

FINAL REPORT

of the
Task Force on Needs of
Muslim Students



www.noracism.ca
Canadian Federation of Students

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The International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

General Inquiries regarding this document should be directed to:

Canadian Federation of Students

Ontario Office

180 Bloor Street West, Suite 900

Toronto, Ontario M5S 2V6

Tel (416) 925-3825

Fax (416) 925-6774

Email federation@cfsontario.ca taskforce@cfsontario.ca

WWW cfsontario.ca noracism.ca

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Summary of Recommendations

Discrimination and Islamophobia

- Recognise at the administrative level, the institution's obligation to accommodate the needs of Muslim students in a way that is consistent with the Ontario Human Rights Code.
- Expand awareness and educational anti-racism campaigns to target Islamophobia on campus.
- Encourage students who have experienced Islamophobic and racist acts to immediately register complaints with the appropriate campus office (security, equity services, ombuds, etc.) and the Ontario Human Rights Commission.
- Students' unions and Muslim students' associations should familiarise with reporting mechanisms at the institutional level and through the Ontario Human Rights Commission in order to help encourage and facilitate a culture of reporting Islamophobia and racism on campus.
- Institutions and their security staff should take seriously and promptly address reports of Islamophobic incidents.
- Statistics regarding the number of Islamophobic complaints and their nature should be compiled and maintained by the institution, the Ontario Human Rights Commission, students' unions, and other relevant bodies.
- Conduct a review of institutional policies that relate to discriminatory practices to ensure sufficiency in dealing with Islamophobic incidents and creating a permanently safe and welcoming environment.
- Convene meetings among relevant administrators, students' unions, Muslim students' associations, faculty associations, and the campus media to recognise the collective responsibility to identify and stop Islamophobia and racism on campus.
- In consultation with students, develop an institutional response to Islamophobia and a plan to streamline, and make more effective, reporting mechanisms for Islamophobic acts.
- Improve and enhance institutional counselling services to properly address Muslim students' needs by, for example, hiring Muslim chaplains, similar to those that exist for other denominations.
- Implement mentorship initiatives to connect new students to students of similar faith.
- Develop training modules on Islamophobia for campus security and maintenance staff. Islamophobic graffiti, for example, should not be removed until it has been properly documented by security staff.

Women's Issues

- Students' unions, Muslim students' associations, and campus women's centres should promote the right of all women, especially Muslim women, to participate in campus activities free of discrimination and misinformed stereotypes.

Media

- Follow up factual errors in media publications by letters to the editor that clearly outline the error and requests a printed retraction in the next edition.
- Students should continue to critique media analysis of Islam and Muslim students via letters to their community and student newspapers.

- Encourage Muslim students and faculty to write for their student or community newspapers and other communications materials.

Academic Considerations

- Increase and institute recognition of religious observances on campus and in college and university policy by ensuring that information on Muslim religious observances is available to college/university administrators, faculty, academic and support staff, and students.
- Send out memoranda to professors and teaching staff in advance of religious holidays and observances.
- Increase flexibility for assignment due dates and exam scheduling to minimise or eliminate overlap with Friday prayer. Make provisions for alternate academic arrangements that are not more onerous than regularly scheduled assignments.
- Ensure that students are not penalised for missed class or lab time associated with religious observances.
- Ensure clear and expedient processes for dealing with religious/academic conflict.

Islam in the Classroom

- Integrate education modules on Islam and Islamophobia into training sessions for general teaching staff.
- Institutional academic bodies should seek to ensure that more courses are offered on Islamic studies and Muslim culture.
- Require academic instructors to rely on resource materials for courses on Islam that are based on evidence and scholarship.
- Ensure diversity within course materials. Materials discussed in the classroom should meet academic standards or be presented in the context of academic analysis.
- Teaching staff should not target discussion of Islam to Muslim students in the class.
- Muslim students should not be made to feel that they are the subject of class discussions regarding Islam.
- Train teaching staff in anti-racist teaching practices and methods for identifying and responding to racism and conflict in the classroom.
- Encourage Muslim graduates to consider working in academia.
- Extend equity considerations in hiring to include Muslim candidates.
- Promote the retention of Muslim faculty by ensuring a positive work environment.

Financial Barriers

- Federal and Ontario student financial aid that is delivered through the Canada Student Loans Program and Ontario Student Assistance Program respectively should reduce reliance on a loan-based financial aid system.
- Governments should reduce financial barriers for students through tuition fee protection in the form of tuition fee freezes and reductions along with targeted financial aid delivered through need-based grants.
- Income contingent loan repayment and other forms of regressive financial aid schemes should be rejected by policy makers.
- Education related government loans should not accumulate interest, even after graduation.

Prayer Space

- Ensure that adequate prayer space is acknowledged as a human rights issue and made available by the institution.
- Develop a campus plan that involves students and ensures multiple prayer spaces across campus for easy access from all points and that new building plans account for prayer space and ablution washing facilities if necessary.
- With involvement of students, conduct regular audits of the adequacy and availability of prayer space facilities including the size, convenience of locations, ablution washing facilities and separate accommodation for women.
- Make prayer space audit results publicly available, especially to new students who need them in order to decide where to study.
- Ensure permanency, upkeep and proper location of prayer space on campus.

Food Services

- Conduct a food service audit with campus food services to assess kitchen facilities and food service delivery processes to determine areas of implementation and improvement of halal food provisions.
- Universities and colleges should expand their food choices on campus and provide more halal options, especially in residence cafeterias and food services. Halal food should be provided at the same quality and costs as non-halal food.
- Clearly identify halal options on menus and in campus food service facilities. Ensure clear labelling of halal food and food ingredients.
- Improve training of food service staff in the preparation of halal food, including training food service employees to change sanitary gloves and wash cutlery and surfaces after preparing non-halal food.
- Include a requirement to provide halal food and halal practices in any new contracts with food service providers. Modify existing contracts to provide both halal food and halal practices.
- Create standard policy to allow Muslim students to bring outside food options for larger catered events, including allowances for Muslim students to bring in culturally appropriate food on Iftar and other religious holidays.

Orientation and Events

- Ensure that orientation planning is open to, and reflective of, Muslim students and their organisations.
- Provide inclusivity training for orientation event organisers.
- Include in orientation packages and summer mailouts the information necessary for Muslim students to properly access necessary campus and community services, such as local mosques, prayer room locations, Muslim students' associations and central students' unions' contact information and opportunities to meet with Muslim students who attend college or university for mentorship and advice.
- Include dry options in events and programmes, where alcohol is not served. For example, events in the evening can be "dry" for the first hour or so before making alcohol available.

Athletic Services

- Liaise with responsible university officials to determine decision-making structures for scheduling athletics and recreation facilities.
- Conduct a student survey on athletic requirements to determine the need for gender specific hours including a use assessment of athletic facilities (i.e. identifying peak and off-peak hours, usage, etc.).
- Improve access and athletic facilities for Muslim women students.
- Provide women-only gym time. Provide curtains or screens over the observation windows looking into the swimming pool during women-only swim times.

Residence Life

- Ensure that more Muslim dons are hired for campus residence, or contact information for Muslim dons at the residence complex be made available.
- Provide training for residence dons and general information to residence occupants about the needs of Muslim students, especially as they pertain to alcohol.
- Increase availability of halal food in residence and allow flexibility for students to prepare their own food.
- Allow Muslim students to opt-out of mandatory meal plans where insufficient halal options exist.
- Institute alcohol-free residences on campus.

Student Engagement and Representation

- Implement equity and diversity programming in campus events, including those organised by campus students' unions and administrations.
- Cross promote student union and Muslim students' association services.
- Ensure proper funding of central students' unions and Muslim students' associations to properly service Muslim students.

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Introduction to the Task Force

Task Force Members

- Sheikh Faisal ABDUR-RAZAK:** Imam and the President of the Islamic Forum of Canada
- Terry DOWNEY:** Executive Vice-President of the Ontario Federation of Labour and Chair of the Women's Committee of the Toronto & York Region District Labour Council.
- Grace Edward GALABUZI:** Assistant Professor of Politics and Public Administration, Ryerson University, and Research Associate at the Centre for Social Justice in Toronto.
- Jesse GREENER:** Ontario Chairperson of the Canadian Federation of Students.
- Alex KERNER:** Equity and Campaigns Organiser of the Ryerson Students' Union.
- Ausma MALIK:** Vice-President Equity of the Students' Administrative Council at the University of Toronto.
- Diana RALPH:** Jewish activist involved with the Campaign to Stop Secret Trials in Canada, and Professor at Carleton University
- Mohamed SHEIBANI:** President of Muslim Students' Association National of the U.S. and Canada.
- Zubeda VAHED:** Board member of the Federation of Muslim Women and former Equity Officer: Race Relations of the Peel District School Board and Education Officer of the Ministry of Education.
- Wahida Chishti VALIANTE:** National Vice-President of the Canadian Islamic Congress.

For more complete biographies of each of the Task Force members, please refer to the Appendices.

Background

The Canadian Federation of Students represents over one-half million college and university students in Canada and over 300,000 students in Ontario. The Federation advocates for high-quality post-secondary education in Canada that is accessible to all, regardless of socio-economic background, race, gender, ability, citizenship, nationality, sexuality or religious affiliation. While the Federation identifies economic barriers as the most significant hindrance to equal access to post-secondary education, intolerance to diverse religious and cultural practices can also serve to prevent equitable access to universities and colleges in Ontario.

At the January 2006 Ontario General Meeting of the Canadian Federation of Students, members voted to initiate a task force to examine the needs of Muslim students at Ontario colleges and universities. This initiative was a response by students' unions to increasing concerns brought forward by Muslim students about inadequate campus prayer space, experiences of islamophobia and discrimination on campus, and a general lack of progress among post-secondary institutions in accommodating the needs of Muslim students.

This report also is also well timed and well considered in the Ontario context, given Canada's changing demographics. Canada's Muslim population is increasing faster than any other religious group in the country. Statistics Canada research shows that between 1991 and 2001, the Canadian Muslim population grew to over 3%, an increase of over 140%. Ontario is home for the vast majority (61%) of Canada's entire Muslim population. And with 5% of its population being Muslim, Toronto has the highest concentration of Muslims compared to anywhere else in Canada and the United States. Coupled with this strong growth of the Muslim population, Canadian Muslims are on average the youngest of any Canadian religious group. At a median age of 28.1 years, a disproportionately large number of Muslim students study in Canadian institutions of higher learning. Given these telling statistics, it is not surprising that students have given themselves the mandate to better understand the needs of Muslim students on Ontario campuses.

Goals of the Task Force

The goals of the Task Force are as follows:

- Provide a forum for Muslim students and campus community members to speak out about Islamophobia and the needs of Muslim students;
- Promote awareness and education about Islamophobia and the needs of Muslim students and campus community members in Ontario;
- Document incidents of Islamophobia and institutional responses on campuses in Ontario;
- Develop strategies and document successes in addressing the needs of Muslim students in Ontario and make recommendations that are both campus-specific and system-wide; and
- Produce a Task Force Report on the hearings and promote its findings to administrators, government, and the general community to be released on March 21, the International Day for the Elimination of Racism.

The Task Force was formed in the summer of 2006 and is composed of 10 members representing a diverse range of experiences pertaining to Muslim students and discrimination. Members hosted hearings, shared expertise and insight to the project, and wrote reports that summarised their experiences and observations made while participating in the Task Force and the hearings. Those reports have informed the findings and recommendations in this report.

Hearings were scheduled across the province of Ontario from September, 2006 to March, 2007. Nearly 1,000 students participated in the 17 hearings that occurred across the Ontario, where verbal and written statements submitted to the Task Force.

