

Date: January 9, 2025

## RE: MUNFA Statement on the Vice-Provost EDI-AR Position

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While we are not aware of the circumstances surrounding Dr. Mullings' decision to resign from the role, MUNFA is concerned to hear that disagreement regarding the scope and substance of the Vice Provost EDI-AR role limited her opportunity to guide and contribute to key policies and decision-making.

We also take note of a broader issue evident in Dr. Mullings' description of her experience that goes to the core of academic leadership and decision-making: how we respond to critique, especially when what we hear is uncomfortable.

There is an important distinction that is often blurred in our institutions, especially during trying times. That is the distinction between *decorum* and *respect*, between *politeness* and *collegiality*. These concepts are frequently treated as interchangeable. They are not. And when we conflate them, we do real harm - not only to individuals, but to the integrity of our academic communities.

We can be direct, impassioned, even forceful - and still be respectful. At the same time, it's possible to be impeccably polite while dismissing lived experience or maintaining inequitable structures.

In the context of Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Anti-Racism particularly we have a special responsibility to recognize this distinction. Respect is culturally derived and deeply shaped by power and position. What feels respectful to those with authority may feel silencing or ineffective to those who must live with the outcomes of leadership decisions.

When we respond to criticism by focusing primarily on *how* something was said, rather than engaging seriously with *what* was said, we risk deflecting from substance and being perceived as shielding ourselves from accountability.

Many scholars - particularly those from marginalized communities - have learned that speaking carefully, softly, or deferentially rarely begets change. History teaches us this lesson repeatedly. Progress in social justice, equality, and human rights has almost always been labelled inappropriate, disruptive, or disrespectful at the time it was sought.

Academia is not immune to this pattern. Our emphasis on rationality, neutrality, and professionalism can sometimes lead us to confuse emotional restraint with intellectual rigour, and discomfort with disrespect.

Yet academic freedom, shared governance and true progress depend on our willingness to let critique inform us - even when it is urgent, emotional, or inconvenient.

If we want institutions that are equitable, inclusive, and worthy of trust, we must be willing to hear hard truths expressed in voices that may not sound like our own. And we must recognize advocates not as adversaries, but as essential partners in that work. We urge careful consideration of this fundamental issue as decisions are weighed regarding the future of this position and its role within the university. In that context, we also call for transparency and meaningful communication regarding the plans for the EDI-AR office and its leadership going forward.

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