



Questions of Diversity at Trent

A report produced as a result of the “Stories of Diversity” survey conducted in early 2014 for Trent’s 50th anniversary year, 2014-2015

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March 2015

Funding and support for the survey and report were provided by

Office of the Provost and Vice-President Academic

Department of Sociology

Dean of Arts and Science - Social Sciences

Trent University Faculty Association

Centre for Human Rights, Equity and Accessibility

Associate Vice-President for Student Affairs

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Background to the survey

This report was produced as a result of the “Stories of Diversity” survey conducted from January to June 2014 for Trent’s 50th anniversary year, 2014-2015. In the body of the report, we summarize the survey results first and then discuss feedback from the two presentations of these results in August and October, 2014, and two panels on racism and LGBT issues held during the winter 2015 term. In the final section, we make recommendations for the various stakeholders in diversity and equity¹ issues at Trent.

Momin Rahman - as the lead staff member on this project, I want to begin by explaining the impetus for conducting the survey and my own investment in these issues.

My friend Gerry Hunt, a Trent Alumnus, emailed me in the fall of 2013 to ask whether anyone at Trent was doing anything on diversity and equity issues for the 50th anniversary. Gerry had just seen the proposed programme for the Alumni Reunion weekend and could not see anything on these issues. I contacted the Alumni association and was told that while nothing had been planned, they would promote and support anything I wanted to organize. Gerry and I are both gay, and although he was not out at the time, he has positive memories of his undergraduate years at Trent. I am a recent faculty hire from 2007 and so I have a position of privilege in this community but I am also keenly aware that I inhabit a variety of minorities here at Trent and in the local area, being gay, South Asian, an immigrant, and from a Muslim cultural background.

I thought it was important that Trent did something to acknowledge diversity as part of its history and, more important to me, that this issue should become a mainstream one at Trent in the future. Hence the idea for an informal survey, set up on *Qualtrics* through myTrent, aiming to gather people’s recollections of their experiences of diversity while they were at Trent. The plan was then to talk about the results at the Alumni Reunion weekend in August 2014. I asked the various sponsors for money for a research assistant to help me with the survey and got immediate positive commitments from those listed on the front page of this report. Getting money (even relatively small amounts) is not that common an experience at Trent and so I hope that my success speaks to some sense of recognition that diversity issues are increasingly important for Trent. After the survey was closed and the results collated, we did two presentations, one at the reunion weekend in August, 2014, and one during the fall term in 2014, attended by a small number of staff and a representative of Community and Race Relations Committee of Peterborough. Getting the results ready for the presentations was largely the work of Cole Murdoch, now a 4th year Sociology and Philosophy student. I also participated in two panels on racism and LGBT issues organised by the Colleges in this current Winter Term, 2015 and took more general feedback from these discussions. .

A final word on the limitations of this exercise. This was not a thorough or comprehensive survey in terms of participants so it can only be a beginning to us thinking about these issues. It is, however, as far as we are aware the first time that any report has been done on questions of diversity at Trent and so it is an important contribution to Trent thinking through these issues in a more focused way than has been evident up until now.

¹ We use equity and diversity on the premise that accessibility issues come under equity provisions.