Campus Hearings

Organising for the Task Force on the Needs of Muslim Students came about with a group of nearly one dozen Muslim and non-Muslim campus organisers who volunteered to assist with the development, implementation, and structure of a hearing. Throughout the summer of 2006, the Task Force developed materials to promote the Task Force, developed a plan for advertising and promoting hearings on campus, consulted with the Muslim Students' Association National, assisted with building networks of Muslim students and Muslim student organisations on campuses across the province, and provided important insight about cultural sensitivities and organisational strategies of inclusiveness and respect. In the fall of 2006, the launch hearing of the Task Force took place at the University of Toronto, which proved successful in bringing together Muslim and Non-Muslim students to share their experiences with Islamophobia.

Subsequent hearings were largely organised by local students' unions, in collaboration with campus Muslim students' associations and other relevant student groups. They began by forming a campus committee, setting a date for a hearing, and selecting panellists who could appropriately address the issues faced by Muslim students on that particular campus. Three to four panel members participated in

each hearing, including at least one Task Force member at almost every hearing, providing introductory remarks to give context to the project and encourage participants to provide an oral or written statement. They heard from hearing participants, while taking notes and reflecting on emerging themes.

The Federation developed an Organising Manual and materials to publicise the Task Force, including posters, pamphlets, stickers, buttons and the website: www.noracism.ca.

The purpose of the campus hearings was to provide a forum for Muslim students to speak out; encourage awareness and education about the needs of Muslim students in Ontario; and document incidents of Islamophobia on the campus. The hearings were open to all members of the campus community but statements were received by students and campus community members who are Muslim, or who have experienced Islamophobia. Participants were asked to provide statements on the following suggested topics, but were not limited to these issues:

- Access to adequate prayer space
- Access to halal food on campus
- Student loans and barriers to financial aid
- Facing Islamophobia and stereotypes
- Incidents of intimidation, prejudice, or hate
- Racial profiling on campus
- Being a student representative
- Involvement in their students' union

- Representation of Muslims in institutional decision-making
- Diversity of faculty, staff and students
- Diversity in course availability and content
- Exam and course scheduling around prayer times and other religious observances
- Islamophobia in the classroom
- Inclusive programming for events and community services (e.g. alcohol presence)
- Campus security, ombuds and administrative sensitivity to Islamophobia and the Muslim community
- Women-only hours in the athletic centre

Statements were guided by a series of questions (included in the Appendices).

At each hearing, a thorough consent process was administered by campus organisers to allow participants to agree to have their stories audio- or video-recorded and used in the final report of the Task Force. Following the hearings, written statements were compiled and coded to identify the major themes that have become the basis for this report. Oral statements were reflected in notes taken by campus organisers at the hearing, or transcribed from hearing recordings. These statements were used to elaborate on the themes identified and offer detailed descriptions of the events and issues identified in the report.

An Overview of the Ontario Human Rights Code

The Ontario Human Rights Code

In order to provide a framework for analysing and understanding themes from the hearings, the Task Force reviewed the rights afforded to individuals through the Ontario Human Rights Code (the “Code”). This section provides an overview of how the Code protects individuals in Ontario from racial discrimination—including Islamophobia—and harassment as well as their right to religious beliefs and practices.

The Ontario Human Rights Code protects individuals from discrimination based on race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, religion, sex, sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status (including same sex partners), family status, receipt of public assistance and record of offences. Organisations in Ontario, including post-secondary institutions, are responsible for implementing policies and practices that uphold the Code.

Definitions and Concepts

Racism/Racial Discrimination

The Code defines racism as the assumption that one racialised group is inherently superior to others. It can be openly manifested in racial slurs, jokes or hate crimes or in more subtle forms such as lack of understanding or accommodation for the beliefs and practices of racialised individuals or groups.

Racism exists at a number of levels, in particular (1) individual (2) institutional or systemic, and (3) societal. Institutional/systemic and societal forms of racism manifest through the institutional policies and practices and decision-making processes that prevent the equal participation of all individuals and groups regardless of race, place of origin, and colour. For example, while many universities and colleges may have anti-discrimination policies on their campuses, a lack of enforcement of such policies can lead to systemic racist practices.

Islamophobia

The Ontario Human Rights Commission recognises Islamophobia as an emerging form of racism. The Code defines Islamophobia as stereotypes, bias or acts of hostility towards individual Muslims or followers of Islam in general. In addition to individual acts of intolerance and racial profiling, Islamophobia leads to viewing Muslims as a greater security threat at an institutional, systemic and societal level.

Racialisation

Racialisation is the expression of racist beliefs and practices. Individuals may have prejudices about physical features, accent or manner of speech, name, clothing, diet, beliefs and practices, leisure preferences, places of origin, and citizenship. Stereotyping is a form of racialisation which occurs when people use social categories such as race, colour, ethnic origin, place of origin, religion, etc. to describe, predict behaviour, beliefs and practices about others. It is often based on misconceptions, incomplete information and/or false generalisations. For example, describing a woman as submissive and oppressed because she wears hijab is a stereotype based on false generalisations about women’s roles in society.

Racial Profiling

Racial profiling is any action undertaken for reasons of safety, security or public protection that relies on stereotypes about race, colour, ethnicity, ancestry, religion, or place of origin rather than on reasonable suspicion, to single out an individual for greater scrutiny or different treatment. Individuals perceived to be Muslims or of Middle-Eastern origin have increasingly become targeted as “terrorists” and labelled as public threats to national security and public safety.

Racial Harrassment

According to the Code, harrassment is unwelcome offensive comments or behaviour such as: racial slurs or jokes; racial name calling or nicknames; racial cartoons or graffiti; comments ridiculing individuals because of race-related characteristics, religious dress, etc.; singling out an individual for teasing or jokes related to race, ancestry, place of origin or ethnic origin; or circulating racially offensive jokes, pictures or cartoons.

Protection for Religion and Religious Beliefs

Religion is also a prohibited ground of discrimination under the Code. The Code protects personal religious beliefs, practices and observances.

Religious Discrimination and Harrassment

Discrimination based on religion includes any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on religion or belief. Harrassment on the grounds of religion involves conduct or comments concerning religious beliefs or practices which are known or ought to be known to be offensive.

“Needs of the Group”

The term “needs of the group” means the needs of the religious group to which an individual

belongs. The group’s needs, such as religious practices and observances, must be assessed in order to accommodate the individual.

Constructive Discrimination

Constructive discrimination occurs when a policy or practice negatively affects members of a group identified by a prohibited ground of discrimination under the Code. Constructive discrimination can be determined when an individual has been subject to an exclusion, restriction or preference that negatively affects members of a group protected by the Code. Unless an exception is provided by law, constructive discrimination cannot be tolerated unless the organisation takes reasonable steps to accommodate the affected person. For example, policies that can negatively affect the right to religious practice can include dress codes, break policies, recruitment and job applications, flexible scheduling, and religious leave.

Poisoned Environment

Harrassment, even a single statement or incident, can create a poisoned environment in a workplace or organisation. In a poisoned environment, racialised individuals or certain religious groups are consequently subjected different terms and conditions (such as in employment, tenancy, or services). Such instances give rise to a denial of equality under the Code.

A poisoned environment is based on the nature of the comments or conduct and the resulting impact on an individual or group rather than on frequency of the behaviour. A co-worker, supervisor, professor, or fellow student can all engage in conduct that poisons the environment of a racialised person. While the notion of a poisoned environment has predominantly arisen in the workplace, it also applies to other arenas where it results in unequal access to services.

A poisoned environment can specifically arise in educational institutions. Educational institutions have a duty to maintain a positive and non-discriminatory learning environment.

Students are entitled to be free from a poisoned educational environment created either by inappropriate behaviour of an instructor or by other students. Educational providers have a responsibility to take immediate steps to intervene in situations where racial slurs, intimidation or harrasment occur.

Issues in Education

The Ontario Human Rights Commission has identified educational institutions as an area of concern for perpetuating various forms of racial discrimination. Concerns that have been identified include streaming, bias in testing and evaluation, monocultural and exclusionary curriculum, unfair and unusual discipline, low expectations, failing to deal with racial incidents and bullying, lack of role models, negative attitudes and stereotypes and a lack of programmes that support the needs and concerns of racialised students.

Addressing Racism

Institutional Policies, Practices and Decision-Making Processes

According to the Supreme Court of Canada, institutions and laws must be designed to be inclusive of all persons. Institutions have a duty to ensure its practices create inclusiveness, and not merely to make exceptions to allow individuals to fit into an existing system. Additionally, they are responsible to be aware of whether their policies, practices, and decision-making processes have an adverse impact resulting in systemic discrimination of individuals or groups. The Ontario Human Rights Commission outlines that, where barriers

already exist within institutions, they should be actively identified and removed.

An institution violates the Code where it directly or indirectly, intentionally or unintentionally infringes the Code or authorises, condones or adopts behaviour that contradicts the Code. Institutions have a human rights duty not to condone or further a discriminatory act that has already occurred. Therefore, when an allegation of discrimination or harrasment is brought forth to an institution, it is not acceptable to overlook the complaint.

The Duty to Accommodate

Not only does the Code require that institutions ensure that their policies and practices protect the right to be free from discrimination, they also have the duty to protect the right: the “duty to accommodate.” The duty arises when a person’s religious beliefs conflict with a requirement, qualification or practice. Accommodation may modify a rule or make an exception to all or part of it for the person requesting accommodation.

The Code requires organisations to accommodate a person’s religious beliefs through work practices (dress codes, work schedules, shift work), break policies (so that members may observe periods of prayer at times during the day), and flexible scheduling (substitution or rescheduling of days when an employee’s religious beliefs do not permit her to work certain hours). Flexible scheduling may include: alternative arrival and departure times on the days when the person cannot work for the entire period, or use of lunch times in exchange for early departure or staggered work hours.

Task Force Themes and Findings

Upon the conclusion of the 17 hearings and the compilation of nearly 500 individual statements, the Task Force members were able to identify 3 major themes: Overt Discriminatory and Islamophobic Acts on Campus, Academic Considerations, and Extra-Curricular Considerations.

Islamophobia on Campus

Poisonous Learning Environment on Campus

Following the attacks on the World Trade Towers in 2001, Muslims all over the world reported feeling “under the microscope.” The Task Force notes that this feeling still persists on Ontario campuses and, in some cases, is reportedly growing. During the Task Force hearing at McMaster University, for example, one student reported having been informed at a previous workshop on Islamophobia that campus security staff were instructed to utilise racial profiling by intercepting and reporting any “Muslim looking” individuals who walked along the path near the McMaster Nuclear Reactor and campus residences and provide those names to the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS).

Apart from stories like the above, opinions and experiences ranged in regards to the atmosphere on campuses and treatment of Muslim students. Many Task Force hearing participants felt that Muslims were generally accepted and respected. However, there were many other participants who detected a negative atmosphere on campus toward Islam and Muslim students ranging from general suspicion, staring, and unequal treatment to hostile encounters and verbal assault. Generally, Task Force participants reported worse treatment for those Muslim students that were more identifiably religious, such as women dressed in hijab, men wearing a beard, or those dressed in traditional garb.

“I hear a lot of ignorant comments towards Muslims and Islam said in front of me by people who don’t know that I’m a Muslim,” University of Windsor student.

A student at the University of Toronto described the atmosphere on campus: “Even though I haven’t, myself, experienced any physical acts of aggression or any outright Islamophobic comments, it feels like there is a measure of mistrust and suspicion and undue attention to my personal appearance. I have heard people snicker behind my back and say things like ‘why is she here?’”

A participant from the University of Windsor wearing the hijab echoed this sentiment: “I feel that other students are not welcoming and they look at me as if I’m a terrorist. They don’t talk to me in the same way they talk to other people.” A female student at McMaster University recounted a situation while studying in her school library when a man began yelling at her, telling her to “go back home,” and criticising her educational background.

“It feels like Muslims have to sit back and swallow these bitter pills in Canadian society,” McMaster University student.

Regularly, participants cited ignorance as the cause for this negativity and students suggested that more awareness and education was needed to demystify Islam and Muslims. Often Muslim students encouraged each other to be proud of who they were and take on the job combatting ignorance through personal conversations and awareness campaigns.

