Dimensions
Pilot Program

The Creative School

Dimensions Faculty Lead (previously Chair)
The Creative School
Annual Report

2022- 2023

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Purpose

The Dimensions Pilot Program is a federal initiative created to assess and address the systemic barriers in post-secondary scholarly, research and creative (SRC) environments, particularly those experienced by members of underrepresented or marginalized groups, including (but not limited to) women, Indigenous Peoples, persons with disabilities, members of racialized groups, and members of 2SLGBTQ+ communities. It is a national initiative of the three granting agencies in collaboration with Universities Canada and Colleges and Institutes Canada. It is a 2-year program involving 18 post-secondary institutions across Canada, including Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU) (formerly known as Ryerson).

The Dimensions Pilot Program at Toronto Metropolitan University connects and builds on Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Accessibility (EDIA) work already undertaken at Toronto Metropolitan University by the Office of the Vice-President, Equity and Community Inclusion (OVPECI) and the Office of the Vice-President, Research and Innovation (OVPRI). The design of the Pilot at TMU was based on: (1) the reality that our SRC cultures and systems differ extensively across the university, roughly corresponding to the areas covered by each faculty; and (2) faculty members and students within each faculty are best positioned to understand, identify and address the EDIA-based issues of their SRC areas.

The Dimensions Pilot Program at TMU consists of small teams in each of TMU's faculties, as well as the Yeates School of Graduate Studies and TMU Libraries. These teams conduct research and gather data about the systemic barriers causing inequities and exclusions in their SRC cultures and practices. Each Dimensions Faculty Lead (previously Chair) (DFL) automatically is a part of the university-wide Self-Assessment Team (SAT), in addition to graduate and undergraduate student representatives drawn from the faculty teams. The SAT used the reports and data from each faculty team to put together an application for Dimension recognition from the head office in Ottawa, which was successfully granted a **Construction recognition** for building an EDIA culture in TMU.

Professor Art Blake, the Director of the Pilot at TMU (term ends in April 2023), organizes and works with all members of each team and keeps the OVPECI updated on the teams' progress.

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All Dimensions Pilot institutions and Pilot leaders are connected to counterparts in the UK who have been involved with AdvanceHE's Athena-SWAN program, on which Dimensions is loosely modelled.

The Dimension Faculty Committee at The Creative School is chaired by Dr. Reem El Asaleh, Dimensions Faculty Lead (DFL) and Associate Professor from the School of Graphic Communications Management. The 2022/2023 graduate student team consists of Anushay Shiekh and Jared Lorenzs.

Over the past two years, the team utilized various quantitative and qualitative research methods to gather information about barriers to The Creative School's SRC activities, as they relate to EDIA. In addition, the DFL participated in several virtual faculty events discussing EDIA practice in research and teaching. Finally, information was gathered from faculty via one-on-one interviews and small focus groups.

This report summarizes key findings from all DFL activities in the 2022/2023 academic year. The Creative School community is encouraged to engage with the DFL team in raising awareness and providing ideas on how to make the SRC ecosystem more diverse and inclusive.

Overall activities to date

- Facilitated workshops for faculty and graduate students on best practices for integrating Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (EDIA) into their research practice.
- Participated in several faculty-wide advisory committees, to provide advice and support related to all aspects of research and creative activities within The Creative School:
  - *The Creative School's SRC Advisory Committee*
  - *Special Advisory Committee for The Creative School 360 Revision*
  - *Graduate Research Methods focus group (The Creative School)*
- Engaged in an SRC-focused Academic Chairs Policy Steering committee at the Office of the Vice-President, Research & Innovation (OVPRI), offering advice and support for a new university initiative.
- Continued meeting with various stakeholders in the Dean's office, sharing valuable feedback on EDIA barriers relevant to The Creative School community.
- Initiated a Community of Practice (CoP) team within The Creative School, fostering collaboration and knowledge sharing on EDIA-related matters.
- Collaborated with Dr. Afsoon Soudi from RTA School of Media to apply for an internal Equitable, Inclusive, and Community (ECI) grant. The grant aims to develop a comprehensive set of ECI learning activity materials for a research method and a capstone course, which will complement the EDIA-based research method checklist previously developed by The Creative School's DFL team. (Grant was awarded in June 2023)
- Engaged in ongoing discussions and initiatives to promote EDIA awareness and implementation within The Creative School and its broader academic community.
- Conducting a literature review on the current practice of research assessment methods dedicated to creative and practice-based scholars (inprogress).

