Annual Report 2023-2024

Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Justice (EDIJ)
Faculty of Environment, University of Waterloo

Now in it's second year, the office of the Associate Dean of Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Justice (EDIJ) continued it focus on leading and supporting EDIJ work within Environment, and connecting the Faculty to various pan-university initiatives. The overall goal of the EDIJ work was to help build an understanding, process and culture of EDIJ in the Faculty of Environment. During the last reporting period the EDIJ work was mainly consultative and formative. In the past year, much of the efforts were dedicated to actionable projects and implementation of specific EDIJ initiatives and activities, details of which are provided below.

Environment Community Gatherings
At the core of humanity is the spirit of coexistence, collectivity and community. Despite our individual dispositions, we survive and thrive because our intellectual, physical, emotional, spiritual, and relational beings are intricately interconnected and interdependent. Environment Community Gatherings offer opportunities for us to come together, connect and strengthen our community (WE) feeling. They help promote the essence of interaction, dialogue and sharing and bring into play values of compassion, empathy and respect. These gatherings are integral to our overall EDIJ ambitions and processes within the Faculty of Environment. Environment Community Gatherings are meant to support the coming together of the students, staff, faculty and other members of Environment into a collective and engage in discursive practices. Strong relationships, interactions and connections are key elements of building robust processes and cultures, and the community gatherings act as a conduit to realise those. They are meant to promote collaborations and a culture of working together as part of Environment's commitment to an 'ethos of caring'.

The Environment EDIJ office organised several community gatherings during the year and we are committed to organising one Community Gathering in each academic term going forward.

Major Annual Commemorations
Our Commitment to a More Inclusive Future
Faculty of Environment has committed to work Together for a Sustainable Future through the values we repose on an ethos of caring. Our ongoing work on the principles of Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Justice establishes a strong foundation to continue the important task of community building by welcoming and supporting the full participation of all of our community members. In that spirit, Environment commemorated several significant annual occasions - February Black History Month, June Pride Month and September National Day for Truth and Reconciliation - and joined the campus community in observing numerous events (please read below). In collaboration with the Environment Communications office and Indigenous Relations office, our plan is to include March (8) International Women's Day, April (22) Earth Day, June National Indigenous History Month and National Indigenous Peoples Day, and June (5) World Environment Day into this list of major annual commemorations.

February Black History Month
February is observed as the Black History Month, which offers an opportunity to celebrate the many achievements and contributions of Black Canadians and their communities who, throughout history, have done so much to make Canada a culturally diverse, compassionate, and prosperous country. It is also an opportunity to reflect on ways to eradicate systemic racism in our institution and beyond. Waterloo,

through the EDIJ offices across the campus, work to advance anti-racism and equity through evidence-based policies, practices and programs.

Black History Month provides us with a poignant reminder of the barriers Black people have faced and still face to inclusion and participation in Canadian society. This month also provides us with the opportunity to recognize and celebrate the significant contributions Black people have made to our communities and institutions. Educating ourselves is one of the ways we can begin to dismantle barriers and support greater inclusion in our Faculty and vision of a sustainable future.

June Pride Month
Each year in June, Pride Month celebrates the diversity, history, contributions, and achievements of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, while also raising awareness about further progress needed for equity and justice. There is significant acknowledgement that there is a lot more work to do to create a safe and just environment for 2SLGBTQIA+ students, staff and faculty, and the UW (and Environment) community are committed to that work. As per the official UW message from President Vivek Goel, while Pride Month is a time for celebration and joy, it is important that we stand in solidarity with 2SLGBTQIA+ students, faculty, staff and alumni throughout the year to ensure that all members of our community can access the same rights and privileges.

The Pride Month serves as a platform for advocacy and education. While progress has been made in recent years, 2SLGBTQIA+ people continue to face significant challenges, including discrimination, violence and a lack of legal protections, which disproportionately impact racialized trans and non-binary people. Pride events and activities provide opportunities for University community members to gather with one another, raise awareness, deepen relationships, share information and advocate for change.

September National Day for Truth and Reconciliation
Every year the September 30 marks the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. The day honours the children who never returned home and survivors of residential schools, as well as their families and communities. Public commemoration of the tragic and painful history and ongoing impacts of residential schools is a vital component of the reconciliation process. This is a solemn day to recognize and reflect on the legacy of residential schools in Canada, to re-familiarize ourselves with the 94 Calls to Action in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and to amplify the truth as we build towards reconciliation.

Environment EDIJ Commons
EDIJ Commons are visualised as both physical and metaphysical entities that situate us in the reality of things. They are meant to provide us with guidance, direction and creative energy to navigate through the dualism of material-nonmaterial, tangible-intangible, visible-invisible, real-abstract, spiritual-mechanical, and formal-informal dimensions of our being. EDIJ Commons reflect the ways in which we care, nurture and value equity, diversity, inclusion and justice. It is a place to fall back on or take recourse to when the urge to reflect, introspect, connect, and reconnect overpowers our imagination.

EDIJ Commons offer the opportunity to either be one's own-self or mingle with the 'WE' (i.e., the community) or engage as both. In overlapping situations of being happy, sad, confused, and dealing with negative or positive challenges, both professionally and personally, one has the option of retiring to these spaces in search of new meaning, positive energy and strength to respond and revitalise. So, these spaces are intensely meaningful in our day-to-day functioning. EDIJ Commons are multidimensional, inclusive of the diversity of ideas, orientations, beliefs, cultures, values, and practices, and are respectful of the complex realties of history, current and future.