“As a Muslim student I think sometimes one of the biggest challenges is that we feel ashamed or uncomfortable correcting or educating our professors, and fellow students, about our beliefs,” York University student.

Other Task Force hearing participants expressed a sense of isolation. Some attributed this to a lack of religious guidance on campus. Concern was raised that counselling services were either unavailable or inadequate to deal with Islamophobia on campus. Some students explained that they could not avail themselves of counselling services because counsellors did not fully understand the scope of their problems. On campuses where there were large numbers of Muslim students, some participants suggested enhancing counselling services by incorporating a position akin to a campus chaplain. This person would be qualified to give religious advice and better relate to Muslim

“I’ve faced many situations where I have felt the need to talk to someone but there is just no one. We have a strong MSA but I think there is also a real need on campus for someone who is qualified to give religious advice,” University of Windsor student.

students who may be trying to learn in a poisoned or hostile environment.

Recommendations

- Recognise at the administrative level, the institution’s obligation to accommodate the needs of Muslim students in a way that is consistent with the Ontario Human Rights Code.
- Expand awareness and educational anti-racism campaigns to target Islamophobia on campus.

Overt Discriminatory and Islamophobic Acts on Campus

Several students noted that they themselves, or others they knew, had been the target of discriminatory or hate inspired acts. Some Task Force hearing participants noted that their campus Muslim students’ association’s (MSA) posters were frequently vandalised or ripped off the walls while other posters nearby were left in place. At Lakehead University, a participant reported that MSA posters were dumped into the garbage. At Queen’s University, a banner outside of the MSA space was lit on fire the last night of Ramadan. One participant recounted the reaction of a group of students reviewing a newspaper article that reported the incident: “[A] friend heard some girls reading the article out loud, and saying that they didn’t understand why ‘those people’ were making such a big deal about it and why do they feel they have the right to get justice for everything.”

Just days after the Task Force on the Needs of Muslim Students hosted a hearing at the University of Guelph, a group of 4 individuals vandalised the exterior of the MSA office late at night after Muslim students locked themselves inside for safety. Racist graffiti directed toward Muslims and Palestinians was written on the wall and office door. Contents of nearby garbage cans were dumped in the hallway outside the office.

More direct acts of hate included being called a “terrorist,” associated with the Taliban, accused

of carrying a bomb, and physical attacks. A York University student said “people watch us and make certain comments, like ‘Taliban.’ It is dehumanising and they are demonising minorities.” The Federation’s Noto Islamophobia, anti-Semitism and Racism campaign was originally motivated by an incident of hate at Ryerson University in 2004 where the multi-faith prayer space had been defaced with graffiti on the wall stating “Die Muslim Die.” In September of 2006, Arab and Muslim students’ associations discovered death threats slipped under their office doors, which stated “Those who follow the Islam faith need to be killed in the worst possible way imaginable.”

At the University of Toronto, a student was followed into a washroom by a female assailant who shoved a flyer into the student’s chest, pushed her backwards, and said, “You need this, you’re a Muslim.” The flyer advertised a rally supporting Denmark over the controversial Danish cartoon of the Prophet Mohammad. After the student threw the flyer away, the assailant asked her why she had discarded it, and began yelling at her and her friend to “go back to [their] fucking country and bomb it,” then proceeded to yell: “Fucking Muslim terrorists.” At George Brown College, the Pakistani Students’ Association was raising funds for earthquake relief and received an email from another students’ organisation asking if they would really be using the funds for terrorist training.

Several students noted that college or university administrations were often either slow to condemn such acts or refused to classify them as Islamophobic or hate inspired. A student from Queen’s University said “I was walking home with friends on Johnson Street, part of the student ghetto, as we walked by them and I felt something that hit my back. I was told that I was a ‘Fucking Arab.’” As a student at the University, he felt he had no means of recourse.

Recommendations

- Encourage students who have experienced Islamophobic and racist acts to immediately register complaints

with the appropriate campus office (security, equity services, ombuds, etc.) and the Ontario Human Rights Commission.

- Students’ unions and Muslim students’ associations should be familiar with reporting mechanisms at the institutional level and through the Ontario Human Rights Commission in order to help encourage and facilitate a culture of reporting Islamophobia and racism on campus.
- Institutions and their security staff should take seriously and promptly address reports of Islamophobic incidents.
- Statistics regarding the number of Islamophobic complaints and their nature should be compiled and maintained by the institution, the Ontario Human Rights Commission, students’ unions, and other relevant bodies.
- Conduct a review of institutional policies that relate to discriminatory practices to ensure sufficiency in dealing with Islamophobic incidents and creating a permanently safe and welcoming environment.
- Convene meetings among relevant administrators, students’ unions, Muslim students’ associations, faculty associations, and the campus media to recognise the collective responsibility to identify and stop Islamophobia and racism on campus.
- In consultation with students, develop an institutional response to Islamophobia and a plan to streamline, and make more effective, reporting mechanisms for Islamophobic acts.
- Improve and enhance institutional counselling services to properly address Muslim students’ needs by, for example, hiring Muslim chaplains, similar to those that exist for other denominations.
- Implement mentorship initiatives to connect new students to students of similar faith.

- Develop training modules on Islamophobia for campus security and maintenance staff. Islamophobic graffiti, for example, should not be removed until it has been properly documented by security staff.

Women's Issues

The Task Force noted that there were generally more women than men who participated in the hearings and that women were relatively more likely to make comments.

"In Canada and other non-Islamic countries, Women are the ambassadors of Islam," University of Ottawa student.

It was mentioned by several participants, both men and women alike, that women are more regularly confronted with contentious issues based on their religion than are men. Participants related this to the fact that women dressed in hijab are more identifiable as Muslim than many men. Female students who wear the hijab said they were frequently questioned or treated differently by their peers. In addition to having to defend their religion generally, the Muslim value of modesty has resulted in women, particularly those in hijab, having to defend themselves against the allegation that they are self-oppressed. Ironically, it was noted by Task Force members that Muslim women were often the most outspoken and passionate defenders of themselves and their religion.

At the University of Toronto Mississauga's art gallery, a video was shown of a Muslim woman

"I know women who don't come to campus wearing a head scarf, like I'm wearing right now, because they know they are going to be targeted," Ryerson University student.

removing her hijab, and was seen to be very offensive to many students. The video was also shown in a class.

Of those people who reported experiencing overt acts of aggression most often it was women dressed in hijab. A woman at the University of Windsor reported that her friend, who was dressed in hijab, was pushed onto a busy street and called a "stupid Paki." The speaker went on to say there had been incidents where a few of her female friends had been verbally harassed and called "witches," "ninjas," and "nuns."

Finally, it was of interest to Task Force members that in remote areas, particularly at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay and Laurentian University in Sudbury, women comprised a smaller proportion of the Muslim students at Task Force hearing than men, whereas the reverse was generally true for campuses in urban area. Task Force participants in remote areas confirmed that there were very few Muslim women on campus and speculated that, in those areas, women in hijab would stand out even more than elsewhere and may be subject to enhanced discrimination.

Recommendation

- Students' unions, Muslim students' associations, and campus women's centres should promote the right of all women, especially Muslim women, to participate in campus activities free of discrimination and misinformed stereotypes.

Media

Participants to the Task Force hearings noted that both on- and off-campus media outlets have a serious impact on the perception of Islam and Muslims. At Task Force hearings there were several references to the re-publishing and distribution of the now infamous Danish Muhammad cartoon by some campus press. Some went so far as to create their own cartoons. Participants also referenced articles that had been published in the student newspaper as not only misquoting passages from the Quran, but fabricating myths.

Students at Ryerson University referenced a particularly disturbing article that ran in the Eyeopener, a student newspaper on that campus, entitled “Muslims Playing for Power.” The article focused on the election of the first Muslim (also the first student of colour) as president of the central students’ union on campus. The article conflated this small step toward equality with a ‘take over’ by Muslims on that campus. In a letter responding to the Eyeopener’s article, Ryerson professor and Task Force member Grace-Edward Galabuzi wrote: “History is replete with regrettable outcomes of sensational conflation of the ‘power’ of minorities.”

The article and Galabuzi’s response are included in the Appendices.

Recommendations

- Notify offices of human rights and anti-discrimination on campus of factual errors and prejudicial depictions in the campus media and encourage campus publications to acknowledge the problem and remedy damage done.
- Students should continue to critique media analysis of Islam and Muslim students via letters to their community and student newspapers.
- Encourage Muslim students and faculty to write for their student or community newspapers and other communications materials.

Academic Considerations

Religious Accommodations

An institution’s responsibility to accommodate students’ religious obligations is not only necessary under the Ontario Human Rights Code, but also enables higher learning to be inclusive and dynamic.

One of the most egregious stories of an institution’s failure to accommodate recorded by the Task Force comes from the University of Western Ontario. Muslim students at that

university who were taking an introductory drawing course—a requisite course for continuation in the Fine Arts programme—requested academic accommodation in relation to a nude drawing segment. Their goal was to develop an alternate assignment in consultation with the course professor that would allow them to learn the underlying skills of the assignment in a more suitable way for them. This arrangement would have prevented those who were uncomfortable with the assignment from simply having to skip it and fail that segment of the course, as had previous students. Instead of making that accommodation, the University of Western Ontario Senate intervened and gave Muslim students an ultimatum: draw the nudes or fail the course and be forced out of the Fine Arts programme altogether. If true, the Task Force believes that this would amount to a clear case of constructive discrimination, which is prohibited under the Ontario Human Rights Code and should be immediately rectified by the University.

Beyond such isolated incidents, two issues were generally cited for which academic accommodations were regularly needed: prayer and religious holidays. According to the Code, an institution is required to evaluate the needs of a group, including accommodations for religious observances and holidays.

Regular prayer is a fundamental tenet of Islam. It is common practice for Muslims to pray 5 times per day at specified intervals. Such practices can significantly overlap with students’ time on campus and in class. Participants of the Task Force’s campus hearings regularly outlined conflicts between prayer and their in-class academic obligations often with consequences to participation marks and tests or assignments.

A common concern identified at the hearings was that faculty members and the campus culture in general held different standards when it came to respecting the observations of different religious groups. A student at Carleton University tried to speak to his professor about the fact that he would have to leave class for

a period to pray, break fast, and return. The student reported: “He informed me that if I couldn’t perform properly I should just drop the class. I found this very intimidating in that a professor is someone I look up to. I was trying to open a dialogue.”

Most participants of the Task Force’s campus hearings lamented that Islamic holidays are not recognised by their institution. Eid ul-Fitr, which marks the end of the fasting month of Ramadan, and Eid ul-Adha, were most frequently mentioned as a day that students would like to be recognised.

In several instances, students mentioned that this holy day conflicted with classes, labs, tests or exams. Many students described that professors were often unaware of the significance of Eid and unaccommodating with respect to make-up exams and tests. “It’s highly stressful to see that you have to go up to the professor and try to explain to him. Some people just don’t want to go through the whole hassle of dealing with having an examination on a holiday,” said a student at McMaster University. Some students reported that their professors told Muslim students that they must provide a letter from their Imam, a Muslim religious leader, before they could be excused from class or allowed to re-take a test or exam. One student from McMaster University provided a letter from her Imam, but the professor still refused to believe that the student was Muslim.

“When I ask people how their Eid was, I am often saddened to hear that they were in an exam,” Ryerson University student.

Ramadan, a month long observance during which time Muslim students fast from dawn until sunset, was also cited as a time during which students would appreciate extensions and/or special accommodations for assignments. Muslims students who fast during Ramadan sometimes have to break fast during class time.

A campus organiser for York University made a presentation about the Task Force to the annual Thaqaalayn Muslim Association dinner, and began her presentation by asking how many students had ever broken fast during a lecture with a chocolate bar, to which dozens of students raised their hands.

