AUSU Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Report and Recommendations 2021–2022

AUSU EDI Mission, Vision, Values and Guiding Principles, Core Goals, And Accountability

Mission - The Athabasca University Students' Union (AUSU) will ensure that the organization and its leadership follow an equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) framework during policy work, decision-making processes, and advocacy goals.

Vision - AUSU will implement all of its short-term goals and begin working toward its long-term goals, becoming an increasingly equitable, inclusive, and diverse organization, now and in the future.

Values and Guiding Principles - Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, Indigenization, Decolonization, Anti-Oppression, and Accessibility.

Core Goals - AUSU will work toward creating opportunities for equity-seeking communities within student leadership, ensure safe and equitable spaces, and prioritize equity, diversity, inclusion, Indigenization, decolonization, anti-oppression, and accessibility, while working in consultation with equity-seeking communities, within the organization, the University, and all external advocacy efforts.

Accountability - AUSU Executive Committee and Staff with oversight from AUSU Council are responsible for implementing and gauging the progress of AUSU's EDI Core Goals.

AUSU EDI Efforts at-a-Glance 2020–2022

2020 - In 2021, AUSU began identifying and addressing EDI gaps within its organization.

EDI-related initiatives included the
- Creation of the Virtual Food Assistance Program
- Creation of the 2SLGBTQIA+ Discord Server and resource list
- Creation of a resource list to help students experiencing sexual and gender-based violence
- Plans for an Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Committee
- Plans for an Indigenous Circle at AUSU

EDI-related policies included
- [8.12 Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee Terms of Reference](#)
- [9.28 Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion](#)
- [9.29 Sexual and Gender-Based Violence](#)

2021–2022 - In 2022, AUSU continued addressing gaps within its structure, worked on creating initiatives, policies, and events, as well as expanding existing structures.

EDI-related initiatives included the
- Creation of the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Committee
- Creation of the Indigenous Circle at AUSU
- Creation of a [Pride Community Centre](#) page on AUSU's website and update of resource list
- Creation of a resource list of students with dependents
- Continuation of the Virtual Food Assistance Program
- Underrepresentation in Student Leadership Survey

EDI-related policies included
- [2.18 Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion](#)
- [2.20 Equitable Access and Inclusion for 2SLGBTQIA+ Students](#)
- [2.21 Accessibility and Accommodations](#),
- [8.13 Indigenous Circle at AUSU Terms of Reference](#)
- [9.30 Equitable Access and Inclusion for 2SLGBTQIA+ Students](#)

EDI-related events and initiatives included
- Pride Month in June, with social media content, a Pride-themed Open Mic Podcast, donation to an 2SLGBTQIA+ organization, and contests
- First Annual Pride Week in October, with speakers, Joshua Whitehead and Dr. Tobias Wiggins, social media content, contests, AUSUnights Pride edition, and a Pride-themed Open Mic Podcast
- Donated a bursary to the Trans Research Centre
- Black History Month, with a Black History Month-themed AUSUnights, social media content, and an AUSU Speaker Series engagement with Husoni Raymond
- Contact with an AU coordinator to distribute a welcome letter and survey for students in secure environments

Outside of AUSU, the 2020–21 term had several **EDI-related advocacy** wins within AU and on the provincial and federal levels.

- Insisted that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) Call to Action 24 be included in future Nursing program planning at General Faculties Council (GFC)
- Advocated for AU to allocate $20,000 toward psychoeducational assessments
- Advocated for AU to remove derogatory course content
- Advocated for AU to simplify the process for affirming-names changes

- Advocated for AU to create a Pride Centre
- Created AUSU letters and a survey for students in secure environments
- Advocated that AU's tutor training manual be changed so tutors knew their responsibilities to disabled students and those with accommodations
- Executive provided representation on the Canadian Alliance of Student Association's (CASA) EDI Committee and the Federal Policy Committee
- Executive provided representation on AU's EDI Committee
- Indigenous Circle provided representation on the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (FHSS) Decolonization and Conciliation Circle Working Group
- Indigenous Circle provided representation on the National Indigenous Advisory Committee (NIAC)
- Spoke to multiple MPs, Ministers, Senators about breaking down barriers that married students and 2SLGBTQIA+ students face when applying to federal student financial aid (connected to the definition of a dependent student)
- Spoke to provincial Minister of Advanced Education and official Critic for Advanced Education about need for culturally appropriate childcare spots

AUSU EDI Goals

Although EDI work has begun, there is still much work ahead. As a way to simplify this ongoing process, AUSU has developed the following six (6) goals based on the organization's experiences to date.

