



Equity and
Inclusion Office

August 16, 2019

Dear Campus Community Members,

There has been some misinformation posted on social media that is raising questions about McMaster's continued commitment to and recent actions in support of campus sexual violence prevention and response.

McMaster is expanding its sexual violence support and education resources and programs. The University has invested in an expanded Equity and Inclusion team, with new members joining the Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Office. This team, with many combined years of experience, now has the capacity to deliver Welcome Week training and other year-round programming as experts who are embedded within this McMaster Office. The Sexual Assault Centre of Hamilton & Area (SACHA) continues to be an important resource along with others as we develop and provide year-round training and education programs.

The expanded programs include training through August and September for Residence Life Community Advisors, Residence Orientation Advisors and Representatives and Welcome Week Reps. This training includes content focussed on defining sexual violence and consent, dispelling myths that perpetuate sexual violence, and identifying barriers to disclosing and reporting. The training also provides clear information about how to "Recognize, Respond, and Refer" disclosures of sexual violence and, most importantly, how to support survivors in a caring and compassionate manner.

Very recently, I met with the SACHA Director and Educator to introduce myself, to share plans for the expansion of the sexual violence prevention and response office, to provide information about the expertise and approach of the team currently providing sexual violence prevention and response support and education for our campus community, and to discuss different ways McMaster and SACHA might work together moving forward.

In that meeting, I shared the depth and breadth of experiences of the EIO team, including my long history working at three successive universities where I led sexual violence prevention and response strategies. I also shared my history working in community organizations addressing gender-based violence and other forms of social marginalization, including work at a sexual assault centre, a shelter for abused women, an immigrant serving agency, an agency serving persons living with HIV/AIDS, and a literacy service.

It was through these grassroots community experiences that my critical race feminist consciousness about issues of gender-based violence and other intersectional social inequities deepened, though my awareness of

marginalization had already developed through lived experiences as a queer-identified woman of colour of the Arab-Yemeni diaspora who was raised in a Muslim household while growing up in Canada. Support for and education on issues of gendered violence can and should come from many sites and sectors, and it should recognize the needs of diverse cultural and organizational communities.

I assured SACHA that the team of long-standing and newly-appointed staff providing sexual violence support and education are well-versed in trauma-informed, intersectional and anti-oppressive approaches. We are aware of the complex social and cultural influences contributing to sexual violence, and the nuances of providing survivor-centric support for disclosures while balancing natural justice and due process when handling complaints. I talked about my deep appreciation for grassroots organizing, and that we supported the need to advocate with government to ensure sustainable funding for the organization's important work in Hamilton. McMaster's expansion and investment in in-house educators was not a reflection of our lack of appreciation of SACHA's past work with us or lack of value for their important presence in the community, but rather a recognition of McMaster's need to build on past sexual violence programming by enhancing its capacity to offer new and expanded year-round programming and services through imbedded experts within the Equity and Inclusion Office (EIO). This is what other schools have done. It is also what the EIO has done with its accessibility, equity and inclusion, and human rights programming within our campus community.

We made clear McMaster will honour its financial commitments to SACHA for educational services.

At the meeting, we invited further exploration of how we might work together in the future, within a network of other relevant campus and community groups, and to better profile among campus community members those services which McMaster is not able to provide: the 24-hour support line, free long-term counselling, and volunteer opportunities, for example.

To date the team's educational programming has been very well received and there are new educational and support programs being planned for the fall.

A newly designed Supporting Survivors of Sexual Violence workshop was delivered and well-received as part of the June 2019 Human Rights, Equity, Accessibility, Respect Toolkit (H.E.A.R.T.) Workshop Series.

Starting September, and running for two terms, the SVPRO team will also launch a new psycho-educational program for student survivors of sexual assault ([PEGASUS](#)).

Additionally, the Equity and Inclusion Education team is bringing an expert on bystander behaviour for a two-day visit to McMaster to deliver training for student leaders, along with other students, faculty and staff.

There is much more being planned, and you can visit our website at equity.mcmaster.ca for more information.

This new and enhanced programming is all part of my vision to strengthen the EIO's impact on our campus community, culture and climate.

Since I arrived at McMaster in the spring of 2018, one of my unwavering priorities has been work on developing a more strategic approach to campus sexual violence prevention and response. To that end, I have undertaken:

- to meet with student union leaders about their recommendations for campus prevention and response efforts;
- to assess and evaluate the current level of service and appropriateness of resources dedicated to sexual violence in the Equity and Inclusion Office;
- to conduct research on best practices for organizing and resourcing campus sexual violence prevention and response offices;
- to revitalize the terms of reference of the policy-directed campus-wide team to align its work with strategic prevention and response priorities;
- to lead, in partnership with senior administrative colleagues and intake office directors, the scheduled annual review of the Sexual Violence Policy, which will seek campus-wide consultation in September; and
- to secure funds and senior level support to expand and reposition the sexual violence prevention and response portfolio.

This work was well underway by the time the Ontario government released the [summary report](#) of the 2018 Student Voices on Sexual Violence Survey, and [announced actions](#) for postsecondary institutions in March of 2019.

By March, I was also fully participating as McMaster's representative on the [Status of Women Advisory Committee on the Framework to Prevent and Address Gender-Based Violence at Post-Secondary Institutions](#), working with colleagues across the nation to advise on best principles and practices for campus sexual violence prevention and response. We are expecting to receive the final draft of a Framework in the coming weeks.

If there are any questions about McMaster's commitment or its current and future work on campus sexual violence prevention and response, I invite you to contact the Equity and Inclusion Office directly through equity@mcmaster.ca or 905-525-9140, extension 27581.

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