

Response to the KBRS 2021 Survey Report

Summary

As required under the Canada Research Chairs Program, Memorial developed a number of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) objectives for the Canada Research Chairs Program. These objectives were reported in an Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (CRCP EDI) Action Plan in 2019, each with corresponding actions and with indicators that allow us to track our progress towards achieving these goals. A copy of this plan is available from the link at: <https://www.mun.ca/research/explore/chairs/CRCP.php>

Memorial hired KBRS in 2021 to conduct a survey of the EDI-AR topics related to Memorial's CRCP program. The findings of the KBRS Survey 2021 indicate that "CRCs and Administrative staff members generally 'like to live here' and want this position and opportunity to work for them and for the University" (KBRS Survey, 2021). The KBRS Survey 2021 has a substantial overlap with the objectives and goals identified in the CRCP EDI Action Plan in 2019. This indicates a need to reinforce the implementation of the action plan and commitments from the involved parties. This also indicates a need to develop additional objectives and actions to address emerging and existing concerns. Hence, this response to the KBRS Survey 2021 will focus on the areas for improvements and gaps to be filled and will follow the structure of the KBRS survey report.

The suggestions in the current response illustrate the objectives and actions that have been captured in the CRCP EDI Action Plan, identify adjustments needed for the implementation of the action plan and suggest additional objectives to be either incorporated into the CRCP EDI Action Plan or tackled in other pan-university strategies or practices. To reinforce the CRCP EDI Action Plan, the Provost and Vice-President (Academic), Vice-President (Research) (VPR) and the Vice-Provost (EDI-AR) will lead the implementation and revisions in accordance with the requirements of the CRCP as well as in alignment with changes to policies and procedures at Memorial University and to ensure ongoing consistency with Memorial's Collective Agreement with its Faculty Association. Also, the Provost, VPR and the Vice-Provost (EDI-AR) will review the objectives and actions suggested in this report that are beyond the scope of the CRCP EDI Action Plan and lead initiatives to address them.

In addition, a designated CRCP EDI Officer's position has been secured using the CRCP EDI Stipend. The position reports to the Associate Director (Post-Award Services Division) in Research Initiatives and Services (RIS) and will work closely with the senior leaders on addressing the objectives, starting in September 2022. This offers the opportunity and the impetus for the EDI Officer to bring together equity workers from across the campuses in order to methodically advance the objectives of the CRCP EDI Action Plan as well as a number of strategic and carefully selected initiatives in a timely fashion.

1. Overarching themes

- 1.1 To improve the understanding of accountability when actions, words or other behaviours are viewed as sexist, racist, ableist or otherwise considered harassment, bullying or discriminatory

Response:

While disciplinary measures are available at Memorial, research suggests that the most effective intervention to address behaviours deemed sexist, racist, ableist, micro-aggression and unconscious biases is training and education (Came & Griffith 2018; Hassen et al, 2021). The CRCP EDI Action Plan highlights that training is anticipated to lead to changes in culture, attitudes, recruitment practices, and workplace accommodations under Objective 6: Improve Memorial's organizational culture; Objective 8: Improve hiring and selection practice; and Objective 9: Improve workplace accommodations.

Other suggestions to address racism, sexism, ableism, homophobia, unconscious biases and other micro-aggressions include:

- Develop an "academic academy" to provide appropriate training for academic administrators to recognize these types of actions and have the necessary skills to hold individuals accountable in order to foster an effective, engaging, open and inclusive environment.
- Modify and/or develop new institutional training programs, which include and promote interactive open, non-judgmental dialogue, allowing for the opportunity to learn from each other's unique perspectives to evaluate awareness, appreciation and understanding.
- Create informal networks for equity deserving groups and ally groups to have an 'anonymous' way to report issues of sexism, ableism, Anti-Black racism, racism, harassment and micro-aggression.
- Review Memorial's communications standards to ensure inclusive language which is sensitive to the diverse nature of Memorial's faculty, staff and students to reduce feelings of isolation.

1.2 To address the concern regarding teaching being prioritized over research

Response:

It is suggested that the performance expectations, including teaching vs research, as outlined in the offer letter and the Collective Agreement, shall be well communicated to the CRCs at the earliest stage. As outlined in other parts of this report, faculty, staff and administrative leaders should engage with the chairholders through different ways such as check-in, mentorship and networking events.

Other suggestions include:

- Create an institutional list of performance expectations for units to provide for CRCs and which are communicated to candidates, whereby research is prioritized, even when there are career interruptions, and supports are given to assist in the mandate of the Chairs.
- Conduct interim assessments of each chair after 6-12 months of the first year of appointment in order to identify any challenges being faced by the chair and to provide needed support.

