

# Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Decolonization (Curriculum Transformation) Report

*Summer 2023*

## Executive summary

In the fall of 2022, President Lachemi reaffirmed Toronto Metropolitan University's (TMU's) commitment to equity by appointing the inaugural Special Advisor to the President, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Decolonization (Curriculum Transformation). The announcement also asserted that TMU's commitment to decolonization "goes beyond the recommendations of the SSTF." Alongside the institution's support via the Special Advisor for focused attention to this area, it is an opportune moment for TMU to demonstrate institutional leadership related to programming and equity.

A central mandate of the Special Advisor to the President, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Decolonization (Curriculum Transformation) is to support the implementation of [recommendation nine in the Standing Strong Task Force \(SSTF\) report](#). This recommendation advises that "academic programs contain mandatory learning opportunities about Indigenous history and Indigenous and colonial relations for all students" and also recognizes the misrepresentation of Black history and the subsequent harmful impact on Black communities in the province. The fall 2023 announcement about the role also notes that TMU's "commitment to decolonization...goes beyond the recommendations" of the SSTF Report.

The establishment of the role of Special Advisor comes at an opportune moment: provincial post-secondary and national accreditation bodies are increasingly expecting programs to attend to equity, and more and more institutions are offering courses with Indigenous content. These provincial and professional priorities, alongside the significance of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, anti-Black racism, the SSTF report, and TMU's institutional commitment to equity, point to the implementation of recommendation nine and attention to programming and equity as both opportunity and responsibility.

This report offers a vision that is boldly responsive to emerging professional, disciplinary, and provincial expectations for equity and programming. By integrating disciplinary and professional degree requirements with equity and public-facing outcomes via [Periodic Program Review](#) (PPR) processes, TMU can again demonstrate significant leadership related to EDID. Through shaping degree requirements and pathways, faculty members and universities have a significant opportunity to offer programs in which students develop capacities that are informed a) by their disciplines and b) by what is required to recognize inequity and contribute to equity in their chosen professions and communities. Change that attends to both disciplinary and equity-related outcomes will necessarily be faculty- and program-driven. Ideally, it will also be systemic.

In responding to recommendation nine and considering equity and programming more broadly, faculty, staff, and students at TMU draw on decades of experience and on a variety of long-standing initiatives that attend to equity and student learning. Likewise, programs will necessarily engage the conversation related to recommendation nine and broader equity outcomes from a variety of starting points and perspectives.

This report addresses the national and provincial contexts for Indigenous content and equity outcomes. It then attends to ongoing initiatives at TMU, as well as central themes that emerged from a series of broad and targeted engagement meetings in April and May 2023. Finally, the report offers a vision and next steps for TMU programs and faculties to consider. There is considerable support and readiness at TMU for moving toward decolonization, anti-racism, and increased forms of equity in programming.

## National and provincial context

Canadian universities, often responding to calls from Indigenous faculty, students, and staff, have been attending to the possibilities for Indigenous knowledge and experience in programming and course content for at least three or four decades. In the last five to ten years, faculty members and administrators (university presidents, provosts, deans, etc.) have made these priorities concrete: universities across Canada are in various stages of ensuring that students graduate with knowledge about Indigenous history and contemporary life as well as deeper understandings of equity, diversity, and inclusion.

**Emerging provincial commitments and national accreditation efforts mirror universities' increased attention to Indigenous content and equity in programming.** The Ontario Council of Academic Vice-Presidents (OCAV) Degree-Level Expectations Working Group is in the initial stages of revising degree level expectations (DLEs) to include specific expectations for graduates regarding equity, diversity, inclusion, Indigenousization and accessibility. Upon OCAV's approval, all universities in the province will need to ensure that their programs support these DLEs.