Community of Practice

Communities of practice are dynamic groups of individuals who share a profound passion for a particular skill or area of expertise, actively engaging with one another to enhance their proficiency continuously (Wenger, 2006). These communities foster regular interaction among their members, facilitating an environment for collective learning and improvement. In these vibrant circles, memberss participate in peer education by exchanging valuable ideas and personal experiences, collaborating to solve complex problems, and organizing guest speakers or presentations from diverse TMU offices, units, or departments. Moreover, they unite forces in joint initiatives and cultivate a sense of connection through social gatherings.

Establishing a Community of Practice (CoP) team under the Dimensions Program at TMU serves a vital purpose: to build a strong and sustainable Dimensions Program at TMU. Each faculty level within TMU becomes host to a CoP comprised of colleagues genuinely interested in supporting the DFL's work and enthusiastically committed to offering their support. These dedicated individuals contribute to the growth and effectiveness of the Dimensions Program by providing valuable advice, deepening their own comprehension of EDIA, and attentively listening to the experiences and research outcomes of fellow CoP members or their respective research subjects. By cultivating this collaborative environment, the CoP team fosters knowledge sharing, enabling a sustainable Dimensions Program at TMU.

Members of the 2023 Dimension's CoP at The Creative Schools are:
- **Afsoon Soudi**, Assistant Professor, Media Production, RTA School of Media
- **David Gauntlett**, Professor, Creative Industries, Canada Research Chair in Creative Innovation and Leadership
- **Ehsan Behzadfar**, Assistant Professor, Graphic Communications Management
- **Gavin Adamson**, Associate Professor, Undergraduate Program Director, School of Journalism
- **Jason Lisi**, Associate Professor, Graphic Communications Management, Executive Director, Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching
- **Katty Alhayek**, Assistant Professor, Professional Communication
- **Lorella Di Cintio,** Associate Professor, School of Interior Design

- **Michael Doxtater**, Associate Professor, Creative Industries, Director, Saagajiwe
- **Osmud Rahman**, Associate Professor, Fashion
- **Pavlo Bosyy**, Associate Professor, Performance, Co-Director of Production + Design
- **Sibo Chen**, Assistant Professor, Professional Communication, Graduate Program Director
- **Sydney Tran**, Manager, Scholarly, Research & Creative Activities

Current activities:

- Conduct monthly meetings to discuss current EDIA issues, fostering open dialogue and collaboration among stakeholders.
- Gavin Adamson, a member of the Community of Practice (CoP), provided a summary presentation on *"Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) considerations in the training plan in Alliance Grants applications"* from a recent NSERC's Alliance Grants session.
- Collaborated with the CoP members to develop a new graduate student outreach survey, incorporating focused questions on available supports and resources related to EDIA. The survey aims to gather insightful information for the next section of the report.
- Based on the survey results and recommendations from the CoP, initiated the development of a Brown Bag event series. This series provides a platform for faculty and graduate students from diverse disciplines to share experiences, exchange knowledge, and foster interdisciplinary research collaborations. The project is led by Prof. Afsoon Soudi and Prof. Katy Alhayek, in collaboration with The Catalyst, and the events are scheduled to take place in the Fall of 2023.
- Engaged in ongoing discussions to develop a comprehensive set of support resources tailored specifically for new graduate students, with a focus on addressing the needs of international students.
- Continuously exploring strategies and initiatives to promote a more inclusive and equitable environment within The Creative School, with a particular emphasis on supporting the needs of graduate students from diverse backgrounds.