Task Force hearing participants generally called for recognition of Eid as a high holy day for Muslims on campus. In addition, Shia Muslims identified the holy day of Ashura. A student at McMaster University summed up the sentiments of many Muslim students: “If they have Christmas for a month, can we have Eid one day?”

Many students reported that when they have attempted to request religious accommodation from the institutional administration, they have been told that the institution could not possibly accommodate the religious observances of everyone. A University of Toronto student approached a senior administrator prior to a meeting of the University’s Governing Council which was considering whether to make Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur University holidays where no exams were scheduled. When she asked about Eid and Diwali, she was told that “if these observances were declared holidays there would be no school.”

The Task Force did document some progressive policy at institutions where religious accommodations for students are mandated. Both the University of Guelph and Ryerson University, for example, recognise the institutional responsibility to make such accommodations by giving students the ability to make arrangements with their professors in the case of religious and academic conflict. By working together, the University of Guelph’s Central Students’ Association and Muslim Students’ Association have secured university-wide policy language that protects against such conflicts. This policy ensures that “accommodation[s] will be made to students who experience a conflict between a religious obligation and scheduled tests, mid-term examinations, final examinations, or requirements to attend classes and participate in laboratories...The instructor has a responsibility to provide reasonable alternative

arrangements that do not put the student at an academic disadvantage.” This is stronger than typical accommodations that students reported being able to secure on their own, which often included simply skipping certain assignments or tests and re-weighting the academic value of future course evaluations. Additionally, the policy outlines an appeal process if an arrangement is not to the student’s satisfaction. The Appendices contains policy from Ryerson University for the reader’s reference.

Recommendations

- Increase and institute recognition of religious observances on campus and in college and university policy by ensuring that information on Muslim religious observances is available to college/university administrators, faculty, academic and support staff, and students.
- Send out memoranda to professors and teaching staff in advance of religious holidays and observances.
- Increase flexibility for assignment due dates and exam scheduling to minimise or eliminate overlap with Friday prayer. Make provisions for alternate academic arrangements that are not more onerous than regularly scheduled assignments.
- Ensure that students are not penalised for missed class or lab time associated with religious observances.
- Ensure clear and expedient processes for dealing with religious/academic conflict.

Islam in the Classroom

Many students identified a ‘chilly climate’ throughout campuses regarding Islam. The misrepresentation of the Islamic religion was identified as a serious concern by many hearing participants. Specifically, students documented incidents from certain professors, course materials, articles in student newspapers, student clubs and campus services. The information presented was characterised as

inaccurate and, in some cases, offensive and “anti-Islamic.”

Many respondents reported incidents in which professors misrepresented Islam through the course materials (which some participants described as “unscholarly”), on their blogs, or during discussion, by using stereotypes, ignoring Islamic history and Islamic scholars, and teaching Islam from a Western perspective. A student from Laurentian University said that the professor for an Islamic Studies class frequently made uninformed comments about the practices of Muslims. When students challenged these comments, it was revealed that the professor had not studied Islam, but religion in general, and had relied on information about Islam from the Internet.

A student from York University talked about classes where the word “terrorism” was used almost synonymously with Islamic fundamentalism. “That isolates Muslim students and intimidates them. It creates for a very uncomfortable and awkward atmosphere for Muslim students where they are expected to say something in defence of their religion,” she said. The student suggested that instructors should be made aware of how some topics and some ways of characterising events can isolate students who otherwise could have something to say, but feel intimidated because they are afraid of being singled out. “Sometimes you feel like your opinion won’t be valued as much,” she said. Students on a number of campuses identified a lack of willingness on the part of some instructors to engage in a meaningful discussion on Islam. “Most topics discussed about Islam are about terrorism,” said a student from George Brown College. “To avoid arguments, the topic of Islam is just abandoned.” In addition, students reported the frequent experience that when stereotypical views of Islam were discussed, they were commonly accepted and not challenged by professors or other students.

Many students felt that professors should learn more about Islam to allow for meaningful discussions in class and to avoid the use of stereotypical and Islamophobic prejudices. It

was also reported that in some cases religious studies course books were biased against, and ignorant of, Islamic history and religion.

Students stressed a desire to see curricula place a greater emphasis on representing Islam, along with other world religions and cultures. Specifically, suggestions included more courses on Islam and consideration of Islamic history, themes of the Quran, and the Islamic world today. Furthermore, they suggested integration of Islamic perspectives into courses such as marketing, nursing and finance—areas where there are specific differences between Western and Islamic perspectives.

A student at Carleton University said “My professor was very knowledgeable in Islam, but used it in a negative light. During Ramadan he asked me if I could read. I said ‘what’? He said ‘you’re fasting, can you read?’ I said, ‘I am fasting but I am not stupid.’”

Negative stereotypes about women and Islam were in the classroom were frequently reported. A female student at the University of Windsor said “I was taking an Islamic Policy course and a student in the course confronted a woman wearing hijab during a discussion on women in Islam, and said ‘you’ve been learning lies’ in front of the entire class. There was not an adequate response from the professor and the student didn’t know where to turn.” In a political science class at York University, a fellow student likened Islam to a cult, to which the professor responded by saying that Islam “had done nothing other than support female circumcision and the subjugation of women”. “This statement hurt,” said the student. “Something I believed in was undermined and it came from a professor who was supposed to

be teaching objectively.” Another student from the University of Ottawa said: “In sociology and feminism classes we feel personally attacked with professors speak about Islam in a biased manner. A friend of mine was repeatedly put on the spot in her feminism class and told that Islam oppressed women. Another woman complained about a professor who spoke very rudely and in a derogatory manner about Islamic society in her sociology class.”

Recommendations

- Integrate education modules on Islam and Islamophobia into training sessions for general teaching staff.
- Institutional academic bodies should seek to ensure that more courses are offered on Islamic studies and Muslim culture.
- Require academic instructors to rely on resource materials for courses on Islam that are based on evidence and scholarship.
- Ensure diversity within course materials. Materials discussed in the classroom should meet academic standards or be presented in the context of academic analysis.
- Teaching staff should not target discussion of Islam to Muslim students in the class.
- Muslim students should not be made to feel that they are the subject of class discussions regarding Islam.
- Train teaching staff in anti-racist teaching practices and methods for identifying and responding to racism and conflict in the classroom.
- Encourage Muslim graduates to consider working in academia.
- Extend equity considerations in hiring to include Muslim candidates.
- Promote the retention of Muslim faculty by ensuring a positive work environment.

Extra-Curricular Considerations

Financial Barriers

Frustration with high tuition fees and the predominantly loan-based government financial aid system was expressed at many of the Task Force hearings. For Muslim students, financial barriers are particularly difficult to overcome because their beliefs forbid them from taking on loans because of their religious aversion to usury, or interest.

In some cases, Muslim students facing financial hardship had to make difficult compromises between their religious beliefs and financial obligations by taking loans in the hope that they could be paid off before interest started to accumulate after graduation. Consequently, the heavy psychological impact of looming debt repayment was identified as having great significance for Muslim students. Some students reported that they tried to cope with their debt by enrolling in part-time studies.

“Interest on OSAP loans is a problem for Muslims causing many to take a reduced course load so they can work and try pay down their debt before interest accumulates,” University of Toronto, Scarborough campus student.

One student pointed out that, while the Canada Student Loans Program and Ontario Student Assistance Program do not accrue interest for full-time students while studying, in some cases loans have been reported to go into interest-bearing repayment while students are still enrolled in their programme.

Some hearing participants speculated that, for every Muslim student who is struggling with the financial and moral implications of accumulating

debt to enrol in post-secondary education, there may be many others who have decided simply not to study at a college or university in Ontario. One student indicated that, with average debt loads in Ontario around \$25,000, many Muslim students are being turned off from attending college or university as they do not want to contradict their faith. Students drew attention to the fact that much of the debt students are facing is the direct result of the high, and growing, cost of post-secondary education.

Recommendations

- Federal and Ontario student financial aid that is delivered through the Canada Student Loans Program and Ontario Student Assistance Program should reduce reliance on a loan-based financial aid system.
- Governments should reduce financial barriers for students through tuition fee protection in the form of tuition fee freezes and reductions along with targeted financial aid delivered through need-based grants.
- Income contingent loan repayment and other forms of regressive financial aid schemes should be rejected by policy makers.
- Education related government loans should not accumulate interest, even after graduation.

Prayer Space

Lack of access to adequate prayer space was widely reported in the Task Force hearings. Regular prayer is a fundamental tenet of Islam. It is common practice for Muslims to pray 5 times a day at specified intervals. Such practices can significantly overlap with students' time on campus and in class. In addition to daily prayers throughout the week, Juma prayers on Friday are widely attended, typically by the vast majority of Muslims on campus (students and otherwise).

Many students endure cramped prayer facilities or pray in isolation in an unsuitable area within the institution. In some cases there are no prayer room facilities at all.

*“I’ve seen Muslims praying in the cracks and crevices all over Ryerson. It makes me incredibly sad and incredibly happy. We know our duty, but we don’t have space to pray,”
Ryerson University student.*

Ideal prayer space should include a segregated prayer space for women and men, which is often not available on campus. This can lead to staggered prayer sessions for men and women, resulting in further delays in students’ busy schedules.

Prayer location was reported as an additional barrier. On most campuses, particularly large ones, a single prayer facility is often not enough. Students find it difficult to travel across the campus for prayers and make it back to classes on time. One Sheridan College student stated that “[The prayer area] is in the residence so students are forced to sign in and buzz in which takes even more time which causes students to have to choose between praying and being late for class.” A Carleton University student stated: “There is not time to pray properly between class because there are often line ups.”

Currently, prayer facilities on campus should, but often do not, include a nearby ablution area for ritual washing before prayer. This extends the prayer process and forces Muslim students to use washroom facilities that were not designed for these purposes. Many hearing participants reported the discomfort they had experienced when interacting with non-Muslims, unfamiliar with the practice. Participants often reported that their non-Muslim peers were confused,

*“Ablutions as well can take the process to 15 minutes which is not convenient if you only have ten minutes between classes,”
Sheridan College student.*

embarrassed or even troubled when witnessing Muslims washing themselves before prayer in such public places.

Concern was raised that the general maintenance of prayer space was inadequate to keep up with the demand. Space is often unkept and unsanitary. At Ryerson University and elsewhere, complaints about the carpet on which students kneel and touch their forehead smelled foul and, despite requests for upkeep to the university administration, was eventually cleaned using student dollars. Also at Ryerson, original plans for new prayer space on campus had Muslim students exercising their holy observances only a few feet from the campus pub.

Most campuses now have multi-faith centres or rooms, which are sometimes exclusively relied upon to service Muslim students’ prayer needs. However, few can accommodate the growing number of Muslim students’ regular needs. Many of the participants of the Task Force hearings criticised college and university administrators’ unrealistic expectations that multi-faith centres could be considered a remedy to Muslim students’ prayer needs. For example, one Laurentian student stated: “The prayer space is shared with others, who may be uncomfortable with seeing students pray. They cannot ask the other clubs to leave, so they should have their own space. The scheduling interferes with Friday prayer schedule, and late classes interfere with the breaking of fast.”

“Why aren’t we given a room we can call our own? During Ramadan we shifted rooms every other day. That makes it difficult for people to come out and congregate in prayer” said a Ryerson student.

Participants recounted conflicts arising between religious student groups who are forced to reconcile their respective needs within an already over crowded multi-faith centre. There were reports of resentment toward Muslim students—whose demands on such a centre can be significant—by other users of these centres.

Finally, security of prayer space was raised as an issue. At Queen’s University, the prayer space was repeatedly broken into. During Ramadan, the Ramadan Kareem (a statement welcoming Ramadan) sign was even set on fire.