In [spring 2022](#), Queen's University began drawing attention to equity in the descriptors to its [institutional degree-level expectations](#) to ensure that its graduates are equipped with the ability to "recognize diverse worldviews, ways of knowing, abilities, and experiences, including Indigenous perspectives." Similarly, four accrediting bodies that are particularly relevant to TMU's programs (including nursing, social work, law, and medicine) formally require programmatic and outcomes-related attention to equity, diversity, and inclusion. A careful look at the work of other accrediting bodies relevant to TMU programs (beyond these four) demonstrates increasing attention to EDID in strategic plans, member education and training, formal statements in response to the TRC, and other initiatives.

**The focus on learning outcomes is essential.** A review of Canadian universities' efforts at a program level to address Indigenous history and contemporary life suggests an emphasis on course content, without extensive paired attention to course outcomes.<sup>1</sup> However, decades of scholarship addressing curriculum and pedagogy underscore the explicit link between a continuous focus on outcomes and student learning. Likewise, program change that focuses on the ways in which outcomes inform content is the most likely to ensure a lasting learning experience for students related to their degree programs.

**The integration of content to support those outcomes will be critical.** One course can offer new learning to students. At the same time, the addition of one course within a set of courses that otherwise remains largely unchanged runs the risk of minimizing, devaluing, or sidelining the ways in which students and faculty alike perceive and prioritize the material in the one course, against the larger backdrop of

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<sup>1</sup>In the interests of better understanding parallel work at other universities, the Special Advisor oversaw a scan of similar efforts at other Canadian institutions. This scan was not exhaustive; its purpose was to illuminate TMU's work and raise questions regarding these efforts generally. More specifically, the scan focused on institutions which require Indigenous content for students, the objectives of these courses, how they are mandated, and the content delivery method. Following feedback from concurrent community consultation sessions at TMU, a secondary focus examined if and how mandatory courses were tied to course level learning outcomes and/or degree level expectations.

courses that fulfill degree completion requirements. Undergraduates typically take forty courses in their completion of a degree. While one or two courses may bear on their total educational experience, there is also the strong possibility that many students will not integrate learning from those one or two courses into their progress through their degree program. In sum, to the extent that university leaders and faculty members hope for courses with Indigenous content to contribute to robust and deep-seated student learning, a focus on outcomes, and subsequently the integration of content to support those outcomes, will be critical.

A host of universities have articulated a general interest in pursuing equity in degree programs. Less readily available are discussions of how this interest might be realized in practice, particularly as connected to outcomes, program reviews, and related curricular and pedagogical change (e.g., scaffolding, assessment, etc.). Considering equity and programmatic change immediately sits in a complex space. University senior leadership indicates support for such curricular changes in vision statements and strategic plans. Faculty members largely determine program requirements, learning outcomes and course content. The external scan noted previously in this report evidenced little careful discussion of a) in-depth pan-university attention to equity-related outcomes or b) consistency across programs related to shared understandings of equity and what these understandings mean for programming.<sup>2</sup>

This report suggests that TMU has an opportunity to significantly contribute to the current national approach to courses with Indigenous content and equity-related learning outcomes. Institutions and professional bodies in Ontario and across Canada are recognizing the importance of aligning what students learn with a more equitable approach to both disciplinary knowledge and to the capacities students will ideally have upon graduation in the context of an inequitable world. In this moment, TMU is particularly well positioned to address these questions in a robust and systemic way that will ideally advance the ways in which Canadian universities integrate Indigenous knowledge and advance equity through systemic programmatic and curricular efforts.

## Institutional context

Given TMU's long-standing commitment to equity work alongside the recent appointment of the Special Advisor, EDID (Curriculum Transformation), TMU has a considerable opportunity to lead change in this area. In the context of the Special Advisor's mandate, this section provides an overview of current efforts at TMU, reports on central themes from a series of spring 2023 engagement meetings, and suggests a vision and possible pathways for programs and faculty members.