Under the above initiative, Environment has designated the Environment Greens and the EV3 Living Wall as EDIJ Commons. Additionally, a number of empty wall spaces in the Environment buildings have

been designated as EDIJ Commons. Known as Creative Wall Commons, these spaces will be used by Environment Community members to engage in collective expressions related to EDIJ through artwork. More details about these EDIJ Commons are on their way.

Faculty of Environment EDIJ Day
The Faculty of Environment EDIJ Day helps to celebrate, commemorate and recognise our diversity and inclusivity by creating one strong Faculty level platform for cultures, communities, identities and histories to interact and intersect in a meaningful way, and to emphasise that we believe in an approach that brings people, ideas and our acts together to create meaningful pathways for engaging and collaborating that is context-specific, place-based and cross-cultural.

While the finer details are being sorted out, starting in Fall 2024, the Second Thursday of September every year will be celebrated as the Faculty of Environment EDIJ Day. More information will be shared as they become available.

Field Research in Ecology and Evolution Diversified (FREED)
With collaborative support from the Directors of SERS and GEM, and Environment AD EDIJ Office, Dr. Chantel Markle is leading an important effort to connect our faculty with an innovative program - Field Research in Ecology and Evolution Diversified (FREED) - that seeks to ensure those who identify as Black, Indigenous or people of colour have equal opportunities to thrive. FREED is a grassroots organization that increases access to field research, outdoor skills, naturalist experience, community building, and career mentorship for Indigenous, Black, and/or Racialized (BIPOC) undergraduate students. It provides undergraduate students with invaluable field research experience in ecology, evolution, and conservation biology that may be otherwise inaccessible due to the historical and ongoing marginalization of these communities in our institutions.

As a response to a call for interest, 21 Environment undergraduate students applied for the FREED field program this year. Using a structured process of reviewing applications, 5 undergraduate and 1 graduate students have been selected to join the program that starts in Summer of 2024. The high application rate is encouraging, and highlights the need this program fills by providing individuals a safe and meaningful experience in fieldwork through representation, mentorship, and decolonization while imbibing the values of equity, experiential learning, progression, and connection.

Environment Happiness-Wellbeing Initiative
The AD EDIJ office was heavily invested in the Faculty of Environment's current Happiness-Wellbeing Initiative. Happiness and wellbeing are highly elusive constructs but continue to be an eternal pursuit of individuals, communities and societies. Despite subtle differences, we often use happiness and wellbeing interchangeably. In the simplest terms, happiness is an internal experience of a positive 'state of mind', whereas wellbeing denotes a 'state of being well' that is characterised by satisfactory quality of life and the fulfilment of needs. In that sense, both happiness and wellbeing are akin to the notions of equity, diversity, inclusion and justice. What can we learn from how happiness and wellbeing intersect, what characteristics they mutually imbibe, and ways to combining and integrating both for the work we do focusing on community building, engagement, inclusion and cohesion?

The AD EDIJ has been working collaboratively in furthering the Happiness-Wellbeing work in Environment under the direct supervision of our Faculty Dean.

CONNECTING WITH PAN-UNIVERSITY INITIATIVES

The AD EDIJ office actively participated in the following initiatives and programs across the UW campus:

- **Faculty EDI-R and Social Justice Connection** is an initiative of Engineering, Math, Science and Environment EDI offices to meet regularly (once a month or as needed) to connect to discuss common areas of interest and concerns with respect to Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, Justice, Anti-Racism and Indigenization work at the Faculty level.

- **Monthly EDI-R (PAL) Meeting** focuses on the primary goal of to provide a platform for discussions about various initiatives occurring on campus so we can strive to align efforts to foster a united direction towards a more inclusive and equitable campus environment. Each month the agenda for discussion includes (1) <u>Campus initiatives</u>: A lead from an ASU and a faculty share information on initiatives from their units, and (2) <u>Roundtable discussion</u>: This is providing an opportunity for each member or EDI representative from the Faculties to provide a brief update on their respective unit or faculty that includes recent developments, ongoing projects, and discuss ways in which EDI-R can offer support.

- **Research Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (REDI) Council:** The AD EDIJ continued as a member of the REDI Council along with the ADR from Faculty of Environment. The Council's mandate is to build research equity and inclusion and promoting Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Indigenous Initiatives (EDII) across the research enterprise.

- **Program Area Lead (PALs - PHASE I and II)** focused on building an educational environment that allows every individual to reach their full potential as a collective responsibility at the University of Waterloo. The goal of the PALs program was to lead and facilitate culture change by embedding Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Anti-racism (EDI-R) into their curriculum, programs, and units. The program also supported and empowered new and existing Program Area Leads (PALs) to be advisors on the UW's Anti-Racism projects. The Office of EDI-R leads and drives competency, and capacity-building opportunities and works as a source of support for PAL members to achieve transformational change. *(Completed)*

- **EDI-R Community of Practice (CoP)** is an initiative of the EDI-RO that highlights the importance of continuing to have the support from others on-campus as one works on equity and anti-racism efforts within one's own department / faculty. It provides an opportunity to learn from what others are working on. The Community of Practice is a collective space to engage, interact and learn from each other. *(Completed)*

- **EDI-R Case Studies Project** was designed for PAL members to apply their learnings while building advisory skills to case studies, designed by EDI-RO. PAL members were assigned to case study groups to focus on Policy Review, Process Review, Competency Building, Communications, New Program Development – all from the perspective of EDI-R. Case studies were designed to simulate institutional priorities that PALs will be advising on, in a later phase. *(Completed)*