

# University of Victoria

## Employment Equity Plan ♦ 2015 – 2020



### Introduction

The University of Victoria's commitment to equity and inclusion is embedded in the university's policies and its strategic plan, **A Vision for the Future – Building on Excellence**. The first objective expressed in the strategic plan is "to be a diverse, welcoming learning community, with a demonstrated commitment to equity and fairness." The UVic Employment Equity Plan 2015-2020 defines how we will accomplish this vision. It affirms that equity underlies and is a pre-condition for excellence and that excellence is furthered by a diversity of people, perspectives and experiences.

The University Equity and Human Rights Office has taken the leadership role in the Employment Equity Plan consultation and renewal process, with ongoing guidance and advice from the broadly-represented Employment Equity Advisory Group. That said, responsibility for employment equity is shared campus-wide and the UVic Employment Equity Plan 2015-2020 articulates this shared responsibility to uphold our equity principles and goals.

The UVic Employment Equity Plan 2015-2020 consists of three key sections. Section I describes the background of the plan, the university's equity goals and principles and introduces the next two sections. Section II provides the university's numerical hiring goals for increasing underrepresented members of four specified groups as determined by the Federal Contractors Program methodology. Section III depicts the plan in a Responsibilities and Accountabilities Chart. The chart (1) sets out the university's plan for ongoing and new initiatives (2) defines the roles and responsibilities of those accountable for equity across the campus, including the Executive, Deans, Faculty Equity Committees, the Equity and Human Rights Office, the Office of the Vice-President Academic, Human Resources, and the Advisory bodies, and (3) sets the timetable for action.

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### Section I: Descriptive Text

#### 1. Background

The UVic Employment Equity Plan 2015-2020 extends the work done in support of our previous 2003 employment equity plan. A series of consultations validated the three broad goals of the 2003 plan, while suggesting a shift in emphasis to focus on the benefits of equity for the university and all employees, as well as the responsibility we all share to participate in employment equity. The box to the right lists some of the broad benefits of equity.

This plan differs from previous plans in part due to changes that occurred to the Federal Contractors Program (FCP) in 2013, as a result of which the University of Victoria no longer falls within its scope. The FCP was a strong influencing factor on previous plans and on the direction employment equity has taken in Canada generally. The FCP focuses on four designated groups: women, Indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities and members of visible minorities. The consultations at UVic indicated the need to continue to monitor employment equity for these four specific groups and that there is much interest in broadening our focus to look at barriers that may exist for other groups and for people who may experience disadvantage in the workplace due to multiple aspects of their identities. The UVic Employment Equity Plan reflects the university's equity principles, satisfies the requirements for special program exemption (which allows us to engage in preferential and limited hiring) from the British Columbia Human Rights Tribunal (BCHRT) and at the same time maintains a state of readiness should UVic fall within the scope of the FCP again in the future.

The UVic Employment Equity Plan builds upon internal consultations and a recent employment systems review completed by external consultants addressing the recommendations from the review of employment practices and in light of ensuing consultations. It also addresses the results of workforce analysis, the successes of the previous plan and the areas where further work is required. This plan is informed by the University Human Rights Committee's memos to the president (2008-2013) and the results of President Cassels' Campus Conversations, and addresses recommendations from the Review of the Central Accommodation Fund and the Indigenous Staff Support Review. Feedback and suggestions from the Employment Equity Advisory Group (EMAG), other university equity-related plans, the results of FCP compliance reviews and input from various campus constituencies were also considered in the preparation of this plan and when setting the university's equity goals.

#### Examples of broad benefits of equity:

- Equitable hiring practices: open up competitions to a wider range and greater number of people, increasing opportunities for additional candidates and the likelihood of selecting the very best. Evaluating applicants in multiple ways expands opportunities for everyone to show their strengths.
- Removing barriers for specific groups often has unanticipated benefits for many other groups and individuals: examples are curb cuts for people who are wheelchair users benefitting people pushing strollers (and others). Reducing stress in workplaces and organizations can remove a barrier for people with mental illness but it has many benefits for everyone.
- Examining employment practices for barriers can shine a light on other difficulties and provide an opportunity to address them.
- Greater range of experiences and perspectives on teams increases creativity and quality of outcomes. Provides opportunities to learn about difference through working with people with a wide range of cultural backgrounds, gender identities, belief systems, sexual orientations, disabilities, experiences, etc.
- Equity increases retention rates: people want to work in environments that are respectful, inclusive and productive.
- Equity reduces the possibility that some people are prospering at the expense of others. It makes sure everyone has access to full range of opportunities.
- Equity creates a reputation for fairness.
- When everyone is treated fairly it motivates people to do their best and increases trust. It is important to respect the full range of difference (visible and invisible) to ensure the full benefits of diversity.
- Equity contributes to better connections between people and a greater sense of community. It promotes health and wellbeing.