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Graduate Students Outreach

In order to work towards the goal of creating a sustainable research culture committed to Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (EDIA), a survey was conducted to get feedback from graduate students at The Creative School. The survey was conducted in March 2023 by the Community of Practice (CoP) team at The Creative School and administered by Dr. El Asaleh, DFL for The Creative School. Students were asked what aspects of their identity made it easier or harder for them to progress through their studies and why they think that is, to rank support and resources related to research activities, and what they feel their programs are missing related to EDIA.

Survey outcomes:

- The survey received 20 responses, 18 Masters students and 2 PhD students.
- Individuals reported receiving different treatment based on several factors including race, international versus domestic students, ability, program of study, health status, and educational background.
- Most students (13 = 65%) rated support and resources related to their research activities (EDIA research practice and engagement) a 3 out of 5.
- Most students (11 = 55%) rated support and resources related to their research environment (safe and inclusive space for interaction) a 4 out of 5.
- Students were split in their rating of support and resources related to research training (research tools, course content, seminars, workshops) with an equal number of students (6 = 30%) rating it 2 out of 5 and 4 out of 5. 4 (20%) students rated it 3 out of 5 and 2 students (10%) each rated it 1 and 5 out of 5.
- Students were also split in their rating of support and resources related to inclusive research opportunities (collaborations, funding, awards, scholarships) with an equal number of students (6 = 30%) rating it 2 out of 5 and 3 out of 5. 5 students (25%) rated it 4 out of 5, 2 students (10%) rated it 1 out of 5, and 1 student (5%) rated it 5 out of 5.
- Students felt that diversity was missing in their faculty members, courses (and course content), and library resources. Multiple students noted a lack of information about and support to obtain funding opportunities for research and a general lack of funding for non-visible minorities (invisible disabilities, religious minorities) and international students.

CoP suggestions to move forward

- Improving the transmission and availability of information (resources) available to students should be a priority. Students should be made aware of funding opportunities in advance and supported through application processes.

- Graduate students should have one association representing the Creative School where students can get together and share experiences.

- It is critical that the Faculty create a more welcoming environment through programming for international students, many of whom have reported feeling like they are recruited for higher tuition and left without support available to domestic students.

- The Creative School should offer virtual workshops in the summer, especially for international students who may be delayed in joining the program due to domestic or visa issues. Topics can include technical writing, grant support, life in Canada, etc.

- Create a mentorship program for international students to be mentored by faculty from international backgrounds for a greater understanding of shared experiences.

Brown Bag event

Based on the survey results and recommendations from the CoP, the DFL initiated the development of a Brown Bag event series. This event intends to bring researchers from across The Creative School to share their research with each other in The Catalyst (RCC223). This is a space for conversation and lunch open to folks working at all stages of SRC, including undergraduate, graduate, and faculty researchers. The event will be held for an hour bi-monthly and will include 3-4 lightning presentations, a discussion, lunch, and networking. Calls for abstracts will be shared in early July and research with focuses on EDIA, decolonization, gender, and race are strongly encouraged.

Welcome workshop package for graduate students (ongoing discussion)

Many graduate students, particularly international students, reported finding it difficult to find support and resources available to them especially due to the short nature of many one-year programs. To address this, the CoP is proposing a welcome workshop package for graduate students in the form of short videos and hybrid workshops prior to the start of their programs. Workshop and video topics may include: what to expect, creating a portfolio, writing

grants/scholarships/external awards (practice-based research), time and project management, industry networking sessions, knowledge mobilization, navigating REB with practice-based research, practice anti-oppression in research, consolidating available resources, specific resources for international students, understanding EDIA terminology, learning basic sign language, and more. The goal is to apply for the Learning and Teaching Grant in Winter 2024 to fund this project.

Overall Research Limitations

The overall concern around participation and engagement continued this year, highlighting a persistent issue within The Creative School. This concern extends not only to the survey that was sent out in March 2023 but also to the low turnout for the online workshops, both among faculty and graduate students. These figures do not accurately represent the majority of The Creative School, which would affect progress in creating an inclusive and engaged community. However, despite the limited participation in the workshops, the attendees displayed remarkable enthusiasm and engagement with the presented topics.

