

Item #12: Report from the Vice-President, Equity Issues

i. Context of Equity Work

The 2009 - 2010 Equity Issues (EI) Portfolio activities revolved around three notable events:

- the 60th anniversary of the United Nations Universal Declaration on Human Rights (December 2008)
- the report of the 25th anniversary of the Royal Commission on Equality in Employment under its sole Commissioner Rosalie Silberman Abella (October 2009)
- the 40th anniversary of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women, the first RC to be led by a woman, Florence Bayard Bird (December 2010).

More substantively, the EI events were undertaken in the context of a shift in governing rationalities from equity to diversity. This shift has generated a lot of *diversity-talk* but has serious implications for equity practice and *doing* equity work. The shift in philosophy produced on the one hand equity as social *justice* and, on the other hand, diversity as *management*. The former, equity, was lodged in a robust conception of social citizenship in the welfare state, and was shaped by the civil rights, women's and social justice movements and generated a host of human rights, anti-discrimination and equality-seeking legislation, institutions and mechanisms to ameliorate conditions of social collectivities like "Aboriginal people," "people of colour," "persons with disabilities," and "women."

The contemporary shift to diversity management appears in the context of neoliberalism and the corporate restructuring of university into an audit academy, one that values market (not social) citizenship and defines values based on narrowly-construed and measurable productivity indicators of individuals. Neoliberal rationalities may tolerate diversity but only to the extent an instrumental 'business case' can be made that such diversities can be managed, branded and made profitable within niche markets (e.g. some internationalization efforts to recruit faculty and students from abroad).

Within this context, the EI Portfolio coordinated a major plenary at the Federation's Annual General Meeting and a series of historic panels at Congress 2009.

It also began work on two longer term initiatives:

- development of an equity infrastructure drawing on the knowledge, talents and skills of those within member associations who work on equity
- to begin mapping a Federation-led initiative on mentoring

ii. Revitalization of the Equity Portfolio and EISC

The Equity Issues Portfolio continues to revitalize. In 2008 the Equity Issues Steering Committee was reconstituted in order to reflect and represent a more heterogeneous membership, with the anticipation that this heterogeneity would be informed by the participants' research, teaching and service activities across the social science and humanities.

A second important revitalization occurred with the merging of women's and equity issues into one committee that takes a more holistic approach to equity. With the indispensable administrative assistance of Lyne Demmery, the newly revitalized Employment Equity Steering Committee (EISC) began its two-year term in November 2008. It includes six outstanding scholars from across Canada and spanning various disciplines:

- Professor Adelle Blackett, Associate Professor and William Dawson Scholar
Faculty of Law, McGill University, Montreal

- Dr. James Deaville, Associate Professor and Supervisor of Graduate Studies, Department of Music, Carleton University, Ottawa
- Dr. Joy Mighty, Professor, School of Business, and Director for Teaching and Learning, Queen's University, Kingston, and President, Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (STLHE)
- Dr. Ashok Mathur, Associate Professor and Canada Research Chair in Cultural and Artistic Inquiry at Thompson Rivers University, Kamloops, BC
- Dr. Dolana Mogadime, Associate Professor, Faculty of Education, Brock University and President, Canadian Association for the Study of Women and Education
- Dr. Christine O'Bonsawin, Assistant Professor, Department of History, and Director, Indigenous Studies Minor Program, University of Victoria, Victoria

iii. Equity Issues Portfolio Activities

a) Equity Issues @ Annual General Meeting

The AGM provides an important site for equity work within the Federation, as it is attended by leaders within member associations and universities. At the March 2009 AGM the VP Equity organized and moderated a workshop entitled, "New Faces of Academia," which was well-attended by delegates. The three panelists included: University of Ottawa Law professor Joanne St. Lewis who spoke on the topic, "Life in Extremus: Being Black in the Canadian Academy." Dr. Dolana Mogadime, associate professor of Education at Brock University and a member of the EISC offered a "Critical autobiographical reflection on equity in the Academy," and York University Anthropology lecturer Carol Tator spoke on "The Weight of Whiteness in Canadian Universities."

b) Equity Issues @ Congress

Congress provides one of the central sites for public awareness and engagement with issues related to employment equity in the social sciences and humanities specifically and Canadian universities and societies more generally. Over the past three years, the current VP Equity worked closely with the previous VP Equity, Dr. Donna Palmateer Pennee to raise the profile of equity at Congress. This collaboration began with the jointly organized "Glass Ceilings and Trapped Doors" at the 2007 Saskatoon Congress. As well, then VP Equity Dr. Pennee, in collaboration with the current VP Equity Dr. Smith and independent scholar Dr. Maria Wallis organized five panels on "Anti-Racism and Equity" and a keynote by philosopher Dr. Falguni A. Sheth at the 2008 Congress at University of British Columbia in Vancouver. These panels were well-attended, with numbers between 50 to over 100 participants, including many new scholars.