Recommendations

- Ensure that adequate prayer space is acknowledged as a human rights issue and made available by the institution.
- Develop a campus plan that involves students and ensures multiple prayer spaces across campus for easy access from all points and that new building plans account for prayer space and ablution washing facilities if necessary.
- With involvement of students, conduct regular audits of the adequacy and availability of prayer space facilities including the size, convenience of locations, ablution washing facilities and separate accommodation for women.
- Make prayer space audit results publicly available, especially to new students who need them in order to decide where to study.
- Ensure permanency, upkeep, and proper location of prayer space on campus.

Food Services

Lack of adequate food accommodations was also one of the most frequently identified concerns for Muslim students. Halal (which means “permissible”) food refers to certain foods, which are prepared in an appropriate fashion, that Muslims may eat under Sharia, or Islamic law. Many students noted that halal food options were not available on their school campuses, and they either had to bring meals or travel off campus to find halal foods. “We take halal food for granted,” said a student from McMaster who grew up always eating halal food and had to stop when attending university because it was too costly.

Halal food was particularly difficult to access in regions outside of the Greater Toronto Area: “Halal food is a great problem at Guelph” wrote

a Guelph University student, echoing another student who wrote: “Guelph is pretty good all around, except when it comes to food. Halal food is only served in one building only during special time periods. And the food they have is unappealing most of the time.” A student from Laurentian University said that when he gets hungry on campus all he can eat is “tuna or some chips.” He has to go home to cook, and often does not have the time to do this.

Even on campuses where halal food options were available, students mentioned that it was often overpriced, limited in variety, available at few cafeterias or of poor quality. At some campuses, the fast food chain Popeye’s provided the only halal food on campus. “Popeye’s, quite frankly, does not suffice,” said a student from the University of Toronto’s Scarborough campus. “Healthier, halal foods will benefit all students and should be implemented by Toronto universities.”

Many students also mentioned that they could only eat vegetarian food where halal meat was not available. This was a concern because of the lack of protein available in most vegetarian food on campus. Another commonly identified concern was in food preparation practices at on-campus food services which would risk the contamination of halal foods, such as use of the same oils, preparation surfaces, and gloves for non-halal and halal foods.

Recommendations

- Conduct a food service audit with campus food services to assess kitchen facilities and food service delivery processes to determine areas of implementation and improvement of halal food provisions.
- Universities and colleges should expand their food choices on campus and provide more halal options, especially in residence cafeterias and food services. Halal food should be provided at the same quality and costs as non-halal food.
- Clearly identify halal options on menus and in campus food service facilities.

- Ensure clear labelling of halal food and food ingredients.
- Improve training of food service staff in the preparation of halal food, including training food service employees to change sanitary gloves and wash cutlery and surfaces after preparing non-halal food.
- Include a requirement to provide halal food and halal practices in any new contracts with food service providers. Modify existing contracts to provide both halal food and halal practices.
- Create standard policy to allow Muslim students to bring outside food options for larger catered events, including allowances for Muslim students to bring in culturally appropriate food on Iftar and other religious holidays.

Orientation and Events

Orientation and social events help new students settle into campus life, engage in valuable networking opportunities, and generally help to cope with the many stresses associated with the fast pace of post-secondary education. For most students these opportunities are memorable and positive, but for many Muslim students these events are inaccessible, unaccommodating, and alienating. Inaccessible events can, at best, amount to missed opportunities and, at worst, contribute to a strong sense of exclusion.

The presence of alcohol was most frequently identified as a barrier to the equitable participation of Muslim students in events. Orientation events were particularly problematic because of the heavy integration of alcohol into events, and lack of halal or vegetarian food options. Alcohol was also identified as a barrier to Muslim students' participation in social functions throughout the year, often in relation to networking opportunities with faculty members.

Where students' unions are in control of orientation events and where they possess a level of sensitivity towards inclusive programming, these events can be positive and unifying experiences for the entire student

“There are lots of social events in my programme. Unfortunately, many like ‘meet your professor’ tend to be wine and cheeses. Muslims shouldn’t be at these events, but then they miss out on the experience of connecting with their teachers and learning outside of the classroom,”
University of Waterloo student.

body. Some students' unions have addressed these issues by ensuring that non-alcoholic activities are promoted during orientation week and halal food is available at events. A student from Ryerson University, for example, noted that the Ryerson Students' Union made a noticeable effort to include a level of diversity in their orientation events and in their outreach strategy. Apart from “dry” events where no alcohol is present, halal hot dogs were also available during orientation for the first time last year. Diverse musical acts also appealed to a variety of students' interests.

Other participants of the Task Force hearings agreed that more multicultural and inclusive events during orientation would generally lead to more participation among students, Muslim students in particular. At some campuses, a long history of non-inclusive orientation events has caused Muslim students, such as those

“I had a great opportunity to socialise with Muslim and non-Muslim students alike at our orientation event this year. Little things like having access to halal hot dogs meant a lot to my Muslim friends and I. It definitely gave us respect for our students’ union,”
Ryerson University student.

at the University of Waterloo, to contemplate organising a Muslim frosh week.

Participants of the Task Force hearings also noted the responsibility of institutions to ensure that opportunities for Muslim students are properly advertised. A student from Laurentian University suggested that, among the institution's orientation materials, information about local mosques and opportunities to meet with Muslim students should be included.

“I think it would be beneficial for orientation leaders at Western to concentrate less on getting their chants right and learn a little bit about inclusive events and how to reach out to more of the new student population,” University of Western Ontario student.

Recommendations

- Ensure that orientation planning is open to, and reflective of, Muslim students and their organisations.
- Provide inclusivity training for orientation event organisers.
- Include in orientation packages and summer mailouts the information necessary for Muslim students to properly access necessary campus and community services, such as local mosques, prayer room locations, Muslim students' associations and central students' unions' contact information and opportunities to meet with Muslim students who attend college or university for mentorship and advice.
- Include dry options in events and programmes, where alcohol is not served. For example, events in the evening can be “dry” for the first hour or so before making alcohol available.

Athletic facilities

Lack of access to athletic facilities was raised as an issue at many of the Task Force hearings. Many universities and colleges now charge a mandatory fee for athletic facilities. However, the facilities themselves are often inaccessible to Muslim women. Muslim women who wear hijab are forbidden to display their bodies to men.

Despite the requirement to pay athletic fees, many women mentioned that they were unable to use the facilities on campus because they do not have women-only hours in the gym or that the windows around in athletic facilities are not covered during women-only swim time.

Another woman talked about how, since Muslim women cannot remove their hijab in front of men, she could not take swimming lessons at her university. She had to travel across the city to take private swimming lessons in order to get credit for her kinesiology course, which required a swimming lesson.

One student from the University of Waterloo described her frustration at being charged a mandatory athletics fee and then being told by the aquatics coordinator that if she could not access the co-ed swimming facilities she would have to pay the cost of two lifeguards. A common suggestion was that there should be women-only hours or a separate room that would benefit both Muslim and non-Muslim women.

“There are so many women who would like to work out at our gym, but because of the amount of men there, they are not able to do this,” said a student from the University of Windsor.

Recommendations

- Liaise with responsible university officials to determine decision-making structures for scheduling athletics and recreation facilities.
- Conduct a student survey on athletic requirements to determine the need for gender specific hours including a use assessment of athletic facilities (i.e. identifying peak and off-peak hours, usage, etc.).
- Improve access and athletic facilities for Muslim women students.
- Provide women-only gym time. Provide curtains or screens over the observation windows looking into the swimming pool during women-only swim times.

Residence Life

Residence rooms are an important—and usually expensive—service for students, which allow them to be near their classes without having to contend with the often challenging housing market near campuses. Residence living is often of particular value for students whose permanent residence is far from campus. Living in a residence can also be an important way for students to become connected to campus life and to form the social networks that help them adjust to independent life. As indicated by many Task Force participants, however, residence life can become a major source of psychological and financial stress when Muslim students show up to campus and the conditions are incompatible with their religious obligations.

“For me it’s hard to cope because when I come home I don’t feel comfortable in my own residence lodgings, so I stay away even though I am tired or need a good place to study,” University of Toronto, Scarborough Campus Student.

Task Force hearing participants levelled many criticisms of campus residence facilities that did not properly accommodate Muslim students. For example, most residences do not allow students to cook for themselves, which was identified as a problem by many participants, especially where residence food options also do not include halal food choices or where such choices were in very limited supply. This problem is further compounded where residence living includes a mandatory meal plan with no halal food options, such as was reported to be the case at Lakehead University. General concern about campus food options, including food preparation and labelling were frequently expressed for residence food services.

Students identified the presence of alcohol as a particular challenge in the context of residence life. At Laurentian University, Muslim students identified that, because of the frequency of alcoholic beverages involved in socialising in residence, many avoided going to their residence because they felt uncomfortable there. Task Force hearing participants recounted cases where requests for smoke free and alcohol free residence houses resulted in roommates who nevertheless smoke and drank.

A student at Laurentian University suggested that universities provide a non-drinking living area for Muslim students and other non-drinkers. A student at Queen’s University also said his first year was difficult because there was a lot of heavy drinking in residence. In his second year he was lucky to have a residence don who was Muslim, with whom he would go for coffee and discuss problems in the residence and how to solve them.

Co-ed residences are also unacceptable for many Muslims, especially women. At Lakehead University, for example, it was reported that no segregated residence options were available. Even on women-only floors or dorms, Muslim women complained that they were never able to be fully at ease, in removing their hijab for example, because the likelihood of men being on the floor was always near and present. Similarly men reported discomfort with the constant flow of women on men-only

floors. One Muslim woman at the University of Toronto's Scarborough campus even recalled her roommate inviting a sexual partner to stay the night in their shared residence room. That woman promptly found new accommodations at some financial loss to herself. Another female participant recalled realising that a man was using the washroom in her women's residence floor as she was showering.

Generally, participants noted a lack of knowledge about the needs of Muslim students as they pertain to campus housing. At Laurentian University, a student was given a bible and cross upon entering residence. At Queen's University one student recalled her residence floor being decorated for Halloween and, despite the fact that she told people that she was not celebrating the holiday because of her religion, she was pressured to dress up.

Recommendations

- Ensure that more Muslim dons are hired for campus residence, or contact information for Muslim dons at the residence complex be made available.
- Provide training for residence dons and general information to residence occupants about the needs of Muslim students, especially as they pertain to alcohol.
- Increase availability of halal food in residence and allow flexibility for students to prepare their own food.
- Allow Muslim students to opt-out of mandatory meal plans where insufficient halal options exist.
- Institute alcohol-free residences on campus.

Student Engagement and Representation

On campuses where there was Muslim representation among the staff and elected directors of the students' union or council, participants frequently mentioned successful initiatives aimed at combating discrimination

and promoting equality for Muslim students. On campuses without representation through the students' union or council, participants noted that decisions and policies often did not reflect the best interests of Muslim students. "I don't feel that Muslims are adequately represented in the students' union, and as a result, many policies and decisions made by the University Students' Council do not have Muslim representation, especially with respect to recreational facilities," said a student from the University of Western Ontario.

At the University of Guelph, the Muslim Students' Association works closely with the Central Students' Association. The two students' associations successfully lobbied for a university-wide religious accommodation policy. Several times, students mentioned the importance of having a Muslim students' association (MSA) or Thaqualayn Muslim association (TMA) on campus. Some mentioned that there should be more funding for the MSA given its growing size on campus, and that there should be additional scholarships and bursaries for Muslims and other minority students. In addition, many referred to ways in which more students and members of the college or university community could be informed about Islam, including socials, programmes, events and other initiatives to build a stronger sense of unity on campus.

A student at George Brown said that she was excited to come to college and join the MSA. When she discovered that one did not exist, she started one herself. Local MSAs and TMAs were an essential part of organising Task Force hearings across the province and contributed enormous dedication and expertise to the initiative.

