Connections & Conversations – An Affinity Group for Racialized Employees at the University of Toronto

Group Charter

INTRODUCTION:

The University of Toronto (U of T) prides itself on being one of Canada’s top diversity employers. The University believes that the diversity of its faculty, staff and students represents quality and is a point of strength for the post-secondary institution. While this may be true, the beneficial effects of this strength may be experienced differently among diverse groups.

A gathering of senior, racialized, female, administrative staff was initiated at the end of 2014 to begin conversations about how they can flourish in the University environment and celebrate accomplishments together. The group is interested in exploring opportunities beyond simply working in an environment that is equitable, accepting, inclusive and free from discrimination and harassment, but also creating spaces and opportunities to fully benefit from and contribute to the University of Toronto community.

There are a number of equity and diversity initiatives that support the interests and needs of faculty, staff and students at The University. The group acknowledges that the equity offices work diligently to address concerns that arise in the University environment. University leaders acknowledge that more could and should be done and include equity initiatives among their top priorities. Liaising with the Anti-Racism and Cultural Diversity Office (ARCDO), supports can be harnessed to leverage the full potential and strengths of racialized groups at U of T.

The interest in creating an affinity group that addresses the interests and needs of racialized people at U of T is borne out of a dearth of networking opportunities and support groups for these people to tap into. Affinity groups are certainly not a new concept, particularly in institutions of higher learning in the United States of America. Universities such as Harvard, the University of Washington and Stanford have a wide variety of affinity groups that support their commitment to diversity and are used to advance recruitment and retention goals. As one of Canada’s best diversity employers, the University of Toronto can join other top diversity employers such as RBC, McCarthy Tétrault LLP, Ryerson University and KPMG in aggressively and proactively implementing diversity best practices.

GROUP OBJECTIVES:

The U of T Connections and Conversations Affinity Group can provide added benefits to the University community in a number of ways. By tapping into the expertise of group members, opportunities can be availed to enhance the diversity profile of faculty, staff and students, to building stronger community ties, to align with the University’s priorities, particularly around the Presidential strategy regarding engagement with the city/region.
This Affinity Group, targeted at university administrators, is a welcome way to encourage cross portfolio, cross divisional and cross campus collaboration. The Group wishes to create a mixed, gendered space to voice and address personal and group concerns around the lived experience of racialized administrative staff at U of T. In addressing these challenges and opportunities, the Group aims to assist the University in promoting an environment that promotes personal and professional growth and development.

The objectives of the Connections and Conversations Affinity group are:

- To provide moral support to racialized members of the U of T community in their pursuit of a satisfying career experience;
- To offer networking and mentoring opportunities and advice to members and supporters;
- To contribute our unique experiences to the growth and development of U of T;
- To seek opportunities within the U of T community to intersect with other groups in efforts to celebrate our cultural heritage while showcasing the talents of racialized staff;
- To develop strategies and plans that address challenges that racialized U of T members encounter individually, or systemically; and
- To explore channels for career advancement and seek opportunities to learn from University decision-makers.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES:

A safe, confidential space to discuss issues related to racialized staff at U of T;

While focused on racialized staff and acknowledging the fact that women head the Steering Committee, the Group is open and welcoming of those who support its goals and objectives;

A desire to build upon the initiatives that currently exist and to heighten the Senior Administration’s sensitivity to the particular needs of racialized administrative staff at the University.

GROUP STRUCTURE:

The Affinity Group welcomes the participation of all U of T community members, including faculty, staff and alumni. Membership in the Steering Committee will be extended to U of T community members on a referral and/or application basis. It is recommended that members meet the following criteria:

- **Identifies as a racialized person**
- **Is currently employed as an administrative staff member**
- **Must have a ranking of PM 4 or higher and also supervise staff**
- **Supports the goals and objectives of the Connections and Conversations Affinity Group**
The activities of the Connections and Conversations Affinity Group will be guided by a Steering Committee comprised of the founding members, as follows:

Liza Arnason  Sandra Carnegie-Douglas
Kaye Francis  Sharon Grandison
Heather Hines  Jeevan Kempson
Suzanne Macintyre  Titi Oridota
Amorell Saunders N’Daw  Deborah Simon-Edwards
Archana Sridhar  Kimberly Yeh

Steering Committee members will serve staggered term lengths (two years); membership on the Steering Committee will become available on a bi-annual basis.

PROGRAMMING:

Affinity Group activities will be open to everyone, including U of T alumni and faculty.

• Help create programs and personal and professional development initiatives and resources that are specific to the Affinity Group’s needs
• Host guest speakers and themed events
• Provide expertise on recruitment and retention strategies for all three campuses
• Develop and share opportunities to actively participate on University Committees
• Participate in research and academic initiatives of interest
• Offer mentorship to new U of T employees who identify as racialized

CONTACT:

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