

## Report from Vice-President, Equity Issues

### I. Context of Equity Work

The 2010 Equity Issues (EI) Portfolio activities are occurring within context of several significant challenges, anniversaries and priorities. A major context and challenge is the financial crisis; many Universities are engaged in cut-backs and belt-tightening. Historically such actions have had a negative impact on equity-seeking groups. It is important that the financial crisis not become a means for silencing or further marginalizing equity discourse and practice. Some important developments and priorities include: first, the January 2010 launch of the 'Equity Matters Blog,' which I proposed in November 2009 to coincide with the launch of the Fedcan Blog. Second, activities planned for Congress 2010 at Concordia University are framed around the 40th anniversary of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women, the first RC to be led by a woman, Florence Bayard Bird. Third, the March 2010 AGM's plenary focuses on Mentoring Matters in the social science and humanities community, another EI portfolio priority. For this I researched and wrote a discussion paper entitled, "*Much Ado About Mentoring*" and have been working with the Executive, Directors and Policy Analyst to explore directions for the future.

### II. Equity Issues Portfolio Activities

#### A. Equity Matters Blog



The Equity Matters Blog was launched on Friday, 8 January 2010 with my first post, "Equity (Still) Matters," which introduced the site and what I hoped it would achieve (see Appendix 1). I hope the 'Equity Matters' blog will become a space where scholars in the humanities and social sciences can engage each other and the broader community on matters of equity and social justice. I also hope that this blog will become a meeting place where scholars and practitioners can disseminate leading-edge social science and humanities equity research, and share ideas about best equity policies and practices. The archived blog entries should serve as important sources of engaged scholarship, widely accessible for teaching and learning within colleges and universities across Canada and worldwide. Notably, the Fedcan Equity Matters (EM) blog is the first and only blog dedicated to matters of equity in Canada. For this initial roll-out, the entries have been invited from diverse scholars working across all four equity issues areas, reviewed and, if necessary, clarifications requested by myself. Once finalized, they are sent on to Karen Diepeveen for final editing and posting.

As Vice-President Equity I am quite pleased that the Federation's EI Portfolio has taken the lead on this front. When I first proposed this idea in Fall 2009, we were unsure of the response we would get. The feedback from outside the Federation has been overwhelmingly supportive. Responses from the community have also been very positive, especially the fact that it is an open-access resource. Posts on the Equity Matters blog have been circulated on several listserves (e.g. Canadian Association of Cultural Studies with 650 members; PAR-L with 1600 members, Researchers and Academics of Colour for Equality list, among others). It has been circulated via various email groups of practitioners working on equity and human rights (e.g. Canadian Association for the Prevention of

Discrimination and Harassment in Higher Education). The EM link has also been posted to a number of university equity and human rights offices' e-resources (e.g. Athabasca U, U British Columbia). To-date, the EM's blog entries have constituted over 65 percent of all page views on the Federation's blog. It has quickly established itself as a strong source of thoughtful content and as a resource for our members, as well as more generally for students, professors and policymakers. As an impressive equity resource in Canada, we will continue to improve its roll out, particularly on stylistic issues and in adding more entries in French.

Almost two dozen entries by scholars from over a dozen universities in almost every region in Canada have been posted to-date (see Appendix). Prior to the AGM and Congress entries have been or will be posted on mentoring and the RCSW. They will include retrospectives on the RCSW, on the status of pay equity and on social justice issues today. After Congress 2010, the plan is to review the blog and further ways of improving it. In future the blog also will be used to highlight various annual events, such as International Day of Social Justice (20 February), International Women's Day (8 March), International Day for Elimination of Discrimination (21 March), International Day of the World's Indigenous People (9 August), and International Day of Persons with Disabilities (3 December).

## **B. Equity Issues at Congress 2010**

December 2010 will mark the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the RCSW, chaired by journalist and broadcaster Florence Bayard Bird. There will be four Equity Issues panels and one keynote address at Congress 2010. I am working closely with Director of Programs Alison Faulknor and Policy Analyst Karen Diepeveen on this file. At Congress 2010, I will use the occasion of this anniversary to offer a retrospective on the Bird Commission and take stock of the status of women in Canada 40 years on, asking the question: *Where do we go from here?* This focus on the RCSW provides many opportunities for thoughtful dialogue beyond exploring the status of women 40 years later. Panels include:

- *Closing the Gender Wage Gap: Provincial Perspectives on Pay Equity*, with **Pat Armstrong** (York U), **Emanuela Heyninck** (Government of Ontario), **Norma Dubé** (Government of New Brunswick), **Nitya Iyer** (Government of the North West Territories).
- *Local-Global Equity & Social Justice Struggles*, with **Janine Brodie** (U of Alberta), **A. Aziz Choudhry** (McGill University), **Gada Mahrouse** (Concordia University) and **Sunera Thobani** (U of British Columbia)
- *The Status of First Nations, Inuit and Métis Women 40 Years On*, with **Ellen Gabriel** (Quebec Native Women's Association) and **Mary Simons** (Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami)
- *In Conversation: The Status of Women 40 Years On*, with the **Hon. Jean Augustine** (Former Minister of State for the Status of Women), confirmed to-date.