Some participants also noted that the MSA was marginalised on campus. During the students' union elections at Ryerson University last year, Muslim candidates from both slates repetitively had their posters torn down. These candidates were either involved in the MSA or were visibly Muslim (one woman dressed in hijab). For others, the lack of accommodation for religious

observance on campus was a barrier to their involvement in the students' union or MSA. "What I try to do is stay home and try to study at home and pray on my own times because it's easier for me to catch prayer," said a student at the University of Waterloo. "[That] causes us to miss out on events and join students' unions. I have wanted to join unions on campus like MSA, but so much workload combined with problems of praying I stayed at home because it was more easily manageable."

Recommendations

- Implement equity and diversity programming in campus events, including those organised by campus students' unions and administrations.
- Cross promote student union and Muslim students' association services.
- Ensure proper funding of central students' unions and Muslim students' associations to properly service Muslim students.

Implications and Conclusion

This report is the culmination of a comprehensive investigation into the first hand-experiences of Muslim students on campuses across Ontario and was intended to assess the breadth and scope of institutional accommodation of an important and growing segment of the campus population. It is not a formal research study and therefore does not purport to be conclusive. However, as this report demonstrates, instances of Islamophobia are not isolated; discrimination toward Muslim students is a systemic feature of Ontario's post-secondary education system.

Over the course of seven months, nearly 1,000 students participated at 17 on-campus hearings resulting in nearly 500 formal statements. In doing so, these students shared personal and intimate details of their lives with Task Force members in the hope of effecting change. It is the hope of the members of the Task Force on the Needs of Muslim Students that this report will accelerate change and support progressive change that will benefit all those who participated in the Task Force hearings.

Islamophobia, as defined in the Ontario Human Rights Code, is the use of stereotypes, biased or hostile acts of towards individual Muslims or followers of Islam in general. As this Report of the Task Force on the Needs of Muslim Students shows, Islamophobia is present on university and college campuses across Ontario. The Task Force found that Muslim students have been called “terrorist,” “Taliban,” “stupid Paki,” “witch,” and “Fucking Arab”- among many other hurtful epithets. In some extreme cases, Muslim students have been harrassed and assaulted on campus. Materials produced and displayed by Muslim students' associations have been vandalised, office spaces have been graffitied, and other forms of discrimination have occurred. Additionally, the Task Force found that Muslim women students experienced discrimination differently, based on their gender. Women talked about being belittled, ostracised from their peers—particularly if they wore hijab—and told that they are not adequately “educated” or “liberated.”

Islamophobia can be broadly conceptualised to include more subtle and covert forms of discrimination, lack of understanding, or lack of accommodation for the beliefs and practices of racialised individuals or groups. The most egregious examples of systemic Islamophobia took place in classrooms where professors and other students made uninformed and hurtful comments that promoted stereotypes of Islam and of Muslims and where discussions about Islam have been known to make students feel uncomfortable, intimidated, undervalued and “singled-out”.

The Task Force findings identify numerous instances of what the Ontario Human Rights Code refers to as a “poisoned environment,” where racialised individuals are subjected to an atmosphere that is different from those who do not experience harrassment. This was evident in ignorant comments from peers and professors, bathroom graffiti, racially biased and/or ignorant course content, and the students' own experiences of being viewed with “mistrust and suspicion.”

Respondents discussed a generalised lack of available resources to address incidents of discrimination and discriminatory policies. Muslim students' associations were often cited as a place where students could help meet each others' needs and come together as a community in the face of discrimination. However, too often these organisations also experience marginalisation on campus. Clearly, more needs to be done by post-secondary institutions to address Islamophobia in a meaningful way.

Failings in accommodating Muslim students were present, in some form or another, in all facets of campus life: from a dearth of appropriate food on campus to inadequate prayer space; from residence life and social events to inflexible administrations in accommodating religious observances; from

underrepresentation of Islam in the curriculum to the underrepresentation of Muslim faculty and student leaders.

In the context of a poisoned atmosphere, where students feel targeted, afraid and marginalised on the campus, a shortage of adequate prayer space is a safety issue. In the absence of prayer space, Muslim students who pray in stairwells or library carrels fear harassment and even assault.

Regarding dietary requirements (halal food), the limited selection at best or the complete absence at worst was one of the most frequent issues to come up at the deputations. Many hearing participants described themselves as being forced to eat non-halal meals, simply to avoid going hungry. In a number of cases, students admitted that they had also ceased other religious observances on campus because the climate was inhospitable, or it was physically not possible to maintain them.

The Ontario Human Rights Code clearly puts the onus on institutions and organisations to implement a human rights framework. According to the Code, organisations have a duty to be aware of their practices, policies and programmes and to ensure they are not having an adverse impact or resulting in discrimination vis-à-vis racialised persons or groups.

However, responsibility also lies with government to enforce the Ontario Human Rights Code and to ensure that its own policies and practices comply with the spirit and intent of the Code. As identified in this Report, the Islamic faith opposes usury and involvement with interest-bearing loans. Yet the bulk of the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) consists of interest-bearing loans. Interest on the loans is paid by the federal and Ontario governments until six months after a student ceases to be a full-time student. Many Muslim students are therefore excluded from accessing OSAP as a financial aid mechanism. For part-time students, the problem is worse because neither level of government current interest relief or what limited financial aid is available to part-time students. This issue requires

further investigation and action to ensure that all Ontarians have equal access to government programmes and services.

It is important to acknowledge the social and political context in which Muslim students are experiencing Islamophobia. Students have lives beyond the campus, and many of the participants related accounts of being harassed or targeted in public washrooms, on public transit, in malls, at work, and at the border while crossing to the United States. In the context of the “War on Terror” racial profiling has increased, and Islam has become synonymous with terrorism in many mainstream media contexts. Islamophobia existed prior to September 11, but the events on that day have given new meaning to representations of Islam, in many cases reinvigorating Islamophobia as an acceptable mainstream perspective.

The college or university campus should be a place where Islamophobic ideas are challenged and disabused, for the enlightenment of students, and for the assurance of equality in the context of learning. This report indicates that in too many instances, the campus can reinforce discriminatory behaviours and ideologies of the broader society. Often students’ unions or Muslim student organisations are a place of refuge for Muslim students, but without the support of the institution there is no assurance that every person is free from discriminatory or harassing behaviour based on religion, ethnic origin, citizenship, or any other grounds.

Currently, there is little academic research into the experience of Muslim students in Canada’s post-secondary education system. The Report of the Task Force provides a rich assessment of the atmosphere experienced by Muslim students, and draws on substantial first-hand experience to demonstrate the systemic nature of Islamophobia within institutions of higher learning. Nevertheless, this Report is only a first step; further investigation and monitoring of Islamophobia is required and post-secondary institutions must address this issue on an ongoing basis.

Action is required to address the atmosphere

of hate, discrimination and harassment that Muslim students experience within the post-secondary education system in Ontario. Fortunately, improving this atmosphere can be accomplished with the implementation of the relatively modest recommendations as this Report outlines. We urge all levels of policy- and decision-makers to implement the recommendations of the Task Force—all of which are in accordance with the Ontario Human Rights Code.

Task Force members also heard a number of positive stories, in which students, staff and faculty stood against Islamophobia and came together to successfully advocate for a safer, more inclusive campus. In these cases, rather than feeling more isolated in the face of racist and Islamophobic incidents, the campus community rebuilt and broadened its sense of

community, building the confidence of Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

As is evident from the recommendations above, the steps necessary for improving the on-campus atmosphere and for challenging Islamophobia requires simple action: awareness of the tenets of Islam to eliminate stereotypes and facilitate genuine engagement between students, staff and faculty; flexibility in course and exam scheduling; diversity in food choices that reflect cultural diversity; adequate prayer space that is secure and within reach of all areas of campus; and—perhaps most fundamentally—basic respect. Such a modest plan of action can—if implemented immediately—transform the educational experience of Muslim students, challenge racism on campus and create a healthier environment for all.

Appendices

Glossary

Like any other religion, there are diverse interpretations and rituals practiced in Islam. These terms are debated and discussed amongst Muslims, who vary vastly in their outlook and interpretation of the religion.

For the purposes of this Report, below are compiled some general definitions of important terms.

Ablution—ritual washing

Allah—God

Canada Student Loans Program (CSLP)—a federal student financial assistance programme. The Canada Student Loans Program was created in 1964. The Government of Canada directly finances all new loans issued on or after August 1, 2000. Administration of Canada Student Loans has become the responsibility of the National Student Loans Service Centre (NSLSC). There are two divisions of the NSLSC, one to manage loans for students attending public institutions and the other to administer loans for students attending private institutions. Ontario's access window to the CSLP is through OSAP offices.

Eid Ul Adha—The festival coinciding with the marking of the pilgrimage of Hajj, and commemorating the sacrifice by Prophet Abraham.

Eid Ul Fitr—This holiday and celebration marks the end of Ramadan, the month of fasting. One of the main religious festivals. The celebration lasts for three days.

Grants—Non-repayable up-front student financial assistance. They differ from scholarships in that they are needs-based.

Halal—Translated as “permissible” and generally used to refer to the types of food permissible by Islamic law. For example, for meat to be considered halal, it is required that the animal be slaughtered in a humane way and that the name of God be invoked. Pork or any pig-based products are not permissible in Islam.

Hijab—Literally translated, it is the Arabic word for “cover”. Typically, it is used to describe the Islamic headscarf worn by Muslim women.

Iftar—Refers to the evening meal (after sunset with the Maghrib prayer) for breaking the daily fast during the month of Ramadan. Iftar during Ramadan is often done as a community, with Muslims gathering to break their fast together. Traditionally, a date is the first thing to consume during Iftar when the fast is broken.

Imam—Typically the leader in a mosque who leads congregational prayers, and may be a spokesperson as well. In the Shia tradition, an Imam is an important leader and must possess certain specific criteria of lineage and scholarship.

Interest and Interest Relief—Provincial and federal student loans bear interest. The only exception to this is where the government has established an “interest-free” period while in-study or where interest relief is provided. During periods of interest relief the borrower is not required to make payments on either the outstanding principal of the loan or on the interest. The Government of Ontario and/or the Government of Canada pays the interest. Neither government makes payments to reduce the outstanding principal. Interest relief is granted for periods of six months, up to a

maximum of 30 months. The borrower may be eligible for extended interest relief of up to an additional 24 months provided they have not been out of school for more than 60 months from the last study period end date. Full-time students are not charged interest while in study but their debts begin accruing interest once they are no longer registered. Following graduation, relief may be granted for periods of six months, up to a maximum of 30 months based on income level.

Islam—A monotheistic religion practiced by Muslims. It is based on the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, who lived in the 7th century. There are five pillars of Islam, the basic tenets of faith: The Testimony of Faith (Shahadah), Five Daily Prayers (Salat), Obligatory charity (Zakat), Fasting during the month of Ramadan, The Pilgrimage to Mecca (Hajj). Islam is the second largest religion in the world today.

Juma—Friday congregational prayer, which occurs midday.

Loan Repayment—For student loans negotiated after August 1, 1995, the student must begin monthly repayment of the total loan principal and interest by the first day of the seventh month after a reduction of course load to less than 60% (40% with documented permanent disability). Additionally, the student must begin monthly repayment of the total loan principal and interest within 340 weeks (400 weeks for doctoral programmes, 520 weeks for students with permanent disabilities) from the date the first negotiated the Canada/Ontario Student Loan unless the first Canada/Ontario Student Loan was negotiated before August 1, 1995 in which case the student has 520 weeks before repayment is required.

Muslim—An individual who follows the religion of Islam.

Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP)—the provincial student assistance programme for Ontario. Financial assistance for postsecondary students in Ontario is available through a variety of programmes that are funded by the Province of Ontario and the Government of Canada. Programme policies are the responsibility of the funding agency, and programme processes and procedures are developed in cooperation by the two levels of government. Full-time students may be eligible to receive an integrated student loan. The Canada-Ontario Integrated Student Loan is funded by both the Government of Canada and the Government of Ontario.

Prayer—It is obligatory for every Muslim to pray five times a day. The daily prayers are one of the five pillars of faith—a basic tenant of Islam and a requirement of faith. For many, it is an important opportunity for spiritual reflection and remembrance throughout the day.

