

Academic: Diversity Awareness

Effective Date:

Approved by Senate:

PREAMBLE

Equity and diversity are not abstract goals; they are essential qualities of an outstanding institution.

Lakehead University embraces equity and diversity as integral to its academic mission. We encourage and support participation of the widest range of perspectives in our exploration and exchange of knowledge and ideas. An essential component of academic excellence is a truly open and diverse community that actively fosters the inclusion of voices that have been or are underrepresented or excluded. Thus, Lakehead University is committed to fostering a living, learning, and working environment to which all can contribute and within which all can thrive.

An environment that fosters equity inspires innovation in teaching, research, scholarship, and service. It enhances wide-reaching opportunities for mentoring. Its diverse communities and varied experience and expertise will make it a welcoming destination for the best and brightest faculty, staff, and students.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout its history, Lakehead University has attracted students and faculty from all over the world as a place to study and work. Lakehead University has also been instrumental in working with the Aboriginal community to further the educational aspirations of Aboriginal students from across Northwestern Ontario and beyond.

The concept of diversity, however, extends beyond cultural diversity and includes variation among people in accordance with broad social categories that, in addition to culture, includes gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, physical and mental ability, family status and socio-economic status. Many individuals within these categories continue to feel marginalized or underrepresented and that their lives and experiences remain hidden within the curriculum and beyond.

Much has been done and continues to be done to make Lakehead University more inclusive of and welcoming to groups that may have been or are excluded or underrepresented in the past. This document is intended to provide a framework to more clearly define and outline strategies to focus on diversity and equity including enhancing ways in which they are addressed across the University; giving particular focus to incorporating equity and diversity within the curriculum, course content and pedagogical strategies.

“Equity” and “diversity” are broad terms capable of many interpretations. It is important, therefore, to define these terms and provide some context.

DIVERSITY AND EQUITY – DEFINITIONS AND PHILOSOPHY

As part of its mission, Lakehead University “values its people and the diversity of their ideas, contributions and achievements”. Recognizing diversity among students, staff, and faculty enhances diversity of ideas, contributions, perspectives, and achievements. We embrace diversity because it enriches our institution and is thus central to an academic culture of excellence. A diverse and excellent academic community, working together, will generate innovative research and scholarship. Students who experience diverse perspectives will be well equipped for leadership roles and affecting positive change. For these benefits to be realized, the diverse perspectives and differences must be fully included and valued. In this sense, “**diversity**” refers to variation among people in accordance with broad social categories that include, gender, race, culture, religion, sexual orientation identity, physical and mental ability, family status, and socio-economic status. Thus, diversity in an organization means taking individual difference into account, respecting the ways in which differences may be manifest and taking full advantage of the exchange of diverse perspectives and ideas that result in a robust and collegial environment.

Benefits to the three pillars of scholarly activity – teaching, research, and service – are maximized when diversity is not only recognized and respected, but also considered strength of the institution that enriches scholarship. Moreover, as a university community, Lakehead is committed to “*enabling students to reach their full potential to be responsible global citizens, [and] to developing and enhancing its students’ international cultural experiences, growth and understanding*” (Strategic Plan 2010-2013, page 16).

Recognizing and welcoming diversity of all kinds is but one step. The challenge for public institutions such as Lakehead University is to ameliorate the ways in which certain groups of people may experience marginalization within the University community. Understanding **equity** is a key platform towards reducing segregation and isolation. The notion that everyone must be treated equally is a popular assumption. However, equity is both a philosophy and practice that is not the same as the notion that all people must be treated equally.

As a **philosophy**, equity is distinct from equality. Equal treatment does not allow us to recognize personal, social, institutional, and systemic barriers that some people may face. Rather than being focused on equal treatment, equity recognizes that people do not all have the same level of access to university resources depending on how they identify themselves within social categories and/or how identities are

attributed to them by others. Equity strives for impartial, fair, and just treatment of everyone.

As a **practice**, equity initiatives recognize that access to opportunity is not equal. They offer opportunities for people to develop their potential by removing barriers to educational achievement, employment, and advancement when and where they exist.

Equity in hiring practices are designed to “level the playing field” to include equal opportunity for gender, race, culture, religion, sexual orientation identity, physical and mental ability, family status, and socio-economic status at all levels of university governance, administration, and organization. Equity in education supports differences in learning and provides accommodations to particular students to access learning resources and to support their achievement.

Equity, at its heart, is about fairness and mutual respect; equity assumes differences and takes difference into account to ensure a fair process and, ultimately, a fair (or equitable) outcome.

CONTEXT

- **Lakehead University’s Vision, Values and Commitments** – The values of integrity, mutual respect, accessibility, dedication to working with Aboriginal peoples, and being a welcoming community are found within Lakehead’s mission, vision and within its operating principles. All these values are related to equity and diversity issues and must be an integral part of all strategic planning.

- **Excellence** – Lakehead University strives for excellence through its students, faculty, staff and alumni. This value is reinforced when principles of equity and diversity are incorporated into policies and practices that enable Lakehead to draw on the broadest possible pool of qualified students, faculty and staff. Moreover, diversity is integral to academic excellence, and only with the synergy of diverse people, perspectives and ideas, can Lakehead University achieve the highest level of excellence in research and teaching and learning.