Survey results

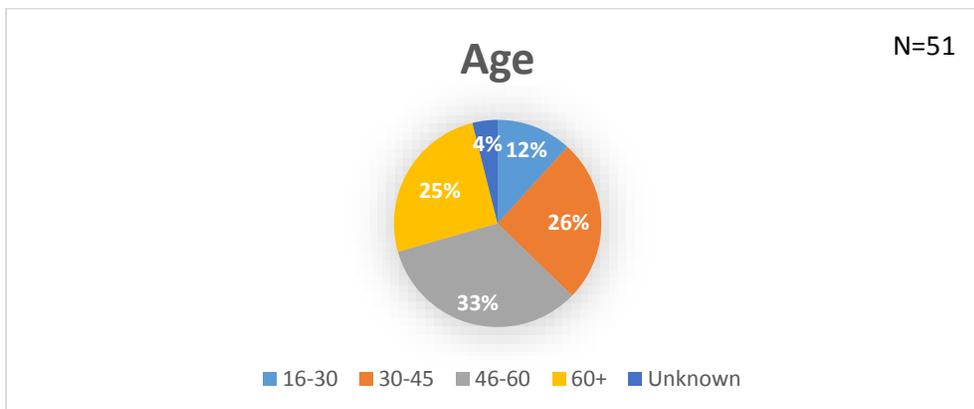
Survey promotion

This informal survey was promoted through various email lists and websites within the Trent community. No compensation was provided for completing the survey. Individuals were led through an online link to the survey on *Qualtrics*. Once on the webpage containing the survey, respondents were prompted to complete thirteen questions: these questions ranged from closed demographic questions to open questions discussing experiences of diversity. If willing, respondents were given space to provide an email if we had reason to contact them once the survey had been completed. The Trent Research Ethics Board approved the survey on the basis that it was clearly described as an informal survey and any use of the responses for promotional purposes would require explicit consent.

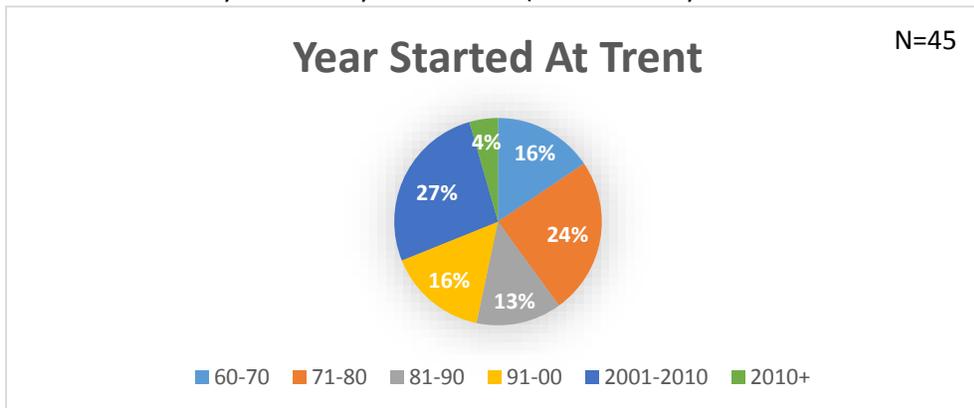
The following are the survey results. Questions 1-8 dealt with demographics while questions 9-13 were open ended questions².

Results: demographics

Question 1: Please tell us your current age.

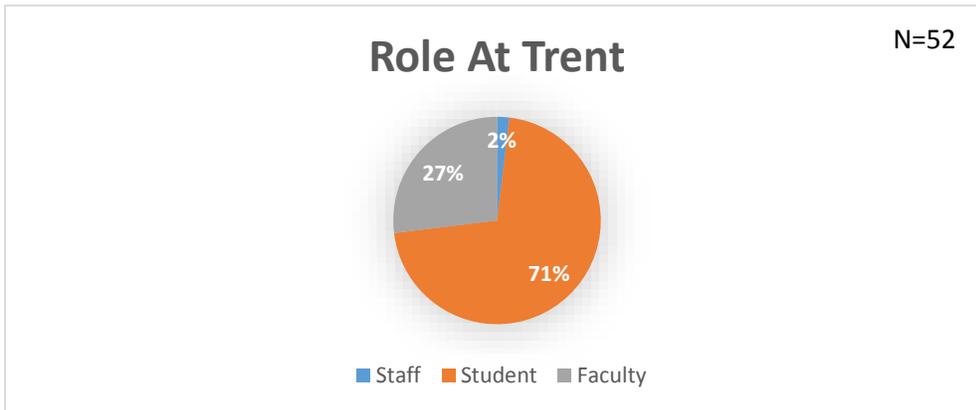


Question 2: What years were you at Trent? (Recorded as year started at Trent)