## Current initiatives

Recommendation nine in the SSTF report references "mandatory learning opportunities" related to "Indigenous history and Indigenous and colonial relations for all students." Faculty, staff, and students at TMU have already made considerable progress in this area. Learning opportunities related to Indigenous history and settler and colonial relations can be identified in three areas:

- A. Program-led initiatives (e.g. courses, Faculty- or program-organized orientation activities and support services, etc.);

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<sup>2</sup> As the scan of work at other universities largely draws on material from their respective websites, there may be work occurring that is not visible to audiences beyond a specific institution. At the same time, the frequency of universities noting Indigenous content and its importance to students' education suggests that universities are, to a large degree, populating their websites with pertinent information.

- B. Pan-university led initiatives (formally or informally constituted committees (e.g. Indigenous Education Council, Truth and Reconciliation Working Group, Presidential Implementation Committee to Confront Anti-Black Racism, etc.)), and;
- C. Efforts led by student-serving (non-faculty/program based) units (e.g. Zone Learning, orientation activities, Tri-Mentoring Program, Indigenous Student Services, etc.)

TMU students can find multiple occasions for learning that provide increased exposure to and/or a deepened understanding of Indigenous history and knowledge and the ongoing impact of colonization. These opportunities are plentiful across the university in courses, programs and extracurricular activities, and in non-academic units that support student life and learning. Such initiatives offer numerous possibilities for student learning and are integral to TMU's equity work.

Ideally, TMU will continue to provide students with multiple formal and informal learning opportunities addressing Indigenous history and experiences. The role of the Office of the Vice-President, Equity and Community Inclusion (OVPECI) is critical to all of the above work. The OVPECI leads efforts in (b) and (c) above, and simultaneously contributes significant leadership to the direction and realization of equity work at TMU.

The focus of the Special Advisor is on faculty-driven and systemic programmatic change in the context of recommendation nine and TMU's commitment to equity in academic programming more broadly. Ideally, existing initiatives will continue to provide students with multiple formal and informal learning opportunities. At the same time, lasting and sustainable programmatic change that enriches student learning and experience as related to recommendation nine will be well served by focused attention to course content that is integrated with program-wide outcomes.

## Engagement themes, spring 2023

Between March and May 2023, the Special Advisor facilitated 15 meetings with faculty, staff, and students at TMU. These meetings included conversations that were open to general audiences and conversations to which specific constituencies were invited as suggested by recommendation nine ([full list of engagement meetings](#)). Participants consistently drew attention to the significance of three thematic areas, including a) situated and varied learners, b) collective and coordinated commitments, and c) resources.

### Situated and varied learners

**Students at TMU will enter their programs with vastly different understandings of the world and of particular communities and contexts. Students will also enter different communities, workplaces, and cultures upon graduation.** In sum, participants noted the existence of multiple types of learners related to the implementation of recommendation nine and equity and programming more broadly.

"Learners" includes students, faculty, and staff. For each of these groups, an individual's place in the world (i.e. one's relationship to institutional power in the context of gender, sexuality, ability, race, Indigeneity, language, country of origin, and other areas) will bear on an individual's existing knowledge and experience, and on one's commitment to and capacities for reflection and change.

Given this varied knowledge, capacity, and commitment, students will also have different experiences in the classroom, particularly when content on colonialism, racism, or other forms of oppression is part of the learning. Students and faculty may demonstrate a lack of understanding and/or acceptance related to the existence and consequences, or an individual's or community's experiences of, colonialism and racism.

When this does occur, particularly students and also faculty and/or staff in Indigenous, Black, or other underrepresented groups may experience harm.

Participants in the engagement meetings stressed the need for community members (i.e. minimally faculty and staff and also ideally students) to acknowledge and identify harm when it occurs; demonstrate the capacity to listen and reflect on experiences of harm, especially for marginalized communities; and proactively be in conversation about practicing different ways forward. It is critical, in curricular efforts related to recommendation nine and broader equity work, that TMU stay attentive to the knowledge and experiences of different learners, and to supportive learning environments for all students. Ideally, programs will identify needs for capacity building in relation to their plan for programmatic change.