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### 2. Equity Goals

Central to the UVic Employment Equity Plan is articulation of equity as positive for everyone and essential to both our success as a university and the realization of UVic's strategic plan goals. Equity is both a process and a goal and it is important that the means are consistent with the end. We need to ensure all our employment practices acknowledge and value difference and recognize that treating people differently is sometimes necessary to achieve equality.

The UVic Employment Equity Plan is designed to meet three broad equity goals:

1. **To promote and implement employment practices which advance equity and access for all.**
2. **To ensure the principles of fairness and equity are incorporated into all aspects of employment, including recruitment and hiring, training and promotion, and retention and accommodation in the workforce.**
3. **To improve the participation of members of designated groups in all jobs and at all levels where they are under-represented, and achieve and retain a workforce representative of the appropriate community.**

The plan is built on four pillars that will provide the basis for how UVic will achieve the above equity goals. The four pillars of the plan are (1) redefining employment equity; (2) accountability, transparency and clarification of roles; (3) consistency, and (4) implementation.

**Redefining employment equity:** will involve changing organizational culture and promoting understanding that equity benefits everyone and engages the principle of intersectionality. Redefining employment equity will be realized through sharing success stories and creating opportunities for people to participate in the articulation of what it means at UVic.

**Accountability, transparency, and clarification of roles:** building on recommendations of the employment systems review, the plan's Responsibilities and Accountabilities Chart clarifies who does what with respect to equity and identifies lead responsibilities. The Responsibilities and Accountabilities Chart will be communicated broadly and this transparency will build commitment and trust in the plan. Work in this area will involve defining good equity practices and increasing awareness and skills.

**Consistency:** means the level of adherence to practices across campus. Equity requires collaboration and cohesion, partnerships and building relationships. Shared responsibilities are defined in the Responsibilities and Accountabilities Chart. Work towards consistency will involve consistent application of policies and procedures with guidance provided by the Employment Equity Steering Committee and primary support from the Manager, Equity and Human Rights, a newly formed position with primary responsibility for oversight, coordination, and implementation of the plan. The Manager, Equity and Human Rights reports to the Director, Equity and Human Rights in the Equity and Human Rights Office.

**Implementation:** means that the equity plan is only useful if it is implemented and evaluated. The Responsibilities and Accountabilities Chart describes how the plan will be implemented and evaluated.

Fundamental to achieving the university equity goals are three equity principles discussed in the following section.

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### 3. Equity Principles

Foundational to employment equity at UVic are three sets of equity principles: equality, dignity, and inclusion; intersectionality (how employment is affected if you are a member of more than one marginalized group or have no membership in any marginalized group); and accessibility and accommodation.

#### Equality, dignity and inclusion

Equality, dignity and inclusion are practices or ways we can treat people and feelings we may have (or not) about how others treat us. Equality and dignity are also fundamental values in our strategic plan that “*will inform all of our actions and are a prerequisite to fulfilling the purpose of the university*”.<sup>1</sup> Inclusion is one of the ways these concepts can be put into practice. In large bureaucratic organizations, a concerted, consistent effort is required to incorporate these concepts into the way that everyone is treated. Equity, dignity and feelings of inclusion can be achieved more easily in a culture where people prevail and where there is a strong sense of community, an acknowledgement and a valuing of difference, and respect for all and fairness. They are abstract concepts and effort needs to be put into translating them into concrete practices. It helps to be aware of practices that leave us (and others) feeling equal and included and that preserve our dignity (as well as practices that do not achieve those ends).

Cultural safety is an example of a practice that can lead to an increase in awareness and respect for the dignity, histories and cultures of marginalized peoples. Cultural safety is important because it explicitly recognizes unequal power and involves a commitment to challenge unequal power relations at all levels of an organization. These practices underlie the creation of a more equitable workplace or service, particularly for those who are not from the dominant culture. Cultural safety has been implemented primarily to provide better health care to Indigenous Peoples by beginning to explore the relationships between colonial history and its impact on health and well-being; however, it can also be applied to other marginalized groups. For example, establishing cultural safety for people who identify as queer/trans\* (i.e., gay, lesbian, two-spirited, intersex, queer, trans\*) would require exploring the relationships between hetero-normativity, homophobia and the enforcement of a gender binary in the workplace. Cultural safety also recognizes intersectionality and the role we all play as bearers of culture and carriers of complex histories. Can a workplace be “culturally safe” if it is for one group but not another? It is rare that we belong and/or identify with only one group, so *intersectionality* is a crucial framework to understand and incorporate.

