

CONCORDIA



**PRESIDENT'S  
TASK FORCE ON  
ANTI-BLACK RACISM**

**PRELIMINARY  
RECOMMENDATIONS**

**NOVEMBER 2021**



# PRESIDENT'S TASK FORCE ON ANTI-BLACK RACISM

## PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS NOVEMBER 2021

In response to the calls to action heard around the globe in support of Black Lives Matter in spring 2020, and in acknowledgment of Concordia's complex and long-standing history with Black communities, both internal and external, President Graham Carr struck a university-wide Task Force on Anti-Black Racism in fall 2020. Reporting to the Provost and Vice-President, Academic, Anne Whitelaw, the Task Force was mandated to oversee and guide a series of wide-ranging efforts to address systemic anti-Black racism at Concordia.

For the first year of its two-year mandate, the Task Force focused its energies on understanding the current state of the university and the ways in which systemic anti-Black racism occurs across the institution — in Concordia's policies, teaching and learning practices, research, and in the experiences of its faculty, staff and students. To address these issues, the Task Force was initially organized into eight subcommittees according to principal areas of concern. The first two subcommittees in the list below were eventually folded (see footnote for explanation) and their foci assumed by a newly formed Steering Committee composed of three major entities at Concordia: the Equity Office, the Black Perspectives Office, and the Caucus of Black Concordians, all critical to the efficacy of the Task Force.

- Anti-Racist Education and Resources for the Campus Community<sup>1</sup>
- Campus Security and Relations With External Security Forces<sup>2</sup>
- Concordia's History and Its Founding Institutions' Relations With Black Communities
- Curriculum and Educational Resources
- Employment Initiatives
- Faculty Development, Research, Library and Supports
- Fundraising and Community Engagement
- Student Services and Success

As highlighted by the work of the subcommittee on Concordia's History and Its Founding Institutions' Relations With Black Communities, Black Concordians have been active members of the university community for many generations. Nevertheless, ongoing systemic barriers have siloed, suppressed and segregated the collective efforts of Black Concordians to effect change, rendering their attempts unsustainable and having minimal impact on our community. In conjunction with the Black Perspectives Office, the Caucus of Black Concordians and the Equity Office, the Task Force is part of a broader strategy to articulate and facilitate the work that must be done to effectively address systemic anti-Black racism at Concordia. Though generally undervalued and emotionally costly for those involved, this labour is essential for the benefit of all Concordians and can only be accomplished with the comprehensive focus allowed by a university-wide Task Force.

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<sup>1</sup> It was decided that the elements of the Anti-Racist Education and Resources for the Campus Community subcommittee would be woven into the considerations of each subcommittee. The Task Force Steering Committee will address anti-racist education across all thematic subcommittees.

<sup>2</sup> The Campus Security and Relations With External Security Forces subcommittee was also folded. The work of this subcommittee was expanded to a broader theme of "safety on campus" rather than a sole focus on security on campus. Safety on campus will be one of the main overarching foci of the Task Force Steering Committee.

## Preliminary findings

At the mid-point of the Task Force's mandate, the following areas emerge as requiring specific elaboration: data collection; recruitment, hiring and retention; education and training; curriculum; Black-specific space and student well-being; recognition; fundraising; and policies and protocols.

### 1. Data collection

The dearth of Black-specific data is an urgent and ongoing challenge identified by all subcommittees. Any comprehensive assessment of the needs of Black students, faculty, staff and alumni is problematic because of the difficulty in identifying these individuals. Quebec legislation notwithstanding, the onus is on Concordia to develop data collection frameworks that can harness this information effectively and establish broader strategic approaches that bring the multiple services that address the needs of Black Concordians into regular communication, consultation and concertation. The subcommittees dealing with Black faculty and staff have found it difficult to locate their focus groups because of the lack of sufficient data. By extension, tackling the lack of representation amongst Black faculty and staff becomes even more challenging, despite the urgency with which this needs to be addressed.