## Co-ordinated and collective commitments

**Recommendation nine work will ideally be intentionally program-based and formally tied to student learning outcomes.** As an institution, TMU has been intentionally working on equity-related priorities across the university for at least two decades. These efforts span multiple units and constituencies. The breadth of initiatives at TMU points to units moving forward in nimble and innovative ways. Work in any given program will ideally provide specific attention to outcomes and to content related to recommendation nine. Programs might pair this formal programmatic work with other equity-oriented learning initiatives in their program and at the university.

A balance of programmatic autonomy and coordination can support change that is driven by faculty members, responsive to program needs and directions, and systemic. Programs will ideally continue to draw on the expertise and resources of units such as the OVPECI and the Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT) to implement change. Coordination might involve a shared language and understanding of concepts (equity, colonialism, racism, and other central ideas) and programmatic priorities (i.e. how these concepts are similarly relevant for programs within one faculty) and the identification of and response to thematic challenges and opportunities with programs that have disciplinary or other ties to each other.

Finally, those at engagement sessions underscored the importance of programs as a whole, in contrast to only a small number of faculty members within a program, participating in the conversation about outcomes and contributions to programmatic change. Faculty members will ideally offer thoughtful attention to who will take responsibility for which components of change. Whether a faculty member is untenured and early in their career or a full professor; or whether a faculty member is part of a settler, Black, racialized, or Indigenous community or communities, will likely have a bearing on the role they might play in the conversation and process of change.

## Resources

**The co-ordination of resource alignment and priorities, programmatic plans and strategies, and capacities is critical.** Participants in the spring 2023 meetings emphasized that the implementation of recommendation nine will have a direct relationship to:

- A. The alignment of priorities, expectations for change, and resource commitments;
- B. Ongoing and intentional consideration of the importance of and processes for engaging Indigenous faculty and staff and Indigenous community members beyond TMU, and supporting all faculty members and instructors in this work; and
- C. The necessity of appropriate support related to the coordination of (a) and (b).

Programmatic and curricular change, on the one hand, are routine parts of a department's work. Formally and informally, faculty members engage in ongoing programmatic reflection and change: they review

existing courses, add new ones, and consider how to best implement the links between DLEs, program objectives, and program learning outcomes. At the same time, curricular change related to Indigenous content and equity is rarely routine. To implement recommendation nine, faculty members, in many cases, will have to consider new areas of knowledge and teaching. Outcomes informed by disciplinary and professional norms may offer limited attention to outcomes informed by the world in which we live and into which students will graduate and to which they will contribute.

Likewise, change that brings Indigenous content and related equity priorities into formal teaching and learning settings will ideally be attentive to the process of programmatic change and how it bears on various groups and relationships. Faculty, staff, and students enter this work from different experiences, whether role related (i.e. as faculty or as students); or in regard to one's experience in and knowledge of Indigenous, Black, racialized, settler and other communities. In the context of program priorities and clear plans related to offering Indigenous content, there will be a need for capacity building. Ideally, programs will engage in department conversations and together articulate a plan for going forward as related to recommendation nine. Such plans will centrally inform program needs.

## **Equity and programming: A vision for systemic change and pathways to implementation**

**Bold and innovative change related to equity and programming will**

- A) be systemic and faculty member- and program-driven,**
- B) be responsive to disciplinary and professional expectations, and**
- C) support students' capacities to recognize inequity and contribute to equity in their chosen professions and communities.**

Further, to realize this vision, students and faculty members will be well served by learning outcomes that integrate disciplinary, accreditation/professional, and public-facing/equity priorities, rather than pursuing these sets of outcomes as distinct. This vision of outcomes that integrates disciplinary and accreditation norms with a regard for the practices of equity is realistic and attainable. It also positions TMU in a highly proactive position in relation to what will, in a relatively short time frame, be required at the provincial and accreditation levels.