These are divided into short and long-term goals, within the organization, the University, and all external advocacy efforts.

Goal #1: **AUSU will advocate for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC's) Calls to Action,** **within the organization, the university, the provincial and federal governments, and all external advocacy efforts.**

Short- Term Goals
- Ensure that land acknowledgements at AUSU meetings are respectful and go beyond simple acknowledgement
- Consult with Indigenous learners on internal policies, initiatives, and external advocacy points
- Advocate for inclusive, representative, and culturally-sensitive course content at AU
- Create general elections for Indigenous Circle Members along with Council, while respecting the Indigenous Circle's ability to decide their internal workings following the election
- Create safe spaces for Indigenous student leaders within AUSU

- Work on Indigenizing and decolonizing aspects of the organization through consultation with the Indigenous Circle

Long-Term Goals
- Ensure the long-term, permanent existence of the Indigenous Circle at AUSU
- Indigenize and decolonize the organization
- Ensure that Indigenous learner needs at AU are represented within the organization, the university, and all external advocacy efforts
- Advocate for the inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge and Worldviews in AU's framework
- Advocate for comprehensive Indigenous language courses at AU (**Calls to Action 14 and 16**)[1]
- Advocate for AU to require all nursing students to take a course that focuses on Indigenous health issues, including the history and legacy of residential schools, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), intercultural competency, conflict resolutions, human rights, and anti-racism (**Call 24**)[2]
- Advocate to AU to ensure history courses do not teach the doctrine of discovery or *terra nullius* (**Call 47**)[3]
- Advocate for inclusion of Indigenous content throughout all AU courses in all faculties

Goal #2: AUSU will create more equitable, diverse, and inclusive spaces within the organization.

Short- Term Goals
- Promote the use of gender-neutral language in AUSU communications
- Promote the use of inclusive language in AUSU communications

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[1] Call 14: "We call upon the federal government to enact an Aboriginal Languages Act that incorporates the following principles:
i. Aboriginal languages are a fundamental and valued element of Canadian culture and society, and there is an urgency to preserve them.
ii. Aboriginal language rights are reinforced by the Treaties.
iii. The federal government has a responsibility to provide sufficient funds for Aboriginal-language revitalization and preservation.
iv. The preservation, revitalization, and strengthening of Aboriginal languages and cultures are best managed by Aboriginal people and communities.
v. Funding for Aboriginal language initiatives must reflect the diversity of Aboriginal languages."
Call 16: "We call upon post-secondary institutions to create university and college degree and diploma programs in Aboriginal languages."
[2] Call 24: "We call upon medical and nursing schools in Canada to require all students to take a course dealing with Aboriginal health issues, including the history and legacy of residential schools, the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, Treaties and Aboriginal rights, and Indigenous teachings and practices. This will require skills-based training in intercultural competency, conflict resolution, human rights, and anti-racism."
[3] Call 42: "We call upon the federal, provincial, and territorial governments to commit to the recognition and implementation of Aboriginal justice systems in a manner consistent with the Treaty and Aboriginal rights of Aboriginal peoples, the *Constitution Act, 1982*, and the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, endorsed by Canada in November 2012."

- Review EDI-related policies to update language and knowledge
- Promote open communication between all members
- Prioritize EDI-related Committees and EDI-issues in Committee agendas
- Strongly encourage anti-oppression/anti-bias training yearly for AUSU individuals, especially the Awards Committee and EDI Committee
- Promote education regarding microaggressions
- Review election strategies to attract a diverse pool of candidates
- Discuss the possible increase of the number of Members-at-Large on the EDI Committee with Council
- Promote/create EDI-related pathways, such as training material and courses on its website, including LinkedIn Learning

Long-Term Goals
- Promote all AUSU elections to equity-seeking students in an effort to attract a diverse group of student leaders
- Expand EDI-related Committees
- Expand EDI-related events
- Expand anti-bias/anti-oppression/anti-racism trainings/bystander intervention training

Goal #3: AUSU will celebrate the voices and experiences of equity-seeking groups within the organization.