At Congress 2009 at Carleton University this important work continued. The VP Equity organized four panels aimed at providing a retrospective on the 'Abella Commission', the 25th anniversary of the Royal Commission on Equality in Employment.¹ The panels were concerned with a central question: Twenty-five years after the Commission's historic report, what is the status of employment equity in the Canadian academy? In 1984, then Judge Rosalie Silberman Abella, the sole Commissioner of the Commission on Equality and Employment, called for 'employment equity', for mandatory policies, programs and strategies aimed at ameliorating systemic discrimination experienced by four 'designated groups' in Canada – Aboriginal peoples, visible minorities, persons with disabilities and women. The Abella Report stated, "the obstacles in their [the designated groups] way are so formidable and self-perpetuating that they cannot be overcome without intervention. It is both intolerable and insensitive if we simply wait and hope that the barriers will disappear over time. *Equality in employment will not happen unless we make it happen* (emphasis

¹ See, "General Summary: Equality in Employment, A Royal Commission Report": <https://pi.library.yorku.ca/ojs/index.php/cws/article/viewFile/12792/11875>

added). (254)” Abella called for employment equity programs because, she said, “It is difficult to see how ... an approach that does not include an effective enforcement component, will substantially improve employment opportunities for [the designated groups]. Given the seriousness and apparent intractability of employment discrimination, it is unrealistic and somewhat disingenuous to rely on there being sufficient public goodwill to fuel a voluntary program.” (197).

At Congress, the week-long historic retrospective on the Abella Commission explored the issues, achievements and ongoing challenges to achieving equity in Canadian universities. Seventeen renowned scholars, public intellectuals and activists from over a dozen Canadian universities and nongovernmental organizations located in six provinces offered their insights on equity issues. The speakers included May Al-Fartousi (Brock), Isabella C. Bakker (York); Marjorie Griffith Cohen (Simon Fraser University); Shelagh Day (Director of Poverty and Human Rights Centre, Vancouver); James Deaville (Carleton); Joyce Green (Regina); Carl James (York); Rauna Kuokkanen (Toronto); Darren Lund (Calgary); Ashok Mathur (Thompson Rivers); Judy Rebick (Ryerson); Dolana Mogadime (Brock); Aruna Srivastava (Calgary); Joanne St. Lewis (Ottawa); Anthony Stewart (Dalhousie); and Makere Stewart-Harawira (Alberta).

The EI Portfolio is grateful to the social science and humanities Deans and the Vice-Presidents of the following universities for their financial support for their academics who spoke on the EI panels: Universities of Alberta, Brock, Calgary, Dalhousie, Regina, Thompson Rivers, and York.

A special thank you is owed to the Federation’s Director of Programs, Alison Faulknor and to Dr. Ellen MacIsaac who helped to facilitate the posting of the abstracts and bios, the audio-visual needs of speakers and the well-attended EI reception.

The panels began on Sunday, 24 May with ‘A More Equitable and Inclusive Academy? The Rhetoric and the Reality’; and on consecutive days was followed by ‘A Colour-Blind Academy?: The Status and Experiences of ‘Visible’/‘Nonwhite’ Minority Scholars’; and ‘Decolonizing the Academy?: The Status of Indigenous Peoples and Scholarship’. The final panel was entitled, ‘25 Years After: A Retrospective on the Abella Commission and Employment Equity’ and included an impressive slate of speakers: Trudeau Fellow Isabella C. Bakker who had served as a researcher for the Commission; Shelagh Day who was a founder of the Court Challengers Program and a former President of the Legal Education and Action Fund; Joanne St. Lewis who also had served as a President of LEAF; and Judy Rebick who had served as President of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women. The sessions were advertised on various listservs and web sites, including rabble.ca, The Walrus, among others. Attendance for each panel ranged from between 40 to over 100 participants. On 28 May, the Hon. Rosalie Silberman Abella delivered a Research in Society Lecture, ‘Human Rights and History’s Judgment’, which drew an overflow crowd of several hundred; it was followed by the EI Portfolio reception during which Madame Justice Abella continued to engage with those in attendance.

