ETHNIC DIVERSITY IN OACUHO
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Ethnic diversity captures the composition of individuals from diverse ethnic, cultural, or racial backgrounds, resulting in a visibly diverse group of individuals. A glance around our membership indicates that OACUHO lacks visible diversity. Housing staff teams remain predominantly white despite growing diversity on campus. What are the experiences of our members who identify with under-represented groups? Whose voices are not heard in this association and within our field? This project begins to answer these questions by reporting on the state of ethnic diversity within OACUHO and the experiences of persons of colour in our association. The report concludes with summary statements of common realities of working in white-dominant spaces, provokes questions for reflection, and makes three concluding recommendations directed at the OACUHO Board, senior leaders, and all members. The project team completed the following initiatives over the past year (2017-2018):

- **August: Established project goals, values, and deliverables**

- **September: Announced project to membership and created shortlist of volunteers**

- **October: Survey on state of diversity within OACUHO sent to all members**

- **November: Three subcommittees formed (Research Review, Focus Groups, and Interviews)**

- **January–March: Three focus groups, 18 interviews, and a summary of preliminary research**

- **April–May: Analysis of information and report writing**

Representation in OACUHO

OACUHO members received three invitations on the listserv to participate in the survey on the State of Diverse Representation within OACUHO (see Appendix A). Of 195 respondents, 22% identify as persons of colour; 2% identify as Indigenous, 16% identify as LGBTQ+, and 0% identify as transgender. Figure 1 depicts (in blue) respondents who identify as persons of colour by membership level. This data likely inflates the number of persons of colour due to a variety of survey limitations, and it does not capture disaggregated data. For example, if we had asked respondents how they define their ethnic identity, how might this compare to the student population within our residences? Numerical representation is not a complete end goal, however, because visibility, acceptance, and celebration as a person of colour do not come hand in hand with higher proportions of representation. Just because a person of colour is in a position of power (e.g. senior role), the overall trend remains that career mobility is not as available for persons of colour as it is for white colleagues within OACUHO.
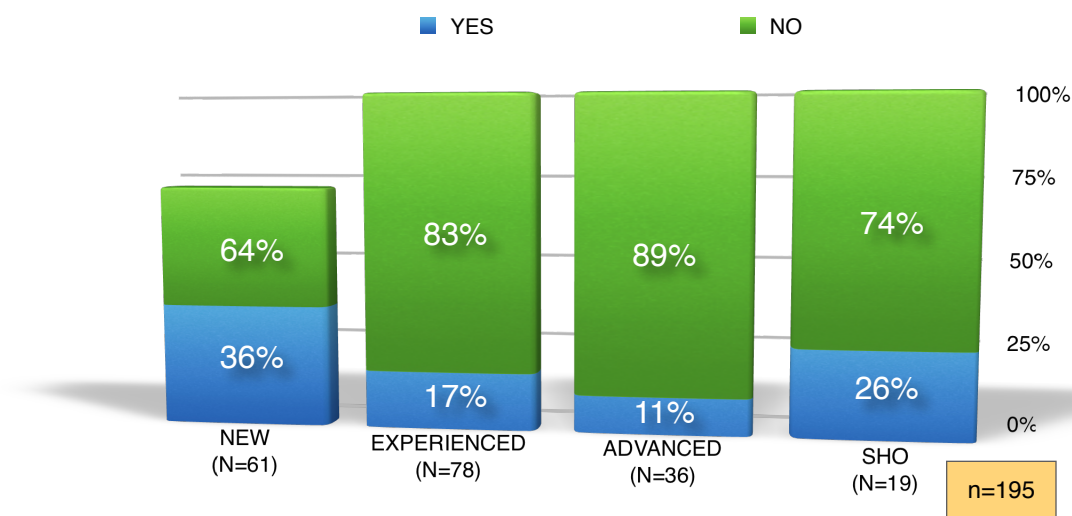

Figure 1: Do you self-identify as a person of colour (percentage, by organizational level)

Summary of Experiences

In the section Voices in Our Association, readers will find counter-stories collected through the focus groups and interviews. Counter-stories are experiences told by marginalized folks that counter the dominant narratives about them. The stories in the report highlight the experience of working as a professional of colour and serving diverse students in a white-dominant space. The project team has identified that as a person of colour, barriers exist to feeling truly welcome in our field. Readers can find nearly 100 counter-stories in the full report that support this reality. Readers can also find: a review of relevant academic research that covers diverse hiring and career mobility in student affairs; an analysis of the student staff survey results; and important commentary about Indigeneity in OACUHO. Readers looking for resources will find ample references throughout the report and within the Appendixes.