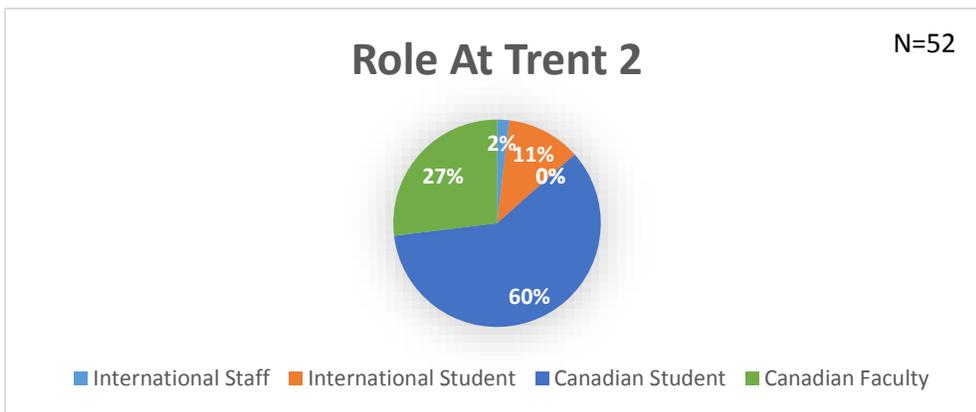


² A full list of the questions is in Appendix 2.

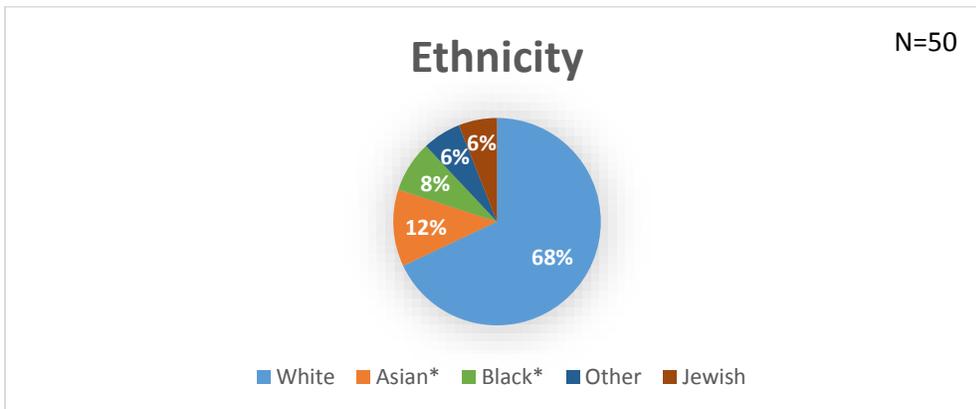
Question 3: Please tell us your role at Trent during these years.



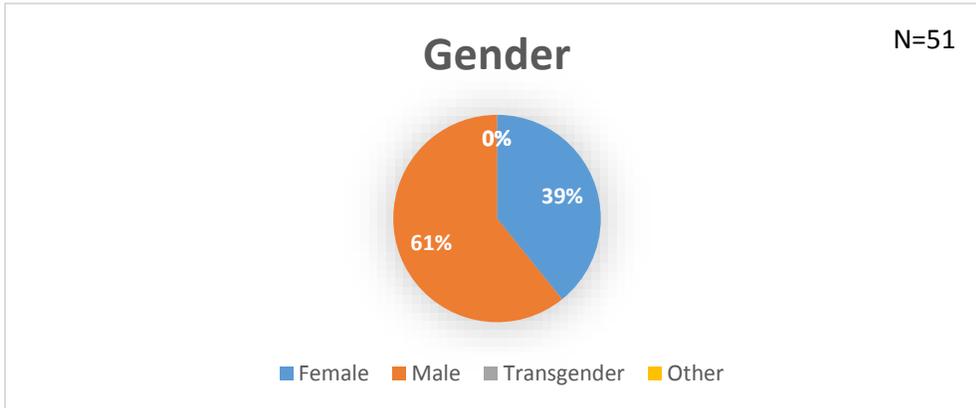
Question 4: Please tell us if you were a Canadian or International Student, Faculty or staff member during this time.