In 2009, with the creative leadership and support of the Federation’s Communications Director Pierre Normand and the Communications team, the Federation introduced a range of exciting and leading-edge multimedia formats to expand the ways in which participants experience Congress. For the first time, Equity Issues panels were recorded and are available online for public awareness or to be used in classrooms for teaching and learning. The videos are available on the Federation’s site at <http://www.fedcan.ca/content/en/312/equity.html> or via the ‘Experience Congress’ link: www.fedcan.ca/experience.

As part of the multimedia effort to extend the experience of Congress, the VP Equity also contributed one blog entry on ‘Equity Issues and History’s Judgment’, which discussed issues of justice from Judge Rosalie Abella and the Royal Commission on Equality in Employment to Justice Harry LaForme, the Commissioner of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission for Indian Residential

Schools in Canada appeared on The Walrus website on 26 May 2009:
<http://www.walrusmagazine.com/blogs/2009/05/26/blogs-from-congress-may-26-28/>.

c) Planning for Congress 2010 @ Concordia

The EI Portfolio is prioritizing the 40th anniversary of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in its 2010 programming. It has confirmed two leading speakers, Ms Donna Brazile, the veteran political insider and first African American to lead a major presidential campaign (Al Gore). Also confirmed is Dr. Sunera Thobani, the first woman of colour in Canada to serve as president of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women. Other invitations are pending and a series of panels is planned.

d) The Power of Possibilities: Proposed Mentorship Program

With the productive collaboration of the Director of Programs, Alison Faulknor, and the support of the Executive, the EI Portfolio is exploring the possibility of launching a major initiative on mentoring. The EI Portfolio of the Federation is exploring funding possibilities for a workshop entitled "The Power of Possibilities," to be held in the spring of 2010. This workshop will pave the way for the Federation to take the lead on future mentoring activities, to discern the needs, the potential scope of a mentorship program, and the steps required to take action. This will represent an important first step in opening up a critical national discussion about the value of mentoring for faculty and graduate students among equity-seeking groups within the academy and to explore what role the Federation can play in facilitating mentorship programs in the social sciences and humanities. We believe mentors can help members of groups traditionally underrepresented in the academy such as Aboriginals, visible minorities and the disabled to move more quickly through the ranks of the academy and other organizations. Mentors serve as a necessary resource in professional development, act as trusted advisors and counselors for new faculty as they establish career goals, and help them retain their creativity, productivity and overall work-life balance.

Canadian Universities increasingly recruit talented faculty and students from across the globe. At the same time they strive to fulfill their obligations under the Federal Contractors' Program to enhance diversity by improving the representation of women, Aboriginal peoples, visible minorities and persons with disabilities. What role can mentoring play to ensure that every faculty and student has an equal opportunity to succeed in an inclusive learning environment? As a representative of scholars, students and practitioners across the country, what leadership role can the Federation play in facilitating effective mentoring programs? These are the kinds of questions the proposed *Power of Possibilities* workshop will address by bringing together leading experts on mentoring, scholars representing diverse disciplines in the humanities and social sciences and representatives from community organizations.

The workshop will explore three themes:

- the benefits of mentoring for the recruitment, retention and advancement of female faculty and graduate students from diverse backgrounds and to enhance their capacities to navigate complex educational and institutional cultures, and to excel in the core areas of research, teaching and service
- the opportunities and challenges of establishing effective mentoring programs across universities, colleges and similar large-scale institutions
- the opportunities for partnership with established community organizations and government to facilitate the entrance of girls from diverse backgrounds into the academy as well as opportunities for community service learning and career co-opt placements.

e) Equity Consultations and Presentations

The VP Equity, Dr. Malinda S. Smith, participated in a number of equity forums across Canada:

- She was an invited speaker and workshop facilitator at the March 2009 CAUT conference, 'Recasting Equity', held in Toronto.
- In October 2009 she was invited to contribute to the University of Alberta's General Faculty Council (GFC 44) review of its Sexual Harassment and Discrimination policies, a review which is being led by former Federation President Dr Patricia Clements.
- In October 2009 Dr Smith spoke on the "Shifts in Governing Rationalities from Equity to Diversity" on a panel on Equity, Diversity and Social Justice with UBC's Associate vice-president Equity Professor Tom Patch, Ms Lynda Gray, Executive Director of the Urban Native Youth Association and Ms Ninu Kang, Director of Family Programs at MOSAIC.
- She also delivered an equity keynote on, "Storytelling about the Practice of Equity and Diversity" at an equity forum organized by the Race Autobiography Gender and Age Centre (RAGA) centre at the University of British Columbia.

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Malinda Smith
Vice-President, Equity Issues