At this point, most readers may expect a fully formed plan on how to achieve an inclusive workplace. In discussing this project specifically, senior leaders and OACUHO members commonly asked the project team: "So what do we do about this issue?" While this is a valid question, it is difficult to answer. Imagine expecting a simplified response to the question: "How do we fix complex mental health concerns on campus?" These issues are systemic and thus call for a system-wide approach. Next steps should be in partnership with OACUHO members of diverse backgrounds (including white members and members of all organizational levels). In lieu of a list of recommendations, the project team identified summary statements and reflection questions for readers to review below. Page references to the full length report have been included after each summary statement to provide concrete examples to readers.

Diverse Staff Representation: Persons of colour are underrepresented at all levels of housing organizations. Percentage of persons of colour decline as we move up within an organization. This is more than a numbers issue; it is also about visibility of persons of colour who are already here. (See p. 23, 28-29, 62-63)

- What do individual operations and senior leaders know about who is present and in what strength within their workplace?
- How do we increase representation of people of colour on the OACUHO Board?
- How do we emphasize visibility over quantitative representation?
- What activities should the Board and individual operations promote and encourage in order to increase visibility and make space for community amongst persons of colour?

Hiring Bias: Barriers to access for marginalized groups exist at all levels of hiring within housing operations. Application screening, interview processes, candidate assessment, and career progression are all subject to bias that favours white culture and white candidates. (See p. 47-52)

- What training and resources can operations access to reduce bias within their hiring processes (e.g. recruitment, hiring, selection and retention)?
- What activities and exercises should operations adopt prior to engaging in a hiring process?
- How do we ensure diverse staff representation in recruitment, hiring and retention efforts?
- How do we remove barriers for equity-seeking populations?

Knowledge of Diverse Student Populations: Persons of colour are expected to be sources of knowledge for white peers about how to effectively serve students of colour. (See p. 37, 41, 62-63)

- What data do operations collect about the state of diversity in their residence population?
- How can operations use diversity data to understand student needs and make decisions?
- How can senior leaders demonstrate commitment to actively engaging in the above processes?
- How can white colleagues become "accomplices" instead of allies? (See page 39 of report)
- How do we reduce emotional labour on underrepresented individuals in their departments?

Inadequate "Equity" Training: Most peers and supervisors do not demonstrate sufficient knowledge of equity, diversity, and inclusion principles. Members experience unintentional microaggressions from peers and supervisors, and witness clear instances of behaviour that reinforces oppressive systems. (See p. 44, 53-54, 62-63)

- What level of cultural competence is expected of Housing staff of all levels/ functional areas?
- What training can OACUHO offer to members to increase cultural competency and develop stronger skills in dismantling oppressive work environments?
- What training can OACUHO offer to senior leaders in dismantling oppressive environments?
- What can OACUHO and member institutions learn from parallel student services associations (e.g. CACUSS Professional Competencies on intercultural awareness)?

Improving Mentorship Opportunities: Participants reported a natural inclination to feel more comfortable sharing vulnerable information with racialized mentors, due to similar life experience. White supervisors demonstrated strong mentorship when they made space for their staff's ethnic identities, or when they named their own power/privilege from the outset. (See p. 20-21, 42-47)

- What opportunities exist (or need to be created) to offer racialized OACUHO members with access to persons of colour in mentorship positions?
- How can we encourage and support creative mentorship opportunities for racialized members?
- What training and guidelines can white supervisors and senior leaders adopt to make more space for the identities of their staff?