#### Intersectionality

We are all made up of many different dimensions, some are fixed, some can change, some are visible, others invisible. These dimensions can bestow unearned privilege or advantage or undeserved discrimination or disadvantage on individuals and groups. We have a tendency to look at these dimensions separately when in fact we all have many aspects of ourselves that often result in a complex mix of privilege and disadvantage. Intersectionality can also be thought of as overlapping, layering, converging and diverging. It is an essential concept when we think about difference and provides a place to begin to learn. For example, people with disabilities are often perceived through a lens that shows very little other than their disability. This results in a tendency to focus on what they can't do rather than on what they can do and to see people only as their disability rather than as a whole person (this is also true for other groups and individuals). Seeing someone with a disability through an intersectional lens encourages consideration of that individual's cultural background, their age, their gender identity, their educational background and many other dimensions. An intersectional perspective encourages recognition of differences and similarities which counteracts an 'us/them' mentality or the 'othering' of people who are different from us in some way. It is important for all of us to locate ourselves on a range of dimensions and maintain that location in our minds as we learn, work and live in an increasingly diverse society. Another reason to be mindful of intersectionality is that it is very easy to perpetuate one form of inequality while we are trying to address another.

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<sup>1</sup> A Vision for the Future – Building on Excellence, Planning and Priorities Committee, February 2012 (p.6)

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### Accessibility and Accommodation

People need to have a way in to universities to work and to learn. Many people particularly people with disabilities (but potentially others who speak English as an additional language or come from a culture very different than mainstream North American culture, those not from middle or upper class backgrounds, etc.) face barriers both physical and attitudinal. Becoming universally accessible would necessitate removing all barriers except those that are *bona fide* occupational or educational requirements. We are not there yet which makes accommodation necessary. Accommodation either removes or provides a way to bypass those barriers. Once someone is admitted or hired they may encounter other barriers. So the need for accessibility or accommodation may continue. A mainstream organization cannot attempt to truly diversify without being open to major change. People who contribute to diversity at UVic cannot be welcomed and expected to accept the way things are when that way was set up for people very different from them. Everyone has the right to inclusion to feel a sense of belonging and to have their contribution valued. It is everyone's responsibility to work harder to understand what inclusion looks and sounds like, and how it feels, as well as to bear in mind that this may not be the same for everyone. True accessibility is compromised without inclusion.

We all have the right to equality, dignity and inclusion and we all share in the responsibility to promote and practice accessibility, inclusion and accommodation.

### 4. Numerical Hiring Goals

This plan involves going beyond a focus on “numbers” to improving our employment practices. That said, numbers are evidence of a successful employment equity plan and it is possible that we may again fall within the scope of the Federal Contractors Program. We therefore need to continue to set goals and monitor the representation of the four designated groups (women, Indigenous Peoples, members of visible minorities and people with disabilities) in the UVic workforce.

The numerical hiring goals in Section II of this plan are the three-year numerical goals for increasing the institutional employee representation of underrepresented members of specified groups, calculated in accordance with the Federal Contractors Program's methodology. University-wide numerical goals were determined using an online Goal Setting Tool provided by the Federal Contractors Program that sets goals for four designated groups experiencing discrimination in the Canadian Labour Market (women, Aboriginal peoples, persons with disabilities, and members of visible minorities). The assumptions used to determine UVic's institutional goals included (1) low turnover, and (2) no growth in overall employee numbers. During consultations, it was decided that the institutional goals should be broken down by Vice-President portfolios to facilitate implementation. The division across each portfolio was determined as follows: the ratio of employees in each job classification for each portfolio was first determined and then that ratio value was applied to the total institutional numerical goals by job class to provide us with portfolio-specific numbers that, if attained, would meet our institutional goals.<sup>2</sup>

The numerical goals, as determined via the FCP Goal Setting Tool provide a baseline for the university's hiring over the three-year period. The numerical goals provide a benchmark that we will work toward. It is our intention to achieve these baseline goals for the four designated groups. The university also intends to continue to hire members of other marginalized groups. As discussed, UVic's equity principles extend the plan beyond the four designated groups to include all marginalized peoples. Our objective is therefore to improve the participation of members of all marginalized groups in all jobs and at all levels where they are under-represented. The Responsibilities and Accountabilities Chart is our roadmap to improved participation of all groups and incorporates our equity principles into all aspects of employment at UVic.

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<sup>2</sup> Fractions were rounded up or down as appropriate to maintain figures that summed to the total institutional goals.