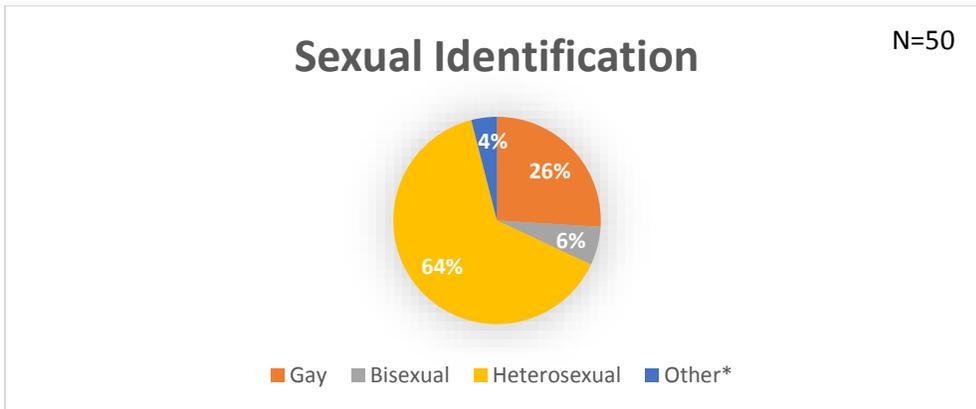
Question 5: Please tell us your ethnic identification in your own words (*we categorized responses into standard groups).



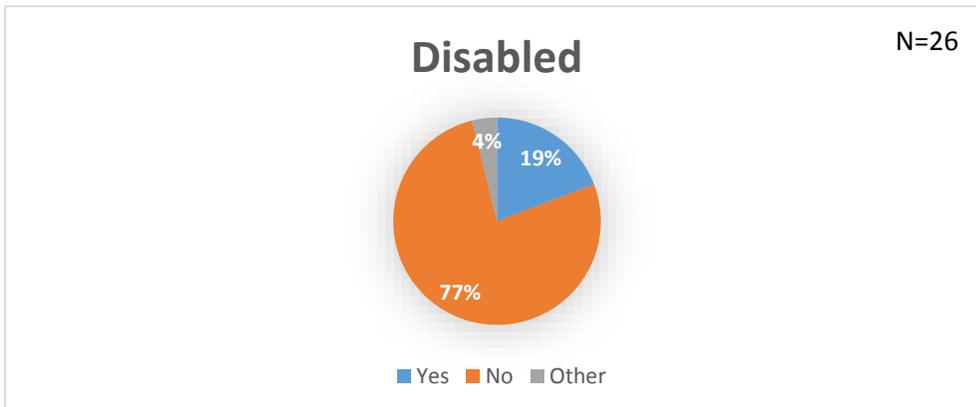
Question 6: What is your gender identification?



Question 7: Please tell us your sexual identification (*other here was 'untethered')



Question 8: Please tell us if you identify as having any disability and if you would like to, please describe your identification in your own words (recorded as "Identify as disabled").



Results: qualitative experiences

The responses from questions 9-13 we divided into the following four major categories.

No experience of diversity

- Did not experience any noticeable degree of diversity at Trent.
- Individuals that fell into this category all attended Trent between 1966 and 1980.

Experienced diversity

- Experienced and/or maintained friendships that would not normally have developed pre-Trent.
- Participated in events recognizing diversity that had not been experienced before.

“Many of the friendships I built were with people from diverse backgrounds that I would likely not have met at other schools.” 28 year old white male who attended Trent from 2004-2008

Positive reaction to their diversity

- Experienced own diversity without any mention of negative instances.
- Trent community did an excellent job of making them feel welcome and accepted.

“I really embraced being able to share my culture and values about how I was taught and raised by my family; people were very interested in Inuit and the Arctic.” 28 year old Inuvialuit male who attended from 2005-2011

“With the folks I met at Trent, I was pleased to find that my queer identity was accepted with a sort of nonchalance. Not only did I immediately find it easy to be open with my newfound friends about my queerness, it was also not something that needed to be focussed in on and examined under a microscope. This was a welcome change from my previous experiences growing up in a rural town, where my sexuality was at times a novel topic for conversation.” 26 year old gay male that attended Trent from 2006-2010

Positive experiences with room for improvement

- Trent was on the right track with accepting diversity but needed to do more to promote it.
- Despite not being as diverse as some larger, more metropolitan campuses, Trent was diverse for a rural university.

“We need more cultural events that acknowledge diversity beyond parades and dinners and diversity 'days'; but more courses, programs, conferences, etc...” Quote from a member of the faculty.

“Over the past several years, Trent has diminished in its commitment to diversity. Our institutional focus has been on adequate compliance with legal requirements.” Quote from a member of the faculty.