Short- Term Goals
- Prioritize events for and by equity-seeking communities
- Consult with equity-seeking groups
- Continue expanding Black History Month yearly
- Continue expanding Pride Month in June and Pride Week in October
- Promote and celebrate important dates, observances, and holidays

Long-Term Goals
- Create an Indigenous Month
- Create a Disability Awareness Month
- Celebrate equity-seeking groups at all times of the year

Goal #4: AUSU will create accessible spaces within the organization, and advocate to the university and all external advocacy efforts.

Short- Term Goals
- Review Policy 2.21 - Accessibility and Accommodations
- Ensure that AUSU is both proactively and responsively accessible
- Continue with role of Accessibility Officer
- Ensure that the accessibility needs of AUSU individuals are met during meetings

- Ensure that internal and external events provide all event specifics and accommodations in writing prior to the event, and participants are provided with an opportunity to provide their required accommodations prior to the event
- Ensure that internal and external events are accessible as possible to AUSU individuals
- Ensure that an intersectional Disability Justice approach is taken when creating policies and planning events for disabled/chronically ill, and/or neurodiverse AUSU individuals
- Set consistent dates for AUSU Committee meetings based on availability polls
- Advocate to AU to expand Accessibility Services
- Advocate for AU to implement ways that ensure ease of accommodations from Accessibility Services

Long-Term Goals
- Provide hybrid (in-person and virtual) options for AUSU events
- Ensure that accessibility within AUSU is prioritized long-term
- Create an environment that is accessible to a greater number of student leaders
- Advocate to ensure that AU prioritizes accessibility in decision-making processes

Goal #5: AUSU will advocate for EDI principles at AU.

Short-Term Goals
- Advocate for inclusive and representative course content
- Advocate for increased supports for equity-seeking communities within AU
- Advocate for the elimination of out-of-province fees for Indigenous learners
- Advocate for increased ease in changing documentation to affirming-names
- Advocate for the elimination of sexual and gender-based violence during co-ops and work placements
- Advocate for choice in textbooks and increased alternative assessments
- Advocate for increased access to affordable, culturally appropriate, trauma-informed mental health services

Long-Term Goals
- Advocate for well-funded support services for Indigenous learners through Nukskahtowin
- Advocate for AU to incorporate Indigenous Ways of Knowing within all all courses, across all faculties
- Advocate for increased courses for students in secure environments
- Advocate for cultural competency training as it relates to administration for all deans and members of the senior administration
- Advocate for cultural competency training as it relates to teaching and learning for all faculty and tutors
- Hold AU accountable for proactive recruitment of faculty, tutors, and administrators from a variety of equity-seeking groups
- Advocate for the creation of official AU Centres for equity-seeking groups
- Advocate for increased staffing for Accessibility Services

Goal #6: AUSU will advocate for EDI principles at the provincial and federal levels.

Short-Term Goals
- Advocate for increased supports for equity-seeking communities in meetings with Members of Parliament and Members of the Legislative Assembly
- Advocate for the elimination of sexual and gender-based violence on an external level in co-ops, work placements, and practicums
- Advocate for increased access to affordable, culturally appropriate childcare that meets students' needs, including just-in-time childcare
- Advocate for increased access to affordable, culturally appropriate, trauma-informed mental health services
- Advocate for increased digital accessibility for learners in rural and remote areas

Long-Term Goals
- Advocate for the removal of age limits from the Canada Summer Jobs program
- Advocate for married adults to be able to apply for federal student loans without spousal permission

Being an Ally: What Does it Really Mean?

An overarching goal of AUSU that transcends the time-bound restraints of this plan is to be defined by equity-seeking groups as a true ally—someone actively working towards effective allyship activities in all aspects of organizational endeavors. Each and every one of the six (6) goals mentioned in this document create a framework to achieve this objective, but the work does not stop there.

To be an effective ally, defined as someone with privilege and power who stands up for an equity-seeking person or group,[4] there are a number of things to note. Firstly, being an ally is not an identity; being an ally is a process. As such, an individual or organization cannot define themselves as an ally—this is a title that can only be given by those we seek to ally ourselves with. Some guiding principles for acting as an ally follow the acronym with the same name:

> **A** - Always centre the impacted or oppressed
> **L** - Listen and learn from those who lived the experience
> **L** - Leverage your privilege to help
> **Y** - Yield the floor

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[4] Fahmy, Eaman. (2020). *What does it mean to act as an Ally?* Pillar Nonprofit Network. Retrieved February 28, 2022, from https://pillarnonprofit.ca/news/what-does-it-mean-act-ally.