1.3 To enhance the recognition of the values and expertise of CRCs

Response:

This topic is essentially related to the management of the CRC program, including the needed support for the CRCs and less about EDI. Networking events to help CRCs build connections with other colleagues as well as administrative are suggested:

- Establish "town halls" with the VPR in order to enable open, direct discussion with CRCs. One was held in April 2022 and future sessions will be scheduled three times annually.
- Organize open forums where CRCs can have topical discussions in a safe environment, in addition to online training courses.
- Develop and implement communications tactics regarding actions taken to support CRCs to date.

1.4 To enhance the support to CRCs regarding onboarding and workplace accommodations

Response:

This topic is essentially related to the management of the CRC program including the needed support for the CRCs which shall reflect EDI principles. Actions suggested are:

- Encourage a formalized mentorship program for all CRCs at Memorial with required touchpoints and responsibilities to enhance the onboarding process, ensuring consistency for CRC contracts across all units (i.e., teaching loads, research deliverables, resources, communications and supports) and assisting in the move to the local community.
- Increase the engagement of faculty and staff within units hosting or seeking to host CRCs.
- Collect data on CRCs' experience through the use of an automated questionnaire as well as follow-up meetings to identify gaps to be filled once every year.

2. Self-identification and disclosure

2.1 To enhance the confidence for and promote the benefits of self-identification and disclosure

Response:

As per Article 30.04 of the Collective Agreement between Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN) and Memorial University Faculty Association (MUNFA), an individual can be considered for equity target hiring only after self-identification and disclosure. Thus self-identification and disclosure are important to building a culture of inclusivity and equitable relations at the university. Positive changes in both practices and culture led by our senior university officials are needed. This is not merely to build and/or enhance the confidence in Memorial's procedures and processes associated with self-identification and disclosure among the four equity groups and underrepresented groups. It is to embrace diversity by the whole community. The community needs to recognize that EDI-AR is a shared responsibility and everyone shall be supported to thrive. The inaugural Vice-Provost (EDI-AR) is now central to the creation of a pan-university EDI-Anti-Racism strategic plan and will enable education about and implementation of relevant policies. Objective 6a from the CRCP EDI Action Plan calls for the Provost Office and Deans and Directors to (a) support and sponsor faculty and staff events, as well as educational sessions, devoted to enhancing EDI across campus; and (b) to support coordination and collaboration across portfolios. Further emphasis on training that focuses on open, critical dialogue is highlighted leading to desirable outcomes. Subsequent "check-ins" with CRCs periodically can help to identify loopholes and adjust/improve our practices.

Other proposed actions include:

- Review the current procedures and protocols of Memorial's self-identification process to ensure confidentiality.
- Identify and promote the benefits of self-identification including supports, accommodations and recognition of the time and impact of working on committees and mentoring others, including their value and consideration in reviews and during promotional evaluations. This involves those who self-identified in equity deserving groups as well as others that interact with equity deserving groups in this nature.

3. Recruitment

- 3.1 To continue ongoing targeted hiring efforts and support of a centralized funding pool to support these specific recruitment initiatives, and to mentor and recruit at the student level

Response:

Comments from the respondents of the KBRS Survey in 2021 are positive regarding the benefits of targeted hiring, which has been an area of focus for the CRCP EDI Action Plan (Objectives 1 and 2) as well as for Memorial's general recruitment strategy. Hiring targets have been established for faculty hires according to gaps in proportional representation by individuals who self-identify as one of the four designated groups (objective 2) and some targeted hiring has taken place to bridge those gaps. Within the CRC Program, approval has been secured from the Human Rights Commission to carry out targeted searches to eliminate gaps in Memorial's population-based CRCP EDI targets (objectives 1a, 1c) and these processes are underway. Additionally, the establishment of a centralized fund to support faculty recruitment (objective 1b) was universally acknowledged as beneficial. The funding support was provided for a period of time, but has not been sustained as the CRC overhead was reduced. It is proposed that a central fund is provided as outlined in the CRC EDI Action Plan and consideration will be given to returning to a higher level of the CRC overhead in order to fund this and other components.

Other suggestions include:

- Expand institutional funds/efforts for more expansive promotion and advertising (i.e., ensuring that job ads reach underrepresented groups) in recruiting members of equity deserving groups for CRCs, opening more tenure track positions and target hiring (e.g., target search for an Indigenous scholar, cluster hire for a scholar identifying as having a disability and Black scholars).
- Inviting early career scholars in equity deserving groups to visit Memorial and speak about their research in order to promote the university as an employment choice and develop institutional contacts. Academic administrators are encouraged to support such initiatives and leverage funding support such as the Conference Fund.

4. Selection

- 4.1 To improve Memorial's hiring practices by ensuring diversity among committee members, effective facilitation by chairs and equitable contract terms for new hires

Response:

The CRCP EDI Action Plan led to the implementation of unconscious bias training for all hiring committees. It is essential to ensure the hiring committees apprehend the employment equity objectives and the role of the Joint Equity Committee (JEC) and comply with the employment equity process. Further improvements can be made by ensuring that hiring committees are diverse and that the Committee Chairs have the skills and experience to facilitate the hiring process by implementing and enforcing best practices from unconscious bias training (as well as other training programs).

