

## **UBC Trans, Two-Spirit and Gender Diversity Task Force**

### **Interim Report to:**

**Vice-President Student, Vice-President Human Resources,  
UBCO Deputy Vice-Chancellor, and UBCV Provost and VP Academic**

March 2021

The Trans, Two-Spirit and Gender Diversity Task Force was brought together for the first time in early March 2020. Its 21 members - 7 faculty members, 4 staff members, 7 undergraduate students and 3 graduate students – have since met monthly to work towards the fulfillment of its mandate, which is as follows:

- Include the marginalized voices of trans, Two-Spirit, and non-binary community members in the strategic planning of the University.
- Provide strategic direction to UBC's senior leadership and create a sustainable and ongoing architecture by which community feedback, requests, and concerns that pertain to gender identity, gender expression, and human rights can be made visible and addressed.
- Provide strategic direction on building an infrastructure to support trans, Two-Spirit, and non-binary related research and scholarship, including fostering connection across faculty and disciplinary boundaries, and creating pathways for students to engage with trans scholarship.
- Detail the primary areas that need attention and improvement such that UBC can address areas of inequality and human rights that directly impact members of trans, Two-Spirit and non-binary communities, including legacies of colonial gender-based violence (legacies that indirectly impact the whole UBC community).
- Develop a set of actionable recommendations for the Provosts, Deputy Vice Chancellor, Vice President, Students, and Vice President, Human Resources with the goal to address gaps in systems, policies, procedures, and practices in the area of gender diversity, improve the recruitment and retention of trans, Two-Spirit, and non-binary students, faculty, and staff, and create working and learning environments on UBC campuses that allow gender diversity to thrive.

March 2021 was meant to mark the end of the Task Force and the production of a final report that would include the set of actionable recommendations mentioned in its mandate. However, the unexpected COVID-19 pandemic has caused a number of delays (discussed further in the last section of this interim report) and it has become clear that the Task Force needs additional time to complete its work.

Please find attached an interim report providing an update on the current work of the Task Force and provides some context for the request to extend the timeline of the Task Force to October 2021.

## **Update on current work:**

### **(1) Gender Diversity Audit:**

As reported in October, the Task Force has retained the consulting firm TransFocus to conduct a gender diversity audit, in the style of the work conducted by TransFocus at [Thompson Rivers University](#). The [project is now well underway](#) under the collaborative leadership of the consulting firm and the Task Force, which has advised the work of the consulting firm in matters such as the format of the audit, the content of the survey (including for example the specific perspectives of Two-Spirit and Indigenous people) and the communications campaign. Task Force members also worked to ensure that the project could obtain approval from the UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board and played a key role in outreach to the UBC community, culminating in the publication of an [internal Broadcast email](#) shared with the entire UBC community on February 10, 2021.

Most recently, the Task Force received an update on survey recruitment. The survey has received remarkable attention from the UBC community, with over 2,000 responses gathered so far. Even more notable, nearly 300 of these survey respondents have self-identified as members of trans, Two-Spirit and gender-diverse (T2SGD) communities, as well as over 100 additional people who identified as questioning. Considering the troubled history of research involving trans people, as well as the historical lack of trust in the institution of UBC that exists within the T2SGD community, hearing from such a large number of T2SGD people is already a notable strength of the audit and will help ensure that recommendations that come out of the project resonate with the UBC T2SGD community. The Task Force continues to help with outreach to ensure a wide representation of various stakeholders in the project. The project is on track to receive a full report by June 2021, after which the Task Force will review it, release it to the UBC community and draw on it to craft its own final recommendations to the Vice-Presidents.

### **(2) Building recommendations**

The Task Force is also working to build its recommendations in key areas of interest as identified in its Terms of Reference (including but not limited to climate and safety, programs and services, gender data and gendered records). In order to inform and refine final recommendations, the Task Force is inviting senior UBC leaders from both campuses to join part of its meetings. The goal is to have these leaders present the ongoing work of their unit especially as it relates to gender diversity and trans inclusion, answer questions from Task Force members about specific aspects of their work, receive feedback from Task Force members on gender diversity issues that may be relevant to their endeavors, and engage in a conversation about ongoing commitments and areas of possible collaboration.