As well, the **Equity Keynote speaker Donna Brazile** will explore "Women and Leadership in the Age of Obama." Brazile has been characterized by *O Magazine* as one of America's Top-20 "most remarkable visionaries" and by *Essence Magazine* as one of the "Top 50 women in America." Working with the Federation's team there are plans to record these sessions and post the podcasts on the Federation's website, adding to the popular videos of equity sessions at Congress 2009.

## **C. Mentoring Matters**

One of the main priorities I identified as Vice-President Equity is the issue of mentoring, which is one of the great social innovations and contributions of the humanities and social sciences. Across many university and college campuses, mentoring increasingly is seen as a core mission. However, despite the proliferation of formal and informal mentoring programs, and the burgeoning literatures on the topic, it is debatable whether we have a deep understanding of the practice. Few empirical studies have been conducted on the effectiveness of mentoring in our disciplines. Some scholars suggest

the best mentoring is not necessarily realized in formal or institutionalized settings: the best mentor may be the accidental mentor, one who arises in an informal relationship. Moreover, truly transformative mentoring relationships tend to be rarer than the proliferation of institutional programs suggest. This cautionary tale has not, however, dampened the claims that everyone should have a mentor, the quest to find the exemplary mentor, or institutional concerns about the factors conducive to successful mentoring. The AGM mentoring plenary will: Examine common assumptions about mentoring, the mentor and the mentee/protégé or co-mentor relationships; map the challenges, including of one-size-fits all approaches, cross-gender and diversity mentoring; identify potential risks, vulnerabilities and dangers for mentor and mentee; and note the opportunities for students, postdoctoral fellows, and especially faculty mentoring in the social sciences and humanities.

Over the past year I have worked with the Executive and especially with the Directors of Programs and Communications and Policy Analyst to explore how the Federation can take up this issue in a meaningful way. Last summer we explored some funding options and in the fall I researched and drafted a discussion paper on mentoring, which explored some of the issues identified in the literature and the lessons learned by practitioners. For the AGM, we have a terrific line up of social science and humanities scholars, including two from the Equity Issues Steering Committee – **Adelle Blackett** (Law, McGill) and **James Deaville** (Music, Carleton) – as well as former Vice-President Equity **Donna Pennee**, Dean of Arts and Humanities at the University of Western Ontario, and **Larry Chartrand**, Associate Professor at the Faculty (Law, University of Ottawa). As well, working with Karen Diepeveen, our new Policy Analyst, we have identified a few special guests from the University and NGO community working on mentoring to participate in our AGM plenary.

#### **D. Equity Consultations and Presentations**

Over the past year I have drawn on my University work to participate in a number of online and face-to-face conference sessions on mentoring, including by Inside Higher Education and, most recently, at the International Studies Association conference in New Orleans (February 2010). At the ISA conference its Diversity Committee ran a session on *“Diversity and Mentoring: From Graduate School to Tenure”* and its Feminist Theory and Gender Studies Group hosted a roundtable on *“FTGS Mentoring Matters,”* including one speaker who spoke on the connections between mentoring matters and engaged scholarship. These workshops by other professional bodies confirm my view that the Federation is leading the way in Canada on addressing important priorities.

Respectfully submitted,

Malinda S. Smith  
Vice-President, Equity Issues

## Sample - Equity Matters Blog Postings

**Malinda S. Smith**, “Equity (Still) Matters” (vice-president Equity);

**Anthony Stewart** (Dalhousie University), “Employment Equity or Affirmative Action in Canada?”;

**Linda Briskin** (York University), “Equity and Collective Bargaining in Canadian Universities”;

**John P. Portelli** (OISE/University of Toronto), “Leadership for Equity in Education: Deficit Mentality is a Major Challenge”;

**Tyrone McNeil**, President of the First Nations Education Steering Committee. “First Nations Higher Educational Aspirations in Canada”;

**Harvey Krahn and Alison Taylor**, (University of Alberta), “Higher Educational Aspirations of Visible Minority Immigrant Youth in Canada”;

**Janine Brodie** (University of Alberta), “The 3’Ds of the Canadian Women’s Movement”;

**Louise Langevin** (Université Laval), “‘L’égalité-déjà-là’ dans une société post féministe? ”;

**Paul Kershaw** (University of British Columbia), “Gender Equality and Child Development: Rethinking Family Policy”;

**Susan Prentice** (University of Manitoba), “Children Matter: Equality and Childcare on Canadian Campuses”;

**Linda Trimble** (University of Alberta), “The Electoral Glass Ceiling for Women: Representation and Political Equality”;

**Wendy J. Robbins** (University of New Brunswick), “Gender Gap in Distribution of Canada Research Chairs (CRCs) and Canada Excellence Research Chairs (CERCs)”;

**Maneesha Deckha** (University of Victoria), “Gender, Culture and Violence: Towards a ‘Paradigm Shift’?”

**Radha Jhappan** (Carleton University), “The new Canadian citizenship test: No ‘barbarians’ need apply”;

**Brenda O’Neill** (University of Calgary), “Gender Gap: Why Women Still Matter in Politics”;

**Jean-François Gaudreault-DesBiens** (Université de Montréal) “Unreasonably focusing on reasonable accommodation in Canada?”;

**Elisabeth Gidengil** (McGill University), “Gender Gap in Voting: Are Women Key to a Conservative Majority?”