Addressing EDIA is a sensitive and complex matter and often a difficult topic to broach. Several factors contribute to participants' hesitation in the surveys and workshops, including concerns about job security, uncertainty surrounding their own positions amidst significant changes, the influence of faculty-student supervision relationships, and the perception that participation will yield no significant changes. Additionally, digital fatigue and other obstacles posed by the virtual environment further hinder full participation in these activities. By encouraging more in-person activities, we can improve engagement and overcome these challenges.

TMU has already established itself as a national leader in EDIA initiatives. Through active participation in Dimensions, we have the opportunity to enhance TMU's reputation further by spearheading Canada's development of equitable, diverse, inclusive, and accessible SRC cultures. By fostering a community where everyone actively contributes, we can work towards creating an environment that embraces and celebrates diversity while ensuring equal opportunities for all.

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Suggested action plans

Faculty

- Establish comprehensive mentorship programs, particularly tailored to faculty transitioning from industry backgrounds, to provide guidance, support, and resources for their successful integration into academia.

- Foster interdisciplinary networking opportunities specifically designed for faculty within SRC, encouraging collaboration and knowledge exchange across diverse fields of study.

- Implement dependent support initiatives that assist faculty members engaged in research or travelling for events, recognizing and addressing the unique challenges they may face due to familial responsibilities.

- Develop a well-defined and transparent research impact assessment plan, specifically addressing the evaluation of Practice-based research, to ensure clarity, consistency, and fairness in assessing its significance and contributions.

- Offer regular EDIA workshops and training sessions for faculty, with a focus on leadership development, research design, grant writing (both internal and external funding opportunities), and the hiring and training of Highly Qualified Personnel (HQP).

- Clearly identify and name microaggressive behaviours as discriminatory, emphasizing their harmful impact. Incorporate this concept into awareness training sessions and include it in department or faculty policies and faculty codes of conduct to establish a strong stance against discrimination.

- Provide comprehensive training for faculty members on understanding, recognizing, and responding to microaggressions. This training should equip them with the knowledge and skills to intervene when witnessing microaggressions happening to others and provide guidance on how to respond effectively if they personally experience such incidents.

Graduate

- Incorporate curriculum changes that prioritize diversity, ensuring that course materials, perspectives, and resources reflect a wide range of experiences and perspectives, fostering inclusivity and understanding among graduate students.
- Introduce a diverse and comprehensive examination process that embraces different backgrounds, methodologies, and approaches, encouraging a broader understanding and assessment of students' knowledge and skills.
- Establish additional graduate award opportunities specifically targeted towards marginalized groups, recognizing and supporting their achievements and contributions within the academic community.
- Facilitate open discussions on supervisor/faculty relationships, providing platforms for graduate students to express concerns, seek guidance, and ensure healthy and effective working dynamics.
- Organize workshops dedicated to integrating EDIA considerations into SRC participation and grant writing, equipping graduate students with the knowledge and skills to incorporate principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion in their research and academic endeavours.
- Extend the training on microaggressions to students by integrating it into research group/lab codes of conduct, ensuring that department-level training is cascaded down to all levels of academic engagement. Additionally, organize workshops for students to educate them on how to recognize and respond to microaggressions effectively. Support student groups on campus in launching a general awareness campaign to further amplify the importance of addressing microaggressions. *(same action item for undergraduate students)*
- Implement hands-on, interactive bystander training that equips participants with practical tools to intervene in situations involving microaggressions. Consider incorporating live actor simulations to provide attendees with opportunities to practice and enhance their skills in responding to microaggressions. Take inspiration from the Bystander and Allyship training conducted by the previous DFC for FoS in September 2022 as a model for developing similar sessions for all individuals involved in SRC activities. *(same action item for undergraduate students)*

Undergraduate

- Provide increased support for open and safe conversations, creating spaces where students can freely express concerns, share experiences, and engage in constructive dialogue to address issues related to equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility.

- Implement curriculum changes that embrace diversity, incorporating diverse perspectives, histories, and cultures into course materials, fostering a more inclusive and representative learning environment for undergraduate students.

- Implement and enforce measures to establish a safe and inclusive classroom environment, ensuring that students feel respected, valued, and empowered to participate actively and comfortably in academic discussions and activities.