



St. Stephen's College

Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Social Justice (EDI-J) Policy Including an Indigenous Framework and Relations Policy

Background

St. Stephen's College (SSC) has a long and robust history. Established in 1908 as an amalgamation of Methodist and Presbyterian religious colleges, and coming under the authority of the United Church in 1927, it is now a spiritually diverse, degree-granting College affiliated with the University of Alberta.

With origins in a western Christian tradition of recognizing and including 'the other,' St. Stephen's long-standing focus on social justice is evidenced in the College's [Educating the Whole Person](#) document which includes its [Affirming Statement of Diversity](#):

These values lead us to work for justice, belonging, and wholeness in language and practice for all persons, respecting diversity of ability, ethnicity, faith tradition, worldview, gender identity, and sexual orientation. We recognize the challenges facing our society, and we endeavor to dissolve the barriers caused by homophobia, transphobia, sexism, xenophobia, racism, and other forms of intolerance, discrimination, and hate. We strive to create a safe, welcoming, and accessible space, within a climate of respect and trust, for all people to be open and honest regarding their life experiences.

Drawing upon its rootedness in the social justice and ecumenical/interreligious heritage of the United Church of Canada, SSC self-consciously nurtures a learning community that is open and accepting to people of all faith traditions and worldviews. As outlined in the College's [Operating Principles](#): "We work for justice, belonging, and wholeness in language and practice for all persons, respecting diversity of ability, ethnicity, faith tradition, worldview, gender identity, and sexual orientation."

Recognizing today's societal context, the Board of the College recommended the development of a policy on Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) to complement its long commitment to Social Justice. There are unique factors to consider in this undertaking, including the College's past, similar policies of other post-secondary Canadian institutions, and the national commitment to Indigenous reconciliation. Additionally, St. Stephen's has numerous working relationships with the University of Alberta and its [EDI policy](#), which covers university services received by the College—among them, academic services, student services, facilities and maintenance, technological services, and other services directly provided to St. Stephen's.

The recent recognition of the history of Indigenous peoples in Canada, including their treaties and status as nations, has prompted a significant galvanizing of most Canadian institutions to recognize



Indigenous history and construct new relations that will acknowledge past wrongs and lead to more socially just outcomes. St. Stephen's must incorporate the learnings and recommendations of the United Nations Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Persons; the Truth and Reconciliation Calls for Action; and the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Call for Justice within the scope of a new Indigenous Framework and Relations policy, separate from its Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Social Justice policy.

Therefore, in alignment with relevant University of Alberta policies, St. Stephen's College has developed:

1. An Indigenous Framework and Relations policy based on reconciliation; and,
2. An Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Justice (EDI-J) policy that builds on its commitment to social justice.



Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Social Justice Policy

Equity

The concept of Equity recognizes that each person has different life circumstances and therefore requires the allocation of adequate resources, opportunities, and accommodations in order to reach their potential.

Equity is not the same as equality. Equality means each individual or group of people is given the same resources or opportunities, but it does not adequately address injustice, racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, or ableism. Also, the concept of equality does not recognize that each person has different circumstances and therefore requires different circumstances and allocations to reach an equitable outcome.

Equity at St. Stephen's includes ways in which the Institution (board, governance committees, staff, students, faculty) will address issues of

- student finances
- ethnicity, race, religious background
- disabilities and accommodation
- sexual orientation, gender identity, and pronouns
- anti-bullying

St. Stephen's College recognizes that in order for students to pursue and succeed in the College's graduate-level programs, they may require additional resources, opportunities, and accommodations to address their individual, social, environmental, and health-related circumstances. It is essential to the College's foundational principles for all students to receive equitable access to these resources, opportunities, and accommodations so that they feel safe, well-equipped, and supported throughout their degree.

Diversity

Diversity refers to demographic or identity diversity, including that based on the protected grounds under the Alberta Human Rights Act. Diversity also encompasses difference or variety in education, perspectives, opinions, heuristics, disciplines, faculties, skills, and learning opportunities. Diversity celebrates 'wins', welcomes everyone, recognizes multiple points of view, and reflects the diversity within communities.

St. Stephen's College supports and encourages diversity through the identification and removal of barriers and biases, and the creation of workplaces and learning environments that are safe and free of harassment and discrimination.



Inclusion

Inclusion ensures that all individuals receive fair treatment, are valued and respected for their contributions, sense that they belong, and are supported equitably in a culturally safe environment. Inclusion prioritizes participation, equity, and access.

In many ways, Inclusion is the result of Equity, Diversity, and Social Justice. It speaks to St. Stephen's historical interest and concern for 'the other'.

Social Justice

St. Stephen's recognizes that social justice for our institution is both a set of goals and a process.