The activities of an organization undertaking allyship endeavors include: actively acknowledging the privilege and power that exists through open discussion, listening more and speaking less, working with integrity and direct communication, and continually working to build capacity to receive criticism.[5]

This involves continuous work to understand and acknowledge the perspectives and experiences of equity-seeking groups, ensuring alignment both publicly and privately, committing to personal and organizational growth and education, and understanding the consequences of failing to act. Above all else, to do this work effectively, we must become comfortable with being uncomfortable.[6]

References

AUSU EDI Policies

2.0 Council Governance
- 2.18 Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion
- 2.20 Equitable Access and Inclusion for 2SLGBTQIA+ Students
- 2.21 Accessibility and Accommodations.

8.0 Committee Terms of Reference
- 8.12 Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee Terms of Reference
- 8.13 Indigenous Circle at AUSU Terms of Reference

9.0 Position Policies
- 9.25 Indigenous Learners
- 9.28 Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion
- 9.29 Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
- 9.30 Equitable Access and Inclusion for 2SLGBTQIA+ Students

Definitions

2SLGBTQIA+ - 2SLGBTQIA+ is an acronym for the umbrella term that encompasses Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trangender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, as well as other ways individuals and communities self-identify.

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[5] The Anti-Oppression Network. (2021). *Allyship.* The Anti-Oppression Network. Retrieved February 28, 2022, https://theantioppressionnetwork.com/allyship.

[6] Kendall, F. (2003). *How to Be an Ally if You Are a Person with Privilege.* Seattle Community Network. Retrieved February 28, 2022, http://www.scn.org/friends/ally.html.

Ally - An individual or group with privilege and power who stands up for a person or group that is targeted, oppressed, marginalized, and discriminated against.

Allyship - An active, consistent, and arduous practice of unlearning and re-evaluating, in which a person or organization in a position of privilege and power seeks to operate in solidarity with an equity-seeking group.

Anti-Oppression/Implicit/Unconscious Bias Training - Implicit/unconscious bias trainings are provided to individuals and organizations as a way to uncover, challenge, and change implicit/unconscious biases and oppressive ways of thought and action. Anti-oppression trainings allow attendees to understand the intersections of power, privilege, and oppression.

Decolonization - Decolonization can be defined as confronting and challenging colonial thought, practices, and organization.

Disability Justice - Disability Justice is defined as the way in which disability cannot be separated from other parts of an individual's identities, including, but not limited to, race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, religious/faith-based beliefs, age, size, and/or class. These identities often intersect and overlap. For example, the ableism experienced by disabled individuals cannot be separated from other forms of experienced oppression including, but are not limited to, racism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia, faithism, sizeism, ageism, and classism.

EDI - **Equity** encompasses, but is not limited to, actions, systems, processes, interactions, and treatment that result in the fair, respectful, and just treatment of all individuals and demographics.

Diversity makes reference to the unique identities, characteristics experiences, and environmental context of individuals, communities, or demographics, including, but not limited to, race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, disability, age, size, social class, family and marital status, language, religious or ethical values system, national origin, immigration status, and political beliefs.

Inclusion is the practice of integrating all individuals, communities, and demographics into systemic structures, processes, systems, environments, and any other facet of the organization as appropriate.

Equity-Seeking Groups - Equity-seeking groups face obstacles to full participation, though historical and current systemic barriers.

Indigenization - Indigenization refers to incorporating Indigenous thought, worldviews, and practices into the educational sphere.

Intersectionality - Intersectionality describes the many ways different aspects of an individual's self or group are connected and applied to that individual or a group, and how these intersections create overlapping and interdependent systems of oppression that impact the individual or group's experience in society. These include but are not limited to, race, ethnicity, class, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, disability, age, size, marital or family status, religion/faith, language, national origin, or immigration status.

Racialized - Racialized refers to a racialized or ethnicization process where individuals or groups are ascribed ethnic and racialized identities to a relationship, social practice, or group.

Systemic Barriers - Systemic barriers are embedded within an organization's systems, processes, culture, or any other relevant facet that disproportionately present discriminatory or inequitable barriers to individuals or groups that restrict them from participating fully in any aspect of the organization.

TRC's Calls to Action - Published in 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action was a summary report of 94 Calls to Action that were originally drafted to address the ongoing legacy of the residential school system.