in-class exercises that expose their biases (Teal, Gill, Green & Crandall, 2012). These strategies aim to gauge the influence of unconscious biases while the reflective activities begin awareness, resolution and amelioration of biases. Encouraging interactions with diverse groups forces the person to face their biases and take immediate and sustainable steps to curb their covert influence on decisions.

This study is the first step in the process of demonstrating that unconscious biases exist at Ryerson. More importantly, the literature doesn’t indicate that the unconscious biases demonstrated in the study of black racism are not applicable to other marginalized populations.

**Media or Publication (max 500 words)**

List any media attention your project has received internally from Ryerson or externally. List any publications or conferences you have attended where data from this project was presented. Confirm that you acknowledged or will acknowledge the grant’s contribution to your work in media, publication or conference presentations.

I presented at the Ryerson Learning and Teaching Conference. My resource is posted on the Learning and Teaching Office Website and on Ryecast.

In all instances I acknowledged that a Teaching About Diversity Grant from Ryerson’s Learning and Teaching Office funded this research.

I posted the resource on You Tube.
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eic9ml_n9WU
## Financial Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Budget Item</th>
<th>Amount Budgeted</th>
<th>Amount Expended</th>
<th>Balance remaining for this item (if any)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research Assistant</td>
<td>$4153.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Assistant Salary</td>
<td></td>
<td>$1104.94</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Assistant Benefits</td>
<td></td>
<td>102.64</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronic Publication (7049)</td>
<td></td>
<td>16.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>$4153.00</strong></td>
<td><strong>$1223.58</strong></td>
<td><strong>$2929.42</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total balance remaining (if any):** $2929.42

### References