Currently, all programs have well-articulated learning outcomes and related content that are directly responsive to disciplinary and professional requirements. PPR processes provide an ideal mechanism by which programs can begin to both identify and then integrate outcomes related to recommendation nine and equity more broadly, which are aligned with their specific disciplinary outcomes. Programs that move toward the integration of disciplinary and public-facing outcomes will ensure programming and curriculum is holistic, coordinated, and responsive to the many demands that graduates will encounter in their chosen professions. Such integration will provide students with a readiness to draw on disciplinary knowledge while simultaneously applying that knowledge in ways that are responsive to inequity, difference, and plurality in a variety of settings.

Following multiple engagement opportunities and conversations with administrators, leaders, and staff, there is considerable understanding of and support for the above vision. At the same time, faculties and programs will engage this work from different entry points. PPR processes provide a clear and established pathway for addressing the integration of disciplinary priorities and equity or public-facing outcomes. Programmatically integrating disciplinary, professional, and public-facing outcomes and content that addresses these multiple

areas will take time. Programs may go through, at a minimum, one or two PPR cycles in working out their particular pathway to implementation.

Wherever a program begins to address programmatic change, the role of the Special Advisor is to thoroughly understand the strengths and priorities of these programs and to support realistic steps to implementation of recommendation nine and the larger vision. In some cases, programs will already be considering equity-related outcomes. In other programs, faculty members will experience existing disciplinary and professional demands as all-encompassing with little room for consideration of new outcomes. The focus of the Special Advisor beginning in fall 2023 will be to work with faculties and at a program-to-program level in support of a program-specific implementation plan for recommendation nine and, as desired, broader equity concerns in concert with PPR timelines and processes.

Faculty members will implement change in ways that work for their program. It is critical for programs to identify a realistic vision and related plan for change. For example, given your program's entry point in terms of this work, what might be possible in two, three or five years? Faculty members will likely have questions: the need for subject matter expertise, the degree to which a program might offer new courses and/or integrate new content into existing curricula, and the challenges of bringing in new content to already full programmatic requirements are all significant areas for attention. Programs can draw on a variety of resources at TMU, including the OVPECI, Vice-Provost, Academic (VPA) and CELT, and the Special Advisor. Individuals in these units and roles are already in conversation about how to coordinate attention to recommendation nine in ways that will support faculty-driven programmatic change. The Special Advisor will serve as a liaison in these conversations and can ensure that programs continue to find ways to implement desired change.

In sum, a vision for implementation of recommendation nine and broader equity outcomes that is systemic and faculty- and program-driven will have strong ties to the increasing provincial and professional expectations (and in some cases requirements) regarding the relevance of EDID in academic programs. In the context of this vision, TMU can continue to excel and serve as a leader in Canada. Such a vision resists short-term change that retains little traction within a department. It also ensures that the implementation of recommendation nine is an important part of programming and curriculum as a whole, rather than one course that students and faculty see as separate from central programmatic priorities. Finally, a faculty-driven, systemic vision that attends to both disciplinary and equity outcomes is closely aligned with TMU's mission and strategic priorities, and will ideally serve both our students and the public good.

## Appendix A: Implementing iterative change

In TMU’s implementation of recommendation nine and increased attention to equity and programming more broadly, it will be critical for programs and faculty members to take ownership for the change that they envision. Programs will enter the conversation at different starting points, and the implementation of change will be varied and particular to each program. Programs will be well served by a plan that identifies a strategic vision for the program (with clear priorities, goals, and timeframes). The articulation of a plan will support subsequent attention to the need and possibility for resources. Ideally, all programs will ensure implementation of recommendation nine by fall 2025-26 and all programs will demonstrate continuous movement toward the vision articulated above in the context of the PPR process. As noted in the report, the Special Advisor in the fall of 2023, the Special Advisor plans to work with each program to develop such a plan. The Initial Self-Assessment and Pathway table below provides programs a way into developing concrete next steps, and will be of use in the Special Advisor’s work with programs and faculty members.