Goals:

- Full and equal participation of all—faculty, staff, students, Board, governance committees, Chancellor, and volunteers.
- Equitable opportunities
- Physical and psychological safety
- Support for the work of seeking solutions to past harms
- Guided by principles of dignity, respect, compassion, fairness

Process:

- Providing training/education for staff, faculty, board, students, and other community members involved in advancing the work of the College
- Seeking solutions to inequality as an institution
- Investigating its past and repairing harms
- Building connections that support justice with communities locally, nationally, and internationally

St. Stephen's recognises that for Indigenous People—the original Peoples of the land—social justice:

- Embraces and is rooted in connections to the land and natural world
- Is based on Indigenous laws/teachings, including nature and spiritual teachings
- Is based on respect and fulfillment of the treaty relations to which we are all party



Indigenous Framework and Relations

St. Stephen's College's historical and current relations with Indigenous Peoples and communities is accomplished partially through research, relationships, historical research, and reflection on both past and future initiatives such as:

- Residential school connections, or historic policies that may have excluded Indigenous Peoples
- Territory acquisition, land rights, and dispossession of land (Eg. Papaschase)
- On-going and systemic racism that creates barriers to post-secondary education for Indigenous Peoples

Besides the College's EDI-J policy, the Indigenous framework speaks specifically to commitments to Indigenous Peoples and communities:

- Acknowledge the living nature of this work (a living document) and include commitments to evaluation and reporting on commitments
- Actively uplift and centre Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing, in addition to 'acknowledging' Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing
- Ensure Indigenous Peoples' priorities and concerns are prioritized both within and beyond conversations about equity, diversity, inclusion, and justice.

St. Stephen's, by virtue of its close relationship to the University of Alberta and interest in aligning the College's Indigenous Framework and Relations with the University, adopts [The Braid](#) as a tool for understanding holistic well-being for individuals and communities. As outlined by the University:

The Braid [is a plan] grouped into three categories or "strands"—symbolizing the responsibilities of the Sweetgrass Teachings: looking to the past, in-powering the present and imagining the future. These three groupings represent a sweetgrass braid and the accompanying prairie and parkland-based Indigenous understandings (where the University of Alberta [and College] are primarily, though importantly, not only, based). In many Indigenous cultures, the braid also represents mind, body, and spirit and the balance between the three for good health and harmony in individuals and communities.

Reconciliation refers to a process of building and sustaining respectful, ethical relations between Indigenous peoples and the rest of Canada based on mutual understanding and respect.



Appendix:

The University of Alberta – [Indigenous Strategic Plan](#) + [Strategic Plan for EDI](#)

The University of Alberta has responded to the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission with an emphasis on capacity building and foundational change in support of Indigenous initiatives, programming, and personnel with a vision for making the U of A a welcoming place for Indigenous students, faculty, and staff. The University's equity, diversity and inclusion initiatives will endeavour to support the principles of the Indigenous strategic plan and prioritize cross-collaboration with it.

The U of A acknowledges that indigenization is an institutional journey that will likely take generations to address. Only intentional, conscientious, systemic changes can move the institution closer to these critical goals. In the spirit of these understandings — and with an acknowledgment that the work to indigenize the institution touches on every academic, administrative and operational aspect of the University — we, as signatories, affirm our commitment as individuals, educators, as researchers, administrators and as leaders to act on Indigenous initiatives within our units and across the institution.

Territorial Acknowledgement:

The University of Alberta, its buildings, labs, and research stations are primarily located on the traditional territory of Cree, Blackfoot, Métis, Nakota Sioux, Iroquois, Dene, and Ojibway/Saulteaux/Anishinaabe nations, lands that are now known as part of Treaties 6, 7, and 8 and homeland of the Métis. The University of Alberta respects the sovereignty, lands, histories, languages, knowledge systems, and cultures of First Nations, Métis and Inuit nations.

The Braid

The plan is grouped into three categories or “strands”—symbolizing the responsibilities of the Sweetgrass Teachings: looking to the past, in-powering the present and imagining the future. These three groupings represent a sweetgrass braid and the accompanying prairie and parkland-based Indigenous understandings (where the University of Alberta is primarily, though importantly, not only based). In many Indigenous cultures, the braid also represents mind, body and spirit and the balance between the three for good health and harmony in individuals and communities.

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University of Calgary – [Indigenous Strategy](#)

A neighbour to the south with different relationships to the community, the U of C's strategy and statements reflect specific commitments to truth and reconciliation. The TRC acknowledges a broad range of injustices that Indigenous people across Canada have faced, and intersects with other important institutional responsibilities specific to Treaty, UNDRIP, MMIWG2S+, and other initiatives that address Indigenous issues.



“The Indigenous Strategy will guide the University of Calgary on its path of transformation and communicate its commitment and responsibility for truth and reconciliation. The strategy will remain a living document within the institution, whereby progress will be monitored and content and direction will be renewed through a process of evaluation and evolution.”

The University of British Columbia – [Indigenous Strategic Plan](#) + [Inclusion Action Plan](#)

The plan is the University’s response to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls’ Calls for Justice. It is also UBC Vancouver’s response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action.

The Inclusion Action Plan also supports our commitments to reconciliation, and recognition of our locations on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territories of Indigenous peoples. This history and relationship with these lands frame our efforts to understand decolonization in the context of all our inclusion efforts.

We ensure that this Inclusion Action Plan supports the implementation of the Indigenous Strategic Plan across UBC.

Indigenous people and their concerns require recognition both within and beyond this conversation.

Resources

Davis, Aida Mariam. “Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion have Failed: How about Belonging, Dignity, and Justice Instead?” *World Economic Forum*, February 23, 2021.

<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/02/diversity-equity-inclusion-have-failed-belonging-dignity-justice>

Harrison, Sybil, Janice Simcoe, Dawn Smith, and Jennifer Stein. *Pulling Together: A Guide for Leaders and Administrators*. A Guide for Indigenization of Post-Secondary Institutions, A Professional Learning Series. BCcampus Open Publishing, 2018.

<https://opentextbc.ca/indigenizationleadersadministrators>