The knowledge gained from these conversations, combined with the experiences and expertise of Task Force members as well as the insights from the Gender Diversity Audit, will allow the Task Force to refine a set of actionable recommendations with the goals to address gaps in systems, policies, procedures, and practices in the area of gender diversity, improving the recruitment and retention of trans, Two-Spirit and non-binary students, faculty and staff, and creating working and learning environments on UBC campuses that allow gender diversity to thrive.

The Task Force also used this time to identify and retain a consulting firm to conduct a campus audit (see next steps). The Task Force leadership invited Dr. Naznin Virgil-Babul (Senior Advisor to the Provost

on Women and Gender-Diverse Faculty) to present at one of the meeting, and has extended an ongoing invitation for Dr Virgil Babul and Jay Aubrey (Human Rights Advisor, UBCV) to join the Task Force. Finally, Task Force members have been invited to support and inform some of the ongoing work of the Equity & Inclusion Office in the area of gender diversity.

This initial phase of bringing the group together and building trust has also created opportunities for members to connect and support new initiatives. A good example is the new student-led trans peer mentorship initiative, which aims to connect upper-year trans students with first-year students to provide social support, cut down on feelings of isolation and help younger students navigate life at UBC and beyond (e.g., the medical system in British Columbia). This initiative is led by three students from the Task Force, who drew on the expertise and support provided by staff and faculty from the Task Force to help them launch this initiative in early September.

### **Extending the timeline for Task Force:**

Although the initial timeline for the Task Force was one year (March 2020-2021), it has become clear that this timeline needs to be extended by another six months to ensure there is time for the Task Force to fulfil its initial mandate and provide a fulsome set of actionable recommendations.

Predictably, some of the work of the Task Force experienced direct delays as a result of the ongoing COVID-19 crisis. As with other parts of university life, the last year has disrupted work flows and required unexpected shifts in our approaches to compensate for the higher than usual levels of uncertainty, fatigue and stress and account for new ways of functioning and engaging primarily online. For the work of the Task Force, this has presented both opportunities – such as an unprecedented ability to build community among its members regardless of location and enable more active participation thanks to the integration of online tools into meetings – and challenges – such as the need to delay the start of the Gender Diversity Audit until the start of Winter Term 2. Initially, the Task Force had planned for the Audit to start in Winter Term 1, but it became clear that September 2020 was not an ideal time to survey the UBC community, as most students, faculty and staff were experiencing heavy workloads and unprecedented levels of stress while having to adjust completely new ways of learning, teaching and working. The delay was largely reflective of extraordinary circumstances related to this time of crisis, which also necessitated we give careful consideration to logistical questions such as recruitment in a largely online environment and planning for virtual focus groups.

Regardless of the very particular context of the last year, the Task Force was also formed within an institution that has a history of harm, which continues to exist in many forms and to be experienced by trans, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse communities at UBC. Given this context, it was essential for the initial work of the Task Force to focus a significant amount of time on fostering a sense of trust and community among Task Force members. Having taken that time through a variety of strategies, including co-creating community agreements that are revisited every meeting, the Task Force has nurtured a community of people who can talk and work with each other in open, honest and at times vulnerable ways, which is necessary to do the work of identifying continued gaps and challenges that need to be addressed. Similarly, it was important that the Task Force take the time to be closely and intentionally involved in the many aspects of the development of the Gender Diversity Audit in order to build trust in the process and the report that will come out of it.

This kind of intentional trust- and community-building takes time, particularly when the mode of engagement is entirely online. Keeping this in mind, and given the updated timeline for the Gender Diversity Audit, **we respectfully request that the timeline of the Task Force be formally extended to October 2021.** This will allow the Task Force to finish the work it set out to do and to do so in the same intentional, thoughtful way that has been central to it so far for the benefit of its members and the wider community.