Negative reactions to equity and diversity

- Some individuals experienced racial stereotyping, racial and sexual slurs, and one instance of physical assault.

"...all was well until the conversation between the two girls ended up on Women's studies topics and somehow, still unknown to this day, offence was taken by the male passenger in the back seat resulting in shouting and an urgent need to pull to the side of the road. The male student proceeded to punch the girl passenger in the front seat breaking her jaw in two places." Quote from a male student that attended Trent from 1984-1989.

There was also comment on the perceptions of institutional commitment

"Trent is deeply entrenched in a chilly climate when it comes to questions of racial and ethnic diversity. The inability and unwillingness on the part of all levels of administration, including departmental and student governance is shocking and damaging to building a sustainable future for growth at Trent."
Quote from a member of faculty

Issues arising and recommendations

A good place for learning diversity

The results we obtained and the discussions arising from the two presentations and panels shows that there is a good basis for diversity issues at Trent. Trent's small size has allowed for interaction between individuals from different groups that makes Trent a good place for experiencing different forms of diversity and thus learning about them. We also had some positive stories of acceptance of diversity from those who identified as diverse in some way, and a broad culture of respect for difference. Many of those at the first presentation during the Alumni reunion weekend also talked about the fact that it was easy to organize student groups at Trent, and to put together events that represented their diversity.

We would have hoped this to be the case. Universities, in their primary functions of education and research, are about learning, and often this involves thinking differently from the established norms. At their best, all universities should have such an atmosphere, but it seems that Trent may also have a distinct advantage in the interdisciplinary nature of many of its programs, and the relatively small class sizes, both of which mix students together in small groups. The relative autonomy of student groups also seems to be an important factor.

Some faculty respondents mentioned the lack of programs and/or courses that spoke directly to diversity and equity issues and some of the faculty at the second presentation reiterated these concerns, as well as the lack of diversity amongst faculty, and issues of gender equity in workload and pay. The first issue is perhaps limited to the classes that deal explicitly with diversity issues, but we can find out the extent of classes that are available, and classes that deal with issues of equity and diversity as part of their "mainstream" subjects (as many do in my program of Sociology, for example). An audit here would bolster our knowledge and provide us with some direction about whether Trent wants to pursue such programming as part of its approach to promoting diversity. The issue of faculty and staff complement is perhaps more contentious but nonetheless important, at the very least in terms of doing an audit of where we stand on how well women and other equity seeking groups are represented in Trent's staffing. Without that evidence, we cannot even begin to discuss what issues should be a

priority (gender equity in workload and pay would seem the obvious 'priority' issue here) or whether diversity in staff is a goal we want to even aim for.

Confronting the negative

There were no obviously negative patterns in the experiences we gathered, or the discussions at the presentations, but one issue that did arise consistently was the perception that Trent did not have a clear institutional policy on diversity and that it did not show leadership on this issue, either within the University community or Peterborough. This was also a clear theme at both the recent College panels, where many also voiced their frustration at the University's lack of commitment to dealing effectively with cases of harassment and discrimination. There are, of course, policy frameworks that Trent operates within, primarily the Campus Violence and Harassment Policy and the Human Rights policy (the provincial context for these policies is detailed in Appendix 1). Trent's compliance here is largely focused on providing routes to address complaints and these clearly need improvement and a more genuine commitment from the University to make these policies more effective. Over and above policy compliance, however, there should be a more direct emphasis on creating an institutional culture that respects and promotes equity and diversity. We are aware that the Centre for Human Rights, Equity and Accessibility (CHREA) is developing a strategic plan that will discuss this issue of institutional culture, and that this office is engaged in variety of new initiatives that relate to the promotion of diversity rather than simply the procedural resolution of conflicts. It may well be that this forthcoming plan will address some of the recommendations below. We are also heartened to see these issues being addressed by the Colleges through these recent panels mentioned above but also through discussions to develop College-based programming on these issues during student orientation. Senior management needs to be more vocally and institutionally supportive of these initiatives.