### Entry points

Yes/no	Criteria
	Program has already or is in the process of integrating disciplinary/professional outcomes with equity outcomes.
	Program is in discussion regarding integration of disciplinary/professional outcomes with equity outcomes; pre-implementation stages.
	Program is ready to consider how courses with equity-related content (including those that respond to recommendation nine) might be added to curriculum.

Note: While many programs may fall clearly into one of the entry points articulated above, other programs may find that they are perhaps “between” entry points, or in more than one.

### Possible next steps

Yes/no	Pathway
	Program defines two to three year goals as related to recommendation nine; formally commits to these goals (e.g. in department meetings, curricular committee, etc.). This might include identifying one or two (existing or new) courses that all students in the program take.
	Program articulates a plan for integration of disciplinary/professional/accreditation and equity outcomes across the program as a whole.
	Linked to goals for implementation of recommendation nine or for integration of equity and disciplinary/professional outcomes, a program drafts a plan for steps toward implementation (including goals, operationalization, and timeline).



	Linked to the implementation plan, the program begins to explore questions of resources within their program and faculty.
	Program identifies assessments for implementation of recommendation nine, and/or for integration of equity and disciplinary outcomes.
	Shared understanding of equity, colonialism, and racism, particularly as they relate to program objectives and disciplinary norms.

Note: This list is not exhaustive as related to implementation of rec. nine and broader equity outcomes. It provides possibilities for concrete, actionable items that will likely support programs moving toward the vision articulated in this report.

## University-wide roles and responsibilities

Role	Responsibilities
Special Advisor, EDID (Curriculum Transformation)	The role of the Special Advisor is to support and facilitate program-level implementation of recommendation nine and broader equity commitments related to programming and curriculum. The work of the Special Advisor will include ongoing meetings and consultation with faculty members and academic leaders (e.g. associate deans, etc.) as well as with units and staff that support academic programming. These meetings and consultation might address: learning priorities as related to recommendation nine and relevant course content, integration with existing courses and/or existing course content, programmatic attention to equity priorities, and other areas related to implementation of the commitments and vision articulated in this report.
OVPECI	The mandate of the OVPECI includes providing “advice and consultation, education and awareness...[and] support for the development of policies and programs.” Specifically: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Indigenous Initiatives unit within OVPECI along with the parallel work of the <a href="#">Indigenous Education Council (IEC)</a>, advances priorities including “student success, teaching, learning, research, community engagement and capacity building.”</li> <li>• Two central priorities for the <a href="#">Education, Awareness and Outreach unit</a> in OVPECI include “presentations to students and classes to imbed and infuse equity, diversity and inclusion across campus” and “consulting with faculty and staff on the importance and necessity of equitable hiring practices to build a campus that reflects the population of those we serve.”</li> <li>• The mandate of the Special Advisor, EDID (Curriculum Transformation) is to support university-wide programmatic change as related to recommendation nine and equity outcomes. Likewise, the Special Advisor is readily available to meet with faculty members and attend program meetings to address concerns, priorities, and challenges related to this work.</li> </ul>
Provost and VPA; CELT	The offices of the Provost, Vice-President and Academic; the VPA; and the CELT all have critical roles in ensuring academic integrity and programmatic and curricular excellence, including comprehensive oversight of and support for formal PPR processes. Teaching resources within CELT include support for course design, course delivery, and curricular and pedagogical best practices.

Note: OVPECI and Provost have explicit responsibilities for equity and academic programming. Multiple additional units at TMU which play an integral role in student experience and success (for example, the Office of the Vice-Provost, Students). Ideally, faculty members and programs in the process of making change will draw on the OVPECI and the VPA (including CELT), and will also engage in conversation with and draw on the expertise of other units.