It is important to acknowledge Concordia's recent efforts to gather data on its wider community through the equity census dedicated to faculty and staff this past winter. Bearing in mind that it is the first census of its kind at Concordia, time is required to understand how to use the data amassed, who should have access to it and whether it will be sufficient to address the requirements of the different institutional and community stakeholders of the university. Though the Task Force appreciates the efforts being made by Concordia to better understand its community, the reality is that the current inexistence of Black-specific data restricts the scope and depth of our investigations. Without this data, our recommendations will inevitably be similarly impacted.

Regarding the Black student population, we strongly recommend that the university conduct a similar exercise to gather student data. The information gleaned through any potential student census must be coordinated directly with the multiple university services that are responsible for the interests of Black students.

### 2. Recruitment, hiring and retention

There is an immediate and pressing urgency to proportionally increase the numbers of Black faculty and staff at Concordia to better reflect Concordia's Black student population, as well as the wider Montreal Black population. This will require the implementation of strategies that prioritize targeted numbers of cluster hires of Black Canadian and African diaspora studies scholars, Canada Research Chairs and postdoctoral positions, among others, all with clearly defined timelines. The difficulties

encountered in filling all the Task Force's subcommittee lead positions already testify to the dearth of Black professors and staff within the Concordia community (and the difficulty in identifying them); the experiences of some of our members only confirm the complexities of the hiring processes. As important as increased numbers are overall, it is also important to note the specific lack of Black faculty in STEM disciplines and at the John Molson School of Business, as well as the need for Black scholarship that focuses on issues of specific importance to the Black communities in Montreal, Quebec and Canada.

While the limited number of Black staff was identified as a concern, issues of retention were also highlighted as requiring attention, especially regarding what is perceived as ceilings to individual development. In addition, it is important to mention that more Black representation is necessary in public-facing staff positions.

The necessity to enhance Black student recruitment, particularly at the graduate level, has been voiced. This issue relates to equitable access to university education, as well as to Concordia's relationship to Montreal's Black communities and the ways in which those relationships can and should be further nurtured. Issues of underrepresentation of Black faculty and staff also potentially have a negative impact on student retention.

### **3. Education and training**

It is clear across several subcommittees that there is a need for further educational resources and accompaniment with respect to unconscious and conscious biases, anti-racism, anti-discriminatory practices and equity as they relate to Concordia's Black community. The experiences of Black students, staff and faculty attest to the fact that such instruction would be beneficial across multiple levels and sectors of the university, including non-Black faculty, staff, public-facing services, administrators and security. This work should be done under the stewardship of the Black Perspectives Office in conjunction with the Equity Office, as well as other university stakeholders. In consultation with both units, the question of mandatory training (as is the case for cybersecurity awareness, sexual violence prevention, etc.) as well as its eventual content needs to be considered in the upcoming year. Manifestly, coordinated and concerted messaging must be prioritized throughout the university.

### **4. Curriculum**

The lack of Black scholarship and perspectives in courses across Concordia is another area that the Task Force identified as requiring attention. The creation of library databases and keyword-accessible course descriptions for students and designated expert support and accompaniment for faculty through the Centre for Teaching and Learning are key components in this endeavour.



Concordia should also honour the work that has been done in the past by its Black community and their allies and respect their ongoing call for the creation of Black studies programs. There is limited scholarship at Concordia that focuses specifically on the Black Canadian experience or on issues that are pertinent for Black communities. Concordia has an important opportunity and an obligation to demonstrate accountability to Black communities by 1) encouraging hands-on research that targets the needs and priorities of those communities, and 2) engaging top-level Black scholars who will significantly diversify and contribute to Concordia's research profile.

Preliminary investigations indicate that if Concordia wants to remain competitive among Canadian universities, it must actively pursue the creation of minor and certificate programs in Black Canadian and African diaspora studies, with a clear intention to move towards a major program. Immediate consideration must therefore be given to how Concordia can support interdisciplinary cross-institutional research and teaching on Black Canadians and African diasporas in the Canadian context. It is equally essential to consider how to effectively house these programs, the priority being to support their administrative autonomy. Importantly, Black studies programs could potentially provide a concrete focus for faculty hires, curriculum development, research funding, recruitment and fundraising campaigns.