These are fixed prayers which can be said in private, wherever one happened to be when the time for prayer comes, or with the community in a mosque or designated space.

The five prayers are outlined below, in specific windows of time throughout the day.

1. Fajr (morning prayer); After dawn but before sunrise;
2. Duhr (early afternoon or noon prayer); early afternoon till late afternoon;
3. 'Asr (late afternoon prayer) late afternoon prayer till sunset;
4. Maghrib (sunset prayer); just after sunset;
5. Isha (late evening prayer); late evening till late at night.

Prayer Space—Muslim students require prayer space for daily prayers. There are many considerations that need to be taken into account in the designation of such space, including: an open room spacious enough for kneeling; adequate space for both men and women; clean, carpeted flooring; availability throughout the day; no depictions of human or animal figures; and

a sizable room relative to the number of students who will be using it. It is also important that the space is in close proximity to a washroom for the ritual washing that occurs before prayers.

Prophet Muhammad (SAW)—The last messenger and the prophet of God, according to Islam. The religion of Islam was revealed through him.

Quran—The Quran is the sacred text of Islam. Muslims believe it was revealed by God to the Prophet Muhammad, and is the final and definitive revelation.

Ramadan—The ninth months of the Islamic lunar calendar. During this month which lasts 29 or 30 days, depending on the sighting of the moon, Muslims refrain from eating, drinking and smoking during the daylight hours. Special congregational prayers occur during the nights of Ramadan, in which the entirety of the Quran is recited over the course of the month.

“Ramadan Kareem”—a celebratory statement on the occasion of Ramadan, the sentiment of which is “Welcome Ramadan”, and literally “may your Ramadan be generous.”

Salat/Salah—Five times a day ritual prayer.

Shariah—General term given to describe the legal framework derived from the sacred sources of Islam.

Shia (Also, Shi’i, Shi’ite)—Are the second largest denomination of Islam, approximately 10–15% of Muslims. Sh’ias adhere to the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad and the religious guidance of his family, as well as those descendents of Prophet Muhammad known as Shia Imams.

Suhoor—Pre-dawn meal (before the fajr prayer) during Ramadan, the month of fasting.

Tuition Fees—Fees paid by the student to enroll in a university or college. Tuition fees are the main contributor to student loan debt and are a barrier to access. In the 2006-2007 academic year, average Ontario college and university tuition fees are \$2,300 and \$5,200 respectively. Overwhelmingly, research shows that financial barriers are the largest barrier for students. Financial aid, largely in the form of repayable loans, is the only avenue for most students to contend with high tuition fees. The average indebted graduate in Ontario holds \$25,000 in public debt alone. There is little data on the amount of private debt—which generally includes loans from family, acquaintances, banks and credit card companies—but estimates put average debt, including these sources, as high as \$33,000.

Usury—Interest. Generally, there is a prohibition in Islam on money gained from interest, and participation in loans which incur interest.

Wudhu—Ritual ablution made before prayer. Involves washing the face, hands, arms, and feet.

Members' Biographies

Sheikh Faisal Abdur-Razak

Sheikh Faisal Abdur-Razak is an Imam and the President of the Islamic Forum of Canada. He has served on the Government of Canada Interfaith Committee, the Province of Ontario's Multifaith Council, and the City of Brampton Multifaith Committee. Abdur-Razak is the Vice-President of the Islamic Council of Imams of Canada and a member of the Al-Shura Muslim Consultative Council. He has spoken on a wide range of Islamic topics in many countries, including: Canada, the U.S., England, Germany, Pakistan, India, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Palestine, Turkey, Syria, Guyana, Barbados, and Trinidad.

Terry Downey

Terry Downey was elected Executive Vice-President of the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) in November 2005, becoming the first African-Canadian to serve as an OFL executive officer. Originally from Nova Scotia, Downey has been a member of the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU) for 17 years working at the Ontario Human Rights Commission. She is also the chair of the Women's Committee of the Toronto & York Region District Labour Council. In her role as OFL Executive Vice-President Downey is responsible for education and training, health care, human rights, social services and special projects.

Grace Edward Galabuzi

Grace-Edward Galabuzi is an assistant professor of Politics and Public Administration at Ryerson University and a Research Associate at the Centre for Social Justice in Toronto. Galabuzi is the Author of *Canada's Economic Apartheid: The Social Exclusion of Racialized Groups in the New Century* (CSPI, 2006). He has worked for the Ontario government as special assistant to the Premier, a senior policy advisor on Justice issues, and in the social sector as an organiser on anti-racism and social justice issues. He is a former provincial coordinator of the Ontario Alliance for Employment Equity and has been involved in various community campaigns on issues such as anti-racism, human rights, anti-poverty, police services reform, and community economic development. He is a member of the United Way of Greater Toronto Board of Trustees and its Policy, Planning and Research committee, and a board member of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

Jesse Greener

Jesse Greener is the Ontario Chairperson of the Canadian Federation of Students, representing over 300,000 students across the province, and formerly the Chairperson of the Federation's National Graduate Caucus. Greener earned his Ph.D. in Chemical Physics at the University of Western Ontario where he was active in his local students' union serving as both an executive member and as a Graduate Student Senator. While at Western, Greener worked closely with the local faculty and staff associations with the goal of unifying campus constituents and developing common platforms on such issues as enhancing university funding, reducing tuition fees, promoting equitable employment, reducing class sizes, and protecting academic freedom.

Alex Kerner

Alex Kerner is a long-time student and social justice activist who has a long history working with the Muslim community. He served as President of the University of Toronto Students' Administrative Council and Executive member of the Graduate Students' Union. Kerner a founding member of

Solidarity for Palestinian Human Rights at U of T and Students Against Sanctions and War in Iraq. He has been involved in campaigns demanding adequate prayer space on campus and opposing Islamophobia, Anti-Semitism, and Racism campaign. In addition Kerner has been involved with the Toronto Coalition to Stop the War and the War Resisters support campaign. Currently, Kerner is the Equity and Campaigns Organiser of the Ryerson Students' Union.

Ausma Malik

Ausma Malik is the Vice-President Equity for the Students' Administrative Council at the University of Toronto where she defends the rights of women, minorities and other marginalised groups. Malik is also responsible for promoting anti-discrimination initiatives on campus and is currently active with the Black Youth Coalition Against Violence and Students' Against Islamophobia. She will graduate in 2006 with an honours BA in international relations and minors in Political Science and History. Ausma has volunteered with Students for Literacy and the U of T food bank, and edited the Undergraduate Political Science Journal at U of T.

Diana Ralph

Diana Ralph is a Jewish activist who currently is working with the Campaign to Stop Secret Trials in Canada to challenge Islamophobia and the "war on terror" in Canada and the U.S. She has informally adopted Hassan Almrei, one of the five Muslim men detained in Canada without charges on secret evidence. Ralph was active in the civil rights and anti-Vietnam war movements in the United States, where she grew up. She moved to Saskatchewan in 1970 where she organised Equal Justice for All, a welfare rights group, and was active in a range of struggles around student's, women's, union, ecological, and native rights.

Mohamed Sheibani

Brother Mohamed Sheibani is the first under-graduate President of Muslim Students' Association National of the U.S. and Canada in its 43-year history. He is currently a fourth year student attending the University of Ottawa, where he is pursuing a degree in Commerce with a specialisation in Accounting. Sheibani first got involved in the MSA National as the East Zone Canada Representative (2002), and went on to serve as the Vice-President – Canada, Taskforce Director (2003), and Vice-President – Canada, Zonal Director (2004). Sheibani's community activism includes his work with the Muslim Youth of Ottawa for the past seven years, as well as serving as its President in 2003-2004. He has played a significant role in the organisation of the Family Eid Festival, one of Canada's largest festivals. He is also involved on his local campus where he served as Vice-President – Finance for the Management Student Council (2004-2005).

Zubeda Vahed

Zubeda Vahed was the former Equity Officer: Race Relations for the Peel District School Board and Education Officer at the Ministry of Education, she has analysed staff and student needs, coordinated staff in-service, and worked with young people and families in distress. Vahed had evaluated text books for the Ministry of Education and had produced a number of resource guides, including: "Unity in Diversity: A Resource Guide for Race and Ethnocultural Equity," "Opening and Closing Exercises: A Resource Guide for Ontario Schools," and "Manifesting Encouraging and Respectful Environments." Zubeda was on the Board for the International Development and Refugee Foundation and the Board of the Islamic Social Services and Referral Association, the Peel Multicultural Council and currently is on the Board of the Federation of Muslim Women and the Ansaar Foundation. Vahed has been Director and Provincial Chair with the Federation of

Women Teachers' Association of Ontario, and served as the committee chair and as an executive member of that organisation. 1993, Vahed was made a Fellow of the Ontario Teachers' Federation for her outstanding contributions to the profession, and for her community work. As well, Vahed has received an award for promoting racial unity by the Baha'i Community of Canada and the South African Women for Women Award. In 2002, Vahed received the Peel Multicultural Council Volunteer Award and in 2005, she received the Islamic Social Services and Resources Association award for her outstanding community service.

Wahida Chishti Valiante

Wahida Chishti Valiante is the National Vice-President of Canadian Islamic Congress. She is also a social worker and psychotherapist specialising in family therapy, mediation and post traumatic stress disorder. Valiante has extensive experience in working with refugees from war torn countries: especially with women and children, who were victim of rape, trauma, and psychological violence. She is the recipient of several awards, including from the Rubina Willis Counseling Centre for her outstanding work in the field of violence against women and children. Valiante is a regular contributing writer for several international publications — including the World Media Monitor and the Canadian Islamic Congress Friday Magazine — on social and religious issues, including gender equality, social justice, family and domestic violence, politics and issues of national and global importance.

List of Task Force Hearings

2006/2007	City	Institution
Sep 20	Toronto	University of Toronto (Launch Hearing)
Oct 25	Ottawa	Carleton University
Oct 31	North York	York University
Nov 1	Kingston	Queen's University, St. Lawrence College, Royal Military College
Nov 1	Toronto	Ryerson University, George Brown College
Nov 6	Toronto	University of Toronto
Nov 7	Toronto	University of Toronto
Nov 8	Guelph	Guelph University
Nov 9	Scarborough	University of Toronto, Scarborough Campus
Nov 10	Thunder Bay	Lakehead University
Nov 15	Mississauga	University of Toronto, Mississauga Campus
Nov 23	Windsor	University of Windsor
Nov 27	London	University of Western Ontario
Jan 24	Waterloo	Wilfrid Laurier University and University of Waterloo
Jan 25	Sudbury	Laurentian University
Jan 30	Hamilton	McMaster University
Mar 9	Ottawa	University of Ottawa



Written Statement

The Task Force on the Needs of Muslim Students is an effort to measure the degree to which Muslim students have their needs met on campus, and also to gather information on incidents of violence or hate directed towards Muslims and those who are perceived as Muslim.

1. If you are Muslim, do you feel your needs are adequately met on your college or university campus? (For example: is there access to adequate prayer space, are events and community services accessible, is halal food available, etc.)

2. Please describe the general atmosphere toward Muslim students on campus. If you are Muslim, do you feel represented? (examples: in the curriculum, in the faculty, in your Students' Union?)

3. Are you aware of any acts of discrimination or hate directed at members of the Muslim community, or other acts of Islamophobia on campus? Have you ever been the target of hate-motivated intimidation or aggression on campus? Please describe.

4. Please use this additional space to elaborate on your answers, or provide any additional information or reflections.

Name: _____

School: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

I do not want my name to be used in the Final Report Signature: _____

The EYEOPENER

Muslims playing for power

Posted on 11/16/06

Written by Sarah Boesveld

As the largest student group on campus, the Muslim Students' Association has made its presence known in student politics. Former MSA vice-president Muhammad Ali Jabbar is heading up the RSU, thanks to support from the MSA. The group has monopolized use of the multifaith room, putting the true meaning of the room's name in jeopardy.