The CRCP EDI Action Plan also called for a reassessment of the CRC Financial Arrangements policy in order to address the observed inconsistency of allocation of resources across the disciplines, as well as among members of the four designated groups. The renewal of the CRC Financial Arrangements guidelines was finalized in June 2022.

Survey responses highlighted that there is variability in the resources and support being provided to new hires, particularly among CRC chairholders. Enforcing transparency during the recruitment, selection, and negotiation stages would help to better inform prospective hires for contract negotiations.

5. Onboarding, mentoring, support and integration

5.1 To support new hires and to ease their integration into Memorial's workforce and life in the community

Response:

Onboarding, mentorship and integration are absolutely beneficial and will be reinforced, following the Objectives 5 and 6 of the CRCP EDI Action Plan, as well as other actions suggested in this response report including engagement events with colleagues, administrative and academic leaders. Additionally, early (before 6-12 months) and periodic subsequent check-ins by administrative leadership to ensure CRC chairholders' needs are being met will help with integration and with creating a feeling of support. This constitutes an extension of Objective 6a of the CRCP EDI Action Plan, which calls for increased coordination and integration across portfolios.

Furthermore, onboarding and integration needs to be embedded in many aspects of our operations and organizational culture, in addition to the standard procedure such as orientation. The Provost, VPR and the Vice-Provost (EDI-AR) will lead initiatives to continuously reinforce EDI-AR policies and practices across Memorial campuses, including educating academic administrators.

Other proposed solutions to enhance onboarding and retention activities include:

- Designated personnel for new hires such as mentors, administrative staff and administrative leaders are highly encouraged to be proactive in engaging with new hires and providing needed support, to acclimatize new hires to Memorial and to the community.
- Administrative personnel shall act proactively to ensure that resources are provided as per the negotiated contract.

- Frequent check-ins of administrative leaders to see how new hires are settling into their new roles and help address any potential challenges they may be facing in their positions.
- Create a network of community mentors to support new hires.

6. Training

6.1 To offer and publicize training opportunities for Memorial employees and to make training programs more impactful and effective

Response:

Increased training and education opportunities were cited frequently (Objectives 6a, 8a, 9a) in the CRCP EDI Action Plan, and the resultant training initiatives (such as unconscious bias and accommodations information sessions) have been implemented.

The emerging and continuing EDI concerns regarding CRCP are calling the senior leadership to lead by example and to steer toward a campus culture which recognizes that EDI is a shared responsibility and that everyone shall be supported to thrive. Ongoing efforts with the university community members to nurture and encourage the culture of cross-racial and gender engagements in the workplace are needed.

Further recommendations include better promotion of training and education programs. Opportunities for in-person training sessions versus online training shall be made available as in-person sessions are perceived as important for attendees to gather and freely discuss the issues as part of their education.

7. Review and promotion

7.1 To recognize EDI-AR committees work as part of Promotion and Tenure (P&T) processes, and to ensure that the teaching and research expectations of the P&T process for CRC chairholders match the expectations that were communicated at the recruitment stage

Response:

The additional workload endured by members of equity-deserving groups as part of their participation in EDI committees and initiatives is referenced in Objective 5b of the CRCP EDI Action Plan, which called for a review of Memorial's P&T process to identify and remove barriers to progression for members of equity-deserving groups. Additionally, care must be taken to ensure that the P&T review process follows the expectations as outlined in the Collective Agreement and that these shall be communicated from the recruitment stage.

Similarly to the members of hiring committees, the P&T committee members shall be required to attend unconscious bias training to acquire an in-depth understanding of EDI and ensure it is recognized throughout the P&T process.

8. Career interruptions

8.1 There is a discrepancy between the support offered for teaching responsibilities versus research responsibilities following a career interruption

Response:

The response is calling on administrative leaders to recognize the challenges CRC chairholders may face following a career interruption and provide the needed support and workplace accommodation to help them navigate. One area of particular focus is the teaching and research responsibilities of the CRCs, with the goal of having these responsibilities consistent during the term of the CRCs.

References

- Came, H., & Griffith, D. (2018). Tackling racism as a “wicked” public health problem: enabling allies in anti-racism praxis. *Social Science & Medicine*, 199, 181-188.
- Collective Agreement between Memorial University of Newfoundland and Memorial University of Newfoundland Faculty Association (MUNFA). (2019, April 30). *Collective Agreement 2019*. Office of Faculty Relations, Memorial University. <https://www.mun.ca/facultyrelations/information-for-academic-employees/academic-staff-members-asms/collective-agreement-2019/>.
- Hassen, N., Lofters, A., Michael, S., Mall, A., Pinto, A. D., & Rackal, J. (2021). Implementing anti-racism interventions in healthcare settings: a scoping review. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 18(6), 2993.