There are any number of ways in which questions of diversity and equity will become increasingly relevant for Trent, from the increasing scrutiny placed on how universities deal with issues of sexual harassment, to the potential conflicts between religious minorities and gender equity or sexual diversity. Beyond an improved process for the resolution of specific conflicts through the CHREA and Campus Violence and Harassment protocols, it is important for Trent to create a culture where these kinds of conflicts are less likely. Moreover, while Trent's experience of ethnic diversity has historically been provided by a small proportion of International and Canadian students, the demographic shift in and around Toronto indicates that a significant proportion of our current and future Canadian recruitment will be students from ethnic and cultural minorities. Indeed, one of the most worrying points raised at the College panel on racism was how staff and faculty at Trent often assumed that visible minorities were not Canadian and must be International students. This lack of awareness of Canada's current diversity and the diversity of our own students should be an embarrassment to Trent and indicates that staff here need better awareness, something that should be led by the employer.

In 2015, all universities outside the GTA are suffering from enrolment decline. Trent is fortunate to have two campuses located close to the GTA but we need to be attractive to these potential students, who are increasingly from a diversity of ethnic backgrounds. One way of doing that is to work towards mainstreaming a culture of diversity, gender equity and mutual respect which could become a genuine part of Trent's identity and thus become a mainstream aspect of our promotional campaigns. Thus, there are two obvious benefits to a broader reflection on Trent's institutional position and the transformation of its institutional culture. First, these are issues which are increasingly relevant to our

potential student demographic, and second, a culture which mainstreams issues of gender equity, diversity and mutual respect is one that may pre-empt the escalation of conflicts around diversity and equity into more serious problems.

Recommendations on Profile, Accountability and Capacity

This report was not “commissioned” by any policy body of the university as such, but our hope is that it will help to start a debate, primarily in Administration, faculty and staff, but also among students. We need to discuss whether we value diversity and equity and if so, how Trent can function as a genuine partner in diversity and equity. Trent has the right “words” in place, but none of our respondents mentioned Trent’s policies beyond their negative perceptions of the complaints procedure, and so there is a lack of “fit” between policies and profile here.

We think that Trent does have a responsibility to show leadership, given its position as a place of learning, both in its role as an employer and institutional location for students, and its profile in the wider community. We recognize the work that is being done by Trent’s CHREA but we think that its role can be enhanced via some of these recommendations. We do not feel that the CHREA currently carries the institutional visibility that leadership on these issues would require, and it is not clear how the University Administration is accountable for issues of equity and diversity beyond its legal compliance framework. The Presidential Advisory Council on Human Rights, Equity and Accessibility (PACHREA) reports to the President and aids the work of the CHREA, but again, its profile seems low and it is not, it seems, a policy-making body. It is also unclear whether staff and faculty receive any actual training or awareness of diversity and equity issues beyond specific compliance modules, which falls far short of the University providing an institutional culture that expects respect and raises awareness of diversity and equity issues.

We think that Trent can therefore raise profile and accountability on these issues, and that this will show some leadership and build some capacity for mainstreaming these issues. This leadership, however, is more about being a willing and supportive partner in promoting and sustaining diversity, and Trent has to build capacity to be an active partner. We should be partnering with our staff, faculty, students and our local community and, above all, moving towards a time when Trent’s approach to issues of diversity and equity are both a central part of our identity and the experience of *everybody* who belongs to our community. These are emphatically *not* issues that simply affect ‘minorities’: they go to the heart of how a community functions in the relationships that we all have with each other. For a university such as Trent that wants to enhance its appeal as a destination, it should surely be an asset to let everyone know that we see the connections between a culture of openness, the respect for difference, equity and anti-discrimination and a successful learning and research environment. The following **recommendations** are given in the spirit of beginning this process:

Accountability

1. One of the senior administrative offices that sponsored this report should adopt it formally within a relevant policy or administrative framework so that these recommendations can be debated and acted upon in a suitable policy process of the management of the University.

2. We already have an existing senior position that takes ownership of diversity and equity issues across the whole university community in the office of the Director of the CHREA. The accountability of this position is not clear, however, and we recommend that the Administration and Board discuss whether the Director should report to both the President's office as well as the Board, thus identifying a senior administrative position that is responsible for these issues and already has PACHREA as a standing committee.
3. Whatever structure is adopted, the Administration should report annually or bi-annually on issues of equity and diversity to the whole University community.