Navigating White-Dominant Culture: Housing work culture is driven by white culture, and the conditions are such that members need to conform to white standards in order to succeed, perform well, and progress in their careers. (See p. 52-54)

- How do our workplaces and OACUHO events perpetuate the pervasiveness of white culture?
- What can OACUHO, individual operations, and individual members do to challenge the pervasiveness of white culture?
- How can senior leaders, supervisors, and individual members create space for a more inclusive, evolving culture that makes all staff feel welcome, relevant, and important?
- How can OACUHO and individual institutions share and celebrate diverse cultural experiences?

Personal Struggles related to Identity: Members experience unique challenges of supporting diverse students or supporting themselves while navigating the isolation of a white work culture. These personal struggles are uniquely tied to ethnic identity (and other identities) in the workplace. (See p. 32-35, 55, 58-60)

- What else can we learn about how personal challenges intersect with our work experiences?
- How can our work environments change to make social justice the responsibility of everyone?
- How can OACUHO partner with professionals of colour to share the burden of these struggles?

Creating Space for Dialogue: Members value the presence and progression of this topic within OACUHO, from the 2017 Conference presentation, to the establishment of the Professionals of Colour Affinity Group, to this project. At an institutional level, however, members experience varying degrees of indifference and support in pursuing this dialogue. (See p. 41, 55)

- What can OACUHO do to continue or improve the provision of space for this dialogue?
- How should this dialogue sustain through future OACUHO activities and experiences?
- How can senior leadership create space for this dialogue at their own institutions?
- What role does OACUHO play in fostering this dialogue within member institutions?

Access to and Knowledge of Relevant Research: Canadian research on racial diversity and equity within student affairs roles is sparse. Knowledge of student affairs theories within membership tends to focus on major foundational theories that do not consider racial identity. (See p. 16-17)

- How can OACUHO support the education of membership on research in this topic?
- How can OACUHO support connecting membership to other knowledge networks within student affairs that pursue knowledge in this area?
- How can senior leaders, individual members, and OACUHO events facilitate dialogue around critical race theory in student affairs and related research amongst members?

Missing Voices: This report lacks representation from some equity-seeking groups (e.g. Indigenous members and trans-identifying members). It mainly captures stories from Residence Life members. (See p. 26, 65)

- What experiences are missing that could help inform this report and future recommendations?
- How are OACUHO and individual operations engaging with the calls to action within the Truth and Reconciliation Commission?
- What can we learn from parallel student services associations (e.g. CACUSS Competencies on Indigenous cultural awareness) or community groups about engaging in decolonization?

Closing Recommendations

The questions above are directed at OACUHO, institutional leaders and operations, and individual members. While the answers to every question are not immediately clear, reflecting on the report's counter-stories can serve as insightful and valid starting points to informal next steps. There is certainly room for further research, which leads us to three recommendations.

Recommendation to the Board:

Dedicate resources towards the project's next phase. Strike a 2018-2019 project team that will identify next steps, based on the findings in this report. Next steps should include tangible items such as changes to service provision, resources made available to the membership, etc. The Board should prepare to share a plan for next steps at the 2018 Fall Business Meeting.

Recommendation to senior leaders:

Create space in your operations to discuss this report on an ongoing basis. Empower your staff to engage with the topic, including how the data relates to your full-time staff, student staff, and residence population. Share what you are doing with colleagues; learn from other institutions.

Recommendation to all OACUHO members:

Engage with each other about the data in this report. Challenge your senior leaders, supervisors, and colleagues with influence to create space for this dialogue. White colleagues must demonstrate partnership in the work of dismantling barriers and making space.

The project team sees opportunity for immediate action this year. The project team offers thanks to all members for reading this report summary, but reading is not enough. Even spurring dialogue between members is a positive step forward. At the very least, talk to your colleagues about the report. Start or end weekly meetings with a question from the above list. Book your supervisors into meetings and ask them these questions. These conversations must be consciously raised so that this issue cannot be ignored. All community members should take accountability for their role in the system of opportunity and access. We hope as readers you will reflect on your role and leverage any power you hold to make space for change.