Through its renewed fight against Islamophobia, the MSA has also been criticized as being increasingly polarized and turning the RSU's attention mostly toward Muslim issues. Smaller religious groups with less influence have been left wondering when their needs will be addressed.

A variety of religious groups on campus have said they have felt uncomfortable trying to use the multifaith room.

Eric Da Silva, president of the Catholic Student Association, says the group looked into using the room for mass but was told by RSU front desk staff that the room was "permanently booked" by Muslim students.

"No one is trying to take away the space from the Muslims, we just don't want to be stepping on their toes," says Da Silva. He stresses that the group found another space to hold mass and the conflict was quickly resolved. Da Silva acknowledges that Muslims have a stricter prayer schedule than Catholics, but he challenges whether the room should be called a multifaith one. The space, which is divided to separate males from females, has rows taped on the floor for prayer and Islamic decorations adorning the walls, is only accommodating to Muslims.

"I don't think the university should be calling it a multifaith room. If we went in there and decorated the room with rosary and crosses, other students would feel uncomfortable praying there," he says.

The Ismaili Student's Association, a smaller Muslim student group that practices the Shiite Muslim religion, has experienced conflicting schedules with the MSA for prayer space during the month of Ramadan. On a regular basis, the smaller group uses the multifaith room for prayer between 6 and 7 p.m. During Ramadan, when Muslims break their

Task Force on the Needs of Muslim Students

fast at sunset, the Ismaili students, who practice a separate form of prayer were resigned to finding somewhere else to pray.

“We were pretty much in a different room every night for a month,” says a member of the group who wished not to be named. “It can be frustrating at times, but you kind of have to make the best of the situation,” she says of having to move so the MSA can use the room.

At the semi-annual general meeting last week, RSU passed a motion to create a multifaith council in which representatives from all religious groups will come together to “learn from each other” and create “harmony on campus,” Jabbar says. A Canadian Federation of Students task force tackling cultural and religious discrimination was brought to campus by members of the MSA on Nov. 1, but it only addressed the problem of Islamophobia. Anti-Semitism and racism towards other minorities were not discussed.

When Ryerson campus was slammed with death threats and anti-Muslim propaganda two years ago, the MSA stepped up to the plate, denouncing these acts and doing their part to eradicate Islamophobia.

“There was a lot of stuff on anti-Semitism then,” says Jabbar. “There was nothing addressing Islamophobia on campus.”

Jonathan Vandersluis, president of Hillel, a Ryerson Jewish group, has concerns that the MSA is using its power to pay attention only to issues facing them, especially pertaining to the recent task force.

“It came out of a campaign that was saying no to racism, Islamophobia, and anti-semitism. How come we’re only addressing the needs of Muslims?” he asks. Vandersluis says Hillel did not get involved in the taskforce because they weren’t informed about it at the time.

Getting involved is something the MSA has prided itself on. Jabbar is grateful for the MSA endorsement and high voter turnout for his election victory last spring.

“I’m not going to deny it,” says Jabbar. “The support I got from the MSA, I really appreciated.”

“When something positive happens, it rejuvenates our community,” he says of his election win and the support he gathered.

Sarah Turnbull, who ran against Jabbar for RSU president last year, was surprised that the MSA’s endorsement of Jabbar went as far as it did.

“I had my Muslim friends told not to vote for me because if they didn’t vote for Jabbar, the Muslims would be suppressed,” she says. “In the end some of my strongest supporters

were Muslims and they were more horrified by this than even I was.”

Turnbull also says that the MSA is what led to the “United” slate to choose Jabbar for president. “It was clearly Nora Loreto’s turn (to run for president),” she says of the experienced and vocal RSU politico.

Jabbar says Loreto’s decision to run for vice president education was her decision alone.

“That’s what she holds true to her heart,” he says, adding that the current slate discussed who would be best in each RSU position. Jabbar says that everyone is doing what they want to do and are working toward representing the student body as a whole, not just Muslims.

As in most democracies, there are some who feel they are not being represented by the government. There are Muslim students on campus who feel their views are not represented well by the student union.

RSU has put too much emphasis on Muslim issues at the cost of representing the needs of all student groups, says a Muslim Ryerson Business student who asked not to be named out of fear of retribution “Everything they’re doing is Muslim, Muslim, Muslim. Whenever I hear them at their meetings that’s the rhetoric they’re using,” he says.

The 1,200 student membership of the MSA is responsible for its strong voice in the RSU, not Jabbar’s presidency says MSA president Waleed Elsayed.

“It was the same when Rebecca Rose was in (the RSU president’s) office. She heard our concerns and so does Muhammad Ali Jabbar. Whoever the next president is, because we have an all inclusive campus, will hear our concerns too,” says Elsayed.

He says that the multifaith room is used most often by the MSA because of their great numbers and their prayer schedule which demands prayers five times a day.

“In the future we may very well need another room just for Muslim students,” he says if other groups wish to use the room more often.

Elsayed says the political involvement of the MSA has not been intentionally influential.

“We want to be a part of the university. Politically, there’s nothing that we want, we have our prayer space in the new building.”

At other schools across Canada, Muslim students are still struggling to find a space of their own. Thomas Butko, professor at University of Alberta and expert on politics and Islam says the issue of prayer space at his university campus is exactly the opposite of Ryerson’s.

“On the most part, a lot of these multifaith areas have been dominated by Christians,” he

Task Force on the Needs of Muslim Students

says, adding that at U of A, Muslims are a minority who don't want to "rock the boat."

As the largest religious group on Ryerson's campus, Butko is not surprised that the MSA is dipping its hand into politics.

"It makes common sense that larger numbers would try to be more promoters of their interests," he says.

Butko says that because religion is seen as private, a large group going public with their interests can be interpreted as controversial.

"People tend to be all or nothing about religion," he says. It was only 20 years ago that the Lord's prayer could be heard in public elementary school classrooms across Canada.

"Many Christians still don't see this as a mixing of public and private," he says.

At smaller campuses like University of New Brunswick, the MSA has little to no political influence in student government. After three years there are 70 members and have only recently gained prayer space.

"We don't have plans to be represented in the student union," says MSA president Yahya Abuamer. "We don't propagate our religions, we're just showing education to erase misconceptions about our faith."

El-Tantawy Attia, executive director of Masjid Toronto says it's important for Muslims to be involved in student politics.

"You should not penalize an active group if the others are not."

Attia commends Ryerson's MSA for its great work in helping the needy during Ramadan.

It's strong numbers allows the group to make positive contributions to the Ryerson community, such as a \$7,000 donation to the Community Food Room with funds raised from a fast-a-thon.

The EYEOPENER

Sharing the power

Posted on 11/21/06

Written by Grace-Edward Galabuzi

Last week, The Eyeopener ran an article titled “Muslims playing for power.” I must say that I was troubled by the article’s inference that the rise to a key position of leadership in the Ryerson Student Union, the first Muslim (and first racialized) president in the history of the organization, has not led to a celebration of a triumph towards inclusion, but is interpreted as a ‘take over’ by Muslims. As a human rights activist who has been advocating for political inclusion for marginalized groups in Toronto (although about 50 per cent of the population of Toronto is racialized, after the recent city council elections, only four of the 44 members of council are from racialized communities!), the further implication that it is inappropriate for the Muslim Students Association to play an active role in campus politics causes me some consternation. Given the historical social exclusion and current challenges that Muslim students face in educational institutions, such participation should be seen as ensuring that traditional students groups can share power with historically marginalized groups.

Secondly, I am a member of the Canadian Federation of Students’ Taskforce on the Needs of Muslim Students. It was called in response to the growing concerns about the climate of Islamophobia at education institutions and more broadly because the reality of the post-Sept.

11 2001 and subsequent ‘war on terror’ that have become increasingly defined by a dominant clash of cultural and civilizational narrative, and national security efforts to protect society, often at the expense of the human and civil rights of certain identifiable groups.

The Taskforce is made up of 12 members from a cross-section of sectors. Among the objectives of the Taskforce is raising awareness and conducting public education about the needs of Muslim students in Ontario; providing a forum for Muslim students to speak openly about the challenges they face in educational institutions; and an opportunity for Muslim students to share experiences relating to incidents of Islamophobia on campuses.

Over the last two months, the Taskforce has held a number of hearings at campuses across the province. One of those was at Ryerson University on Nov. 1. Students unions, including the RSU have been an active supporter of the Taskforce. Information from the hearings suggests a need to redouble efforts to create campus environments that are

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inclusive and tolerant of diverse expressions of faiths and the necessity to address long standing gaps in services that meet the needs of Muslim students. The issue of access to prayer space remains very much a concern, given the size of the Muslim population and the very limited space there is in the multi-faith room and at Ryerson the overwhelming majority of the Muslim students have been forced to go off campus to find space to pray. The problem is one of inadequacy of space for all who need it.

It is important that when we take up these issues, we focus on tolerance and inclusion, rather than conflating the small steps historically marginalized groups have taken into some threat of a 'take over'. History is replete with regrettable outcomes of sensational conflation of the 'power' of minorities.

RYERSON UNIVERSITY
POLICY OF ACADEMIC COUNCIL

ACCOMMODATION OF STUDENT RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE OBLIGATIONS

Policy Number:	150
Approval Date:	October 2, 2001 (Original) Revised: November 8, 2005 (For implementation in Fall 2006)
Submitted By:	Ad Hoc Work Group on Accommodation of Student Religious Observance Obligations
Committee Members:	K. Alnwick, K.Behdinan, D.Glynn, D.Little, D. Schulman, A. Whiteside (N. Farrell – consultant)
Policy Review Date:	To be reviewed October 2008
Responsible Committee or Office:	Provost and Vice President Academic, Secretary of Academic Council

Ryerson recognizes that a student's religious observance may require an absence from any required course activity as scheduled in the course syllabus (available and/or distributed by the first day of class) or scheduled after the first day of class, or from a final examination as announced later in the term. Final examinations may be scheduled seven days a week. This policy provides a mechanism to address student religious observance requirements as they relate to meeting these course requirements.

Students and faculty have the option to address absences due to religious observance informally, but may utilize the more formal process as outlined in this policy.

Students must determine whether to handle the request for an accommodation for religious observance informally or formally through this process according to the following timeline:

- For required activities scheduled in the course syllabus, available and/or distributed by the first class - within the first two weeks of classes;
- For required activities scheduled after the course syllabus is distributed – within 5 working days of the distribution of the schedule; and
- For a final examination - within 5 working days of the publication of the final examination schedule.

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Faculty shall accept, at face value, the sincerity of students' religious beliefs. If the formal process is selected, the student will download the form from the Registrar's website* and complete it, outlining absences required for religious observance. A completed form should be presented in each course in which a conflict occurs based on the above timeline. If the required absence occurs within the first two weeks of classes or the dates are not known well in advance as they are linked to other conditions, this form should be submitted as soon as possible in advance of the required absence. The form will serve as the student's formal request for accommodation. The professor and the student will then consult to reach agreement on a reasonable accommodation. When making alternative arrangements the professor must ensure that the academic obligation can be met as expeditiously as possible before the end of the term and is conducted in a suitable manner or environment.

Professors must confirm an informal or formal arrangement which addresses the student's request within five (5) working days of the request. In cases where a mutually agreed upon accommodation cannot be made, or where the student's request has not been addressed by the deadline, the student may bring the matter to the Chair/Director of the Department/School (for CE courses this would be the relevant CE Program Director) within five (5) working days after consulting with the professor, and/or no later than the fifth week of classes. If the matter remains unresolved, faculty, the Chair/Director or the student should consult with the Discrimination and Harassment Prevention Office.

* The *Student Declaration of Religious Observance* form is available on the Registrar's or Academic Council's website which is linked to Religious Observance calendars through the Discrimination and Prevention Services website, providing students and faculty with a comprehensive description of some observance obligations.