## **5. Black-specific space and student well-being**

The necessity for a specific gathering space for Concordia's Black student community emerges as essential to providing them with a campus environment that is inclusive and welcoming. The centre's initial priorities should focus on culturally relevant supports to address the particular challenges faced by local and international Black students, whose experiences are sometimes markedly different. This will also have a positive impact on the emotional labour currently placed on Black faculty and staff as they accompany students through their university experience. It is equally urgent that Health and Wellness services provide culturally relevant mental health supports for Black students.

## **6. Recognition**

Conversations with current and former Black Concordians suggest that the university needs to make a concerted effort to remedy the perception that it does not follow through on its stated commitments. Minimal acknowledgement of the role of systemic racism in the Sir George Williams protests is seen as problematic. There is skepticism about whether Concordia will follow through on recommendations to attend to the increased recruitment of Black faculty and staff, the retention of faculty, staff and students, and the creation of safe spaces and learning experiences for Black students. These, along with gestures such as renaming buildings, commissioning public art, creating Black studies programs, etc., are essential to restoring confidence in Concordia's commitment to equity and inclusion for its Black community.

## **7. Fundraising**

The role of fundraising cannot be overstated. It is imperative that there be a call to action and accountability on the part of the university. A strategic plan with clear priorities, a defined timeline and attainable deliverables must be established. The strategy should be implemented on two distinct fundraising fronts: the community campaign side and the major donor side. It is recommended that the university direct efforts to 1) find consistent ways to fundraise for Black-specific initiatives including — but not limited to — research studies, curriculum development, a centre for Black students, etc.; 2) develop proposals that ensure opportunities are presented to major gift donors; and 3) support scholarship opportunities for local and international Black students.

## **8. Policies and protocols**

There is an urgent need to implement additional mechanisms that will improve avenues of communication for race-related complaints at all levels of the university. It is imperative that these processes be readily accessible to the entire university community and, most particularly, to the Black student population. What is required is a concerted effort to develop a climate-assessment model that can function alongside an individual complaint model as is currently supported by the Code of Rights and Responsibilities. Notable efforts have already been made to coordinate various entities to receive such complaints and provide the necessary support for those involved. At the present time, however, the situations are dealt with exclusively on a case-by-case basis which, though necessary, does not address the broader context within which these situations emerge. Furthermore, these protocols should be made accessible on the webpages of all pertinent university units.

There also needs to be a specific protocol developed regarding the use of derogatory and/or dehumanizing language in the classroom. This will require consultation and collaboration between the Black Perspectives Office, the Equity Office, the Centre for Teaching and Learning, the Office of Rights and Responsibilities, and the Office of the Vice-Provost, Faculty Development and Inclusion.



## Preliminary recommendations

Based on the above findings, the President's Task Force on Anti-Black Racism makes the following preliminary recommendations to the university:

### Institution-specific recommendations

- 1. Develop a strategic plan for Black-specific data collection:** Comprehensive data collection frameworks must be developed to identify Concordia's diverse Black communities. This is critical if the university is to adequately assess and respond to the specific needs of Black faculty, staff and students. This urgent effort requires the immediate collaboration of — but is not limited to — the Vice-Provost, Faculty Development and Inclusion; the Equity Office; and the Office of Institutional Planning and Analysis.
- 2. Increase the representation of Black faculty and staff to better reflect Concordia's Black student population, as well as Montreal's Black population:** Human Resources (for staff) and relevant stakeholders in the academic sector (e.g., Office of the Provost and Vice-President, Academic; Office of the Vice-Provost, Faculty Development and Inclusion; Office of the Vice-President, Research and Graduate Studies, etc.) must review current recruitment strategies, identify systemic barriers to hiring and develop strategic plans for the next five years to specifically increase numbers and improve career advancement and retention practices. An important aspect of career management must include tangible methods of recognizing the added emotional labour that some Black staff and faculty experience.
- 3. Implement a mandatory and continuous university-wide training program on anti-racism that includes a specific chapter on anti-Black racism:** Provide university leadership, staff, faculty and students with ongoing education on unconscious and conscious biases and anti-Black racism, co-created and co-delivered by relevant stakeholders, including — but not limited to — the Equity Office, the Black Perspectives Office, and Human Resources.
- 4. Create certificate and minor programs in the short term that focus on Black and African diaspora studies in the Canadian context and commit to the ultimate creation of a major program:** Build curricula that speaks to Black histories and representation in a range of fields related to Black Canadian and African diaspora studies and focuses on the scholarship of Black and African diaspora authors. Establish clear timelines for the phased creation of all three programs (certificate, minor and major) with considered attention to where these programs can best be housed. Priority should be given to the autonomy of the programs.