Profile

4. Senior Administration should develop the existing mission statements of the University to mainstream diversity and equity issues within them and promote these aspects as a central part of the University's student and employment experience (at present, anyone visiting our website would be hard pressed to find a statement on equity and diversity without visiting the CHREA pages). This should involve consultation with campus unions, Senate and student groups and PACHREA (who could potentially take leadership on the issue).
5. Consider the appointment of a Human Rights Advisor who deals with policy issues and complaints, working under the Director of CHREA, who would then have more capacity to work on the profile of these issues.

Capacity

6. Improve institutional processes for dealing with harassment and discrimination more swiftly and effectively.
7. Identify the current successful institutional supports for diversity and pursue the development of these further (for example, student groups formed through TCSA, diversity and equity College programming, equity considerations on hiring committees for staff and faculty).
8. Integrate issues of diversity and equity into the induction of each new student cohort.
9. Integrate issues of diversity and equity into the expectations of those for whom Trent is a workplace (for example, annual reminders of duties and responsibilities, development of informational training modules for staff that covers all issues).
10. Explore how to partner with local community organizations to promote and sustain diversity and equity off-campus (such as the Community and Race Relations Committee, the city Council, for example)
11. Develop regular institutional knowledge about programs and classes that deal with diversity and equity issues, and promote these as part of raising the profile of diversity and equity issues on campus.
12. Develop regular institutional knowledge about diversity and equity in faculty, staff and student populations.

Appendices

1. The wider policy framework for equity and diversity

At the highest level of governmental legal protection is the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. This constitutional document, being one part of the Constitution Act of 1982, guarantees certain rights and freedoms to all citizens of Canada while protecting them from wrongful acts by the government of Canada. Further, this document is constitutional, and thus is the most binding document for human rights in Canada. Despite this strength it must be noted that the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms does not protect individuals from instances that do not involve the government; as such, “The *Charter* only applies to the acts and conduct of government, and does not apply to the acts of, and conduct between, individuals.”³

The Canadian Human Rights Act (CHRA) protects Canadians against discrimination when interacting with the government or entities that are regulated by the government at a federal level. This act ensures that while working for or interacting with the federal government or an extension of it, individuals are not discriminated against. The Canadian Human Rights Act seeks to protect individuals specifically from discrimination when interacting directly or indirectly with the federal government. Despite the fact that the laws contained within this Act are not part of the constitution, other laws that are enacted must respect this Act similarly to how they must abide by the Charter; it is in this sense that the government has deemed this Act ‘quasi-constitutional.’⁴ The Canadian Human Rights commission states that, “, “People can turn to the *Canadian Human Rights Act* to protect themselves against harassment or discrimination when based on one or more of the 11 grounds of discrimination...” These 11 grounds are the following: (i) race; (ii) national or ethnic origin; (iii) colour; (iv) religion; (v) age; (vi) sex; (vii) sexual orientation; (viii) marital status; (ix) family status; (x) disability; and (xi) a conviction for which a pardon has been granted or a record suspended.⁵ Section 2 of the act provides the purpose of the act; it states, “The purpose of this Act is to extend the laws in Canada to give effect, within the purview of matters coming within the legislative authority of Parliament, to the principle that all individuals should have an opportunity equal with other individuals to make for themselves the lives that they are able and wish to have and to have their needs accommodated, consistent with their duties and obligations as members of society, without being hindered in or prevented from doing so by discriminatory practices...”⁶ The CHRA focuses specifically on discrimination at a federal level and seeks to ensure that individuals are protected against discriminatory practices by either the federal government or institutions regulated by the federal government.

Next, in an effort to prevent discrimination in areas of Canada that the Charter or CHRA do not protect but that are still under governmental jurisdiction, provincial laws have been enacted to protect citizens; looking to Ontario we can see the enactment of the Ontario Human Rights Code. This code “prohibits actions that discriminate against people based on a protected *ground* in a protected *social area*.”⁷ The Ontario Human Rights Code allows for protection beyond that provided by the Charter or

³ Ontario Human Rights Commission, “Introducing the Ontario Human Rights Code”

⁴ Canadian Human Rights Commission, “How Are Human Rights Protected in Canada?”

⁵ Canadian Human Rights Commission, “What is Discrimination?”

⁶ Government of Canada, “Canadian Human Rights Act.”

⁷ Ontario Human Rights Commission, “The Ontario Human Rights Code.”