- **Demographics** – Changing demographics brought about by emigration and immigration, a changing economy, globalization, increasing participation rate of Aboriginal peoples in furthering their education opportunities, greater participation of disadvantaged groups and changing ideas of inclusiveness, have contributed towards a change in the population of prospective students. These also have changed the face of staff and faculty available to attend, live and work at Lakehead University. To attract prospective students and to retain and engage well qualified staff and faculty, Lakehead University must ensure that campus facilities, policies and climate are welcoming and that programs and services are diverse and accessible to all.

- **Societal Good** – In our role as a leader and educator in the community, it is important that Lakehead University acknowledge and address historical injustices and systemic barriers that may prevent disadvantaged groups from seeking higher education or employment at Lakehead. Lakehead University must be an active leader in not only promoting equity and diversity within our own backyard but also in providing the tools and programs for our

students, staff, faculty and graduates to bring these values back to the community at large. Lakehead University is committed to acknowledging the unique place of Aboriginal peoples within the Canadian Constitution.

- **Social Justice** – Lakehead University recognizes that equity and diversity are essential to social justice for all, and that aspiring to meet goals for equity and diversity is a moral imperative. In addressing these goals, Lakehead seeks to address the inequities and barriers that keep people from learning and working to their full potential and that impede access to all that the University has to offer.

REQUIREMENTS FOR SUCCESS

- **Commitment** – Achieving equity and diversity at Lakehead University requires more than vision; it requires an adjustment in our practices at many levels. Such organizational change will not happen without a genuine commitment to take action to achieve the vision.

Commitment requires more than rhetoric; it must be supported with adequate resources.

- **Honesty and Accountability** – Lakehead University must be open, honest and accountable in assessing its progress towards achieving equity and diversity. Lakehead must recognize where inequities exist and must be transparent about its efforts to remedy them. It is equally important to recognize and celebrate individuals and units that are having a significant impact in advancing equity and diversity at Lakehead.

- **Leadership** – Although change must happen at all levels of the organization, it is essential that Lakehead University's leaders demonstrate a commitment to action. Commitment can be demonstrated through inclusion of equity and diversity in strategic planning, policy-making and resource allocation, and in the diversity of those appointed to leadership positions.

- **Shared Responsibility** – Success in achieving equity and diversity will require actions and resources that empower individual units to implement change that meets their needs in their particular context. That means setting goals that are broad enough to advance the vision of Lakehead University while respecting the differences across units, faculties and campuses. It also means providing the support and resources that are necessary to enable units to meet their goals.

- **Empowerment** – Also essential in advancing equity and diversity is the work of dedicated individuals and groups who advocate from the grassroots. This plan is intended to be a tool that empowers these individuals and groups to advance the University's mission and that recognizes their contribution.

- **Innovation** – To become a university that embraces equity and diversity as part of its academic mission and that reflects the diversity of Canadian society, Lakehead University must be prepared to recognize and change policies and practices that have been barriers to inclusion and participation. Change is often a challenge. However, Lakehead University must find ways to encourage the entire community to be innovative and creative to further the vision to foster equity and diversity.

CURRENT PROGRAMS AND RESOURCES FOSTERING EQUITY AND DIVERSITY

Presently, the following programs and resources are available on campus. Each of these resources (and the list is not exhaustive) work towards fostering equity and providing an environment in which differences and different perspectives are welcomed.

- Aboriginal Cultural and Support Services
- Aboriginal Awareness Centre (Lakehead University Student Union (LUSU))
- Department of Women's Studies
- Pride Central (LUSU)
- Gender Issues Centre (LUSU)
- Multicultural Centre (LUSU)
- Lakehead International
- Learning Assistance Centre
- Harassment and Discrimination Coordinator
- Office of Human Resources
- Accessibility Committee
- Office of the Ombudsperson
- Union representatives

PROPOSED POLICY STATEMENT ON EQUITY AND DIVERSITY

Lakehead University is committed to developing a climate of educational equity that welcomes diversity, embraces differences and values, and reflecting as wide a range of diversity as is consistent with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Such a climate includes acknowledging and eliminating direct, indirect and systemic discrimination. A culture of educational equity recognizes and respects the equal dignity and worth of all who seek to participate in the life, work and mission of the University. Such a culture is created and maintained by developing a university-wide commitment to educational equity, supported by policies, programs, curricula, practices and traditions that facilitate individuals' free, safe and full participation in the life of the University.

NEXT STEPS

- 1 To establish a task force that develops an action plan to operationalize the concepts of equity and diversity and extend those to key objectives of the 2010-2013 strategic plan that address diversity and to incorporate the concepts and desired goals into the University's academic plan.
- 2 To consider the establishment of a permanent committee on Equity and Diversity or investigate best governance models for facilitating the following objectives:
 - a. Organizing of a forum each year for the discussion of issues, policies and practices regarding equity, diversity, inclusivity and the maintenance of a safe, respectful and appreciative teaching, learning and working environment
 - b. Recommending appropriate policies or practices, particularly with regard to teaching and learning.
 - c. Engaging in other objectives that promote the intentions behind the above policy

- d. Reviewing, and where necessary, recommending revisions to existing academic policy or the creation of new policy related to academic equity

Acknowledgements:

- With thanks for University of British Columbia, Equity Office – Tom Patch, Associate Vice-President, Equity, for agreeing to let Lakehead University use its “Valuing Difference: A Strategy for Advancing Equity and Diversity at UBC” as a template for this work.
- Queen’s University - “Educational Equity Report and Policy Statement”
- University of Victoria
- University of Minnesota – “Reimagining Equity and Diversity: A Framework for Transforming the University of Minnesota”, page 6 – Social Justice, Excellence