5. **Establish a permanent resource on Black perspectives at the Centre for Teaching and Learning:** Hire a specialized curriculum developer and a teaching consultant who would be responsible for developing reading lists and building resources around curricula, as well as training faculty across the university on Black perspectives, decolonization and other areas relevant to the fields of teaching and research.
6. **Establish permanent library support to highlight Black scholarship:** Hire a specialist to develop and maintain a comprehensive library database of Black authors/scholars from different disciplines and facilitate student access to these resources. Relationships with other scholarly communities inside and outside the university would need to be established.

### Stakeholder-specific recommendations

1. **Implement training in de-escalation, anti-oppression and anti-racist practices for Campus Security personnel:** Develop and implement a safe intervention model that is co-created and co-delivered by relevant stakeholders, including — but not limited to — the Office of the Vice-President, Services and Sustainability; the Office of Rights and Responsibilities; and the Equity Office. Where necessary, external expertise should be solicited. Develop a strategy to (re)build relationships between Campus Security and Concordia's Black community that includes community outreach activities.
2. **Develop a strategic plan to offer mental health services designed to meet the needs of Black Concordians:** Establish immediate and longer-term strategies to address the health needs specific to Black Concordians by providing culturally relevant counselling, as much for Black faculty and staff as for students. Immediate and long-term strategies must include the recruitment of Black health professionals.
3. **Create a permanent student centre servicing Black students:** With the collaboration of the Dean of Students Office and the Black Perspectives Office, commit to the creation of a centre for Black students with a dedicated space for students to experience a campus environment that is inclusive and welcoming for Black students. In the interests of Black student recruitment and retention, the centre's services should be geared towards local and international Black students, be culturally relevant and bilingual, and have links to Black alumni as well as to Montreal's Black communities.
4. **Implement culturally relevant mentorship programs for Black faculty and staff:** Develop a strategic plan for the next five years that addresses succession planning, career management and mentoring to support the advancement of Black faculty and staff. This would be led by the Vice-Provost, Faculty Development and Inclusion, and Human Resources.
5. **Develop a strategic plan for fundraising to finance support services for local and international Black students and to develop Black studies curricula:** Major gift donors must be approached and consistent annual funding campaigns developed to raise funds for scholarships, internships and academic and well-being support services for Black students, as well as to finance the development of Black studies programs.

- 6. Provide public recognition of the presence and contributions of Black Concordians over the course of Concordia's history:** Make aspects of Concordia's history with Black communities both visible and accessible by erecting permanent commemorative installations. Celebrate the continued presence of Black Concordians and honour their successes in overcoming the challenges and barriers they have faced, both within and beyond the university confines.

With the expectation that Concordia will fully endorse these recommendations and move towards their immediate implementation, this current year will be dedicated to the following: the execution of a comprehensive survey of present and former Concordians on multiple issues related to the foci of the respective Task Force subcommittees; the completion of individual subcommittee mandates; the formulation of the implementation strategies necessary to bring the entire project to fruition; and, ultimately, the submission of the Final Report of the President's Task Force on Anti-Black Racism to the President by summer 2022.

The most important underlying consideration for the Task Force leadership is ultimately to facilitate the existence of an anchored and vibrant community for Black Concordians — a key element if the work of the Task Force and its recommendations are to be considered successful in the long run. Ongoing exchanges with all university stakeholders must continue to facilitate implementation, provide a structure for long-term ally support and offer a clear framework for Black excellence among faculty, staff and students, allowing them to be fully invested in their futures at Concordia.

The Task Force is an enormous endeavour. This past year has served primarily to help everyone get their bearings. It has taken time for the Task Force leadership and the subcommittees to fully understand their respective mandates, situate and contextualize their work accordingly, and then find the most appropriate and effective ways of working together. These recommendations are a worthy testament to the commitment, conviction, and talents of the Task Force members.