CHRA. The principles are as follows: (i) dignity and worth of every person; (ii) understanding and mutual respect; and (iii) equal opportunity to participate in and contribute fully to the community.⁸ Regarding specific rights, the OHRC specifies that it protects rights in what it calls 'protected social areas.' These social areas consist of the following: (i) accommodation; (ii) contracts; (iii) employment; (iv) goods, services, facilities; and (v) membership in unions, trade or professional associations.⁹ Further, the OHRC expands upon the 11 grounds of discrimination stated in the CHRA and further includes (i) citizenship, and (ii) receipt of public assistance. It is in part one of the OHRC, labelled *Freedom From Discrimination*, in which it provides the 9 policies that protect individuals from discrimination. Thus the OHRC allows for protections beyond what is offered by the Charter or the Canadian Human Rights Act. By ensuring these social areas are protected can the provincial government protect individuals from discrimination in many areas of life.¹⁰

At Trent University the Centre for Human Rights, Equity & Accessibility provides a policy in which members of the Trent community are protected. In its commitment the policy begins by emphasizing the "central role of equality, access and respect for its faculty, students and staff."¹¹ Further, through stating that "Trent University is fundamentally committed to the promotion of free inquiry and expression", it can be inferred that the policy aims to prioritize autonomy for all those it covers.¹² Within Trent's policy is both a restatement of the OHRC along with a distinct mention of Trent's policy being put in place to "affirm Trent University's commitment to compliance with the Code."¹³ Thus, by abiding by the OHRC Trent ensures the commitment to non-discriminatory practices through which diversity can be present in the community.

In conclusion we first have the Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms, a constitutional document. This document extends to all levels of governmental legislation, is stronger than other forms of legislation, but is only focused on ensuring that the government is compliant. The next level involves the Canadian Human Rights Act. This Act affects only federal level legislation but focuses specifically on discrimination. Further, this Act protects individuals from discrimination by all federal legislation. Becoming more specific, the province ensures further protections are guaranteed in which institutions, Trent University being one example, are required to comply; this is ensured through the Ontario Human Rights Code. In terms of addressing harassment and discrimination, Trent also has a Campus Violence and Harassment policy that has been developed to comply with Ontario's Occupational Health and Safety Act.¹⁴ Trent is thus compliant with both policies in terms of having developed procedures to resolve discrimination.

2. Questions used in the survey

Welcome to the Stories of Diversity survey. We are hoping to / collect experiences of diversity at Trent for a presentation during / the Trent 50 Reunion weekend and a subsequent informal report.

⁸ Ontario Human Rights Commission, "Introducing the Ontario Human Rights Code"

⁹ Ontario Human Rights Commission, "The Ontario Human Rights Code."

¹⁰ This excludes private interactions between two individuals in private settings.

¹¹ Trent University, "Discrimination and Harassment Policy."

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Trent University, "Discrimination and Harassment Policy."

¹⁴ <http://www.labour.gov.on.ca/english/hs/pubs/wpvh/introduction.php>

1. Please tell us your email if you would be happy for us to follow up / any queries we have and to seek your permission if Trent wants to / use any of these responses in promotional material
2. Please tell us your current age
3. What years were you at Trent?
4. Please tell us your role at Trent during these years
5. Please tell us if you were a Canadian or International Student, Faculty or staff member during this time
6. Please tell us your ethnic identification in your own words
7. What is your gender identification?
8. Please tell us your sexual identification
9. Please tell us if you identify as having any disability and if you would like to, please describe your identification in your own words.
10. The following questions ask about your experiences of diversity at Trent. Please feel free to answer at length and tell us about any clubs, societies or student groups at Trent that were important...
11. What were your experiences of having your diversity recognized at Trent?
12. What were your experiences of encountering other forms of diversity at Trent?
13. Are there any specific incidents or occasions that stand out to you as particularly POSITIVE, in terms of either having your own diversity recognized or encountering other forms of diversity?
14. Are there any specific incidents or occasions that stand out to you as particularly NEGATIVE, in terms of either having your own diversity recognized or encountering other forms of diversity?
15. Reflecting on your experiences discussed above, is there anything you think would have helped you as an individual, or others from diverse communities, in making the Trent experience better?

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