Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Plan

2021-2026

Aurora College

Aurora College Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Plan 2021-2026

Vision

Aurora College is committed to advancing Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Accessibility by fostering an institutional culture that values and promotes a respectful, culturally meaningful experience for our college community and our partners in learning and research.

Mission

At Aurora College, we embrace diverse identities and knowledge to enable all voices to contribute to personal, community, educational, and institutional excellence.

Definitions

Diversity is:

The mix of identity, values, experiences, backgrounds, and perspectives that makes each individual unique.

Inclusion is:

The act of fostering a culture where people feel safe and mutually respected. It is an environment focused on the collective, where our differences are accepted and valued.

Equity is:

An environment where everyone is treated with fairness by recognizing our individual needs and where everyone has access to resources, development, and opportunities to be successful.

Accessibility is:

An environment where our services, facilities, and resources are accessible to all people according to our differing abilities.

Background

In 2019, Aurora College was successfully granted seed money to establish an Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) strategy and committee in response to a proposal submitted to the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC). Subsequently, an 11-member working group from across the college was formed to continue the development of an EDI initiative at Aurora College.

The working group contracted the Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion (CCDI) to assess the state of EDI at Aurora College. Over the next three years, in collaboration with CCDI, an EDI assessment of Aurora College staff, policies, EDI practices and culture was conducted. The assessment consisted of a broad review of Aurora College's EDI practices and included:

- Diversity census and inclusion surveys
- Diversity and inclusion focus groups
- Senior executive leaders' interviews
- Review of organizational policies
- Industry qualitative benchmark analysis of EDI practices

The results of the assessment were presented to the Executive Leadership Team (ELT) in the Current State Inclusivity Assessment in March 2021. Building on this work, the original working group developed a five-year strategic plan, which was accepted by ELT in 2021.

In 2022, the EDI working group was dissolved and Aurora College established its Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) committee. Following a college-wide call for interest in serving on the committee, the EDI Committee was appointed by the President. The purpose of the committee is *"…to provide advice to the President on issues of policy and governance and to lead initiatives and discussions within Aurora College relating to the concepts of equity, diversity, and inclusion…."*

The EDI Committee (EDIC) continues the work of developing EDI initiatives, policies, and discussions and advancing EDI at Aurora College. Over the past year and a half, the EDIC members have attended internal and external EDI focused training and conferences, reviewed and published the EDI Strategic plan, and hired Aurora College's first EDI Coordinator position to support the work of the EDIC.

The Dimensions Charter

In May 2022, Aurora College became the first Northern post-secondary institution to endorse the Dimensions Charter and joined more than 100 Canadian post-secondary institutions to support its goals. The charter is a foundational element of the Dimensions program, the goal of which is to foster increased research excellence, innovation, and creativity within the post-secondary sector across all disciplines through greater equity, diversity, and inclusion.

In signing the charter, Aurora College publicly stated its commitment to embedding EDI principles in its policies, practices, and action plans. Aurora College is now recognized nationally and internationally as a post-secondary academic community dedicated to promoting EDI principles.

EDI principles will be inherent in the transformation to a polytechnic university and will foster a culture of openness and respect to allow the College community, including students and staff, to be the best they can be in their respective roles.

The Dimensions program is an initiative supported by the three federal research granting agencies: the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC), and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC).

Strategic Planning Process

Aurora College's first five-year EDI Plan was developed after the completion of the Current State Inclusivity Assessment. The Assessment was then compared with the General Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Benchmarks (GEDIB) to understand where Aurora College stands when compared with the best practices. This allowed the working group to understand the position of Aurora College when compared to best practices and identify strategic actions to improve institutional EDI practices.

Based on the consultations done in the initial inclusivity assessment, and aided by an EDI consultant and the GEDIB benchmarks, the working group developed the mission, vision, definitions, goals, and priorities to advance EDI at Aurora College. Specific action for achieving these goals and priorities were also developed, and these are included in the EDI Committee's implementation plan.

Goals & Priorities

Goal #1: Create a strong foundation to build an equitable, diverse, and inclusive institutional culture

Priorities:

- Establish internal mechanisms and supports to advance the Aurora College EDI agenda;
- Support inclusive leadership behaviours across all levels of the institution;
- Enable and engage contributions of all voices in attaining the vision and mission;
- Build alliances and collaborate with interested parties and communities.

Some of the actions that will be taken in order to meet these priorities include:

- Communicating Aurora College's vision, mission, and definitions pertaining to EDI and the EDI Strategic Plan to faculty, staff, and stakeholders;
- Creating an implementation plan for phasing in the General EDI Benchmarks;
- Ensuring that the college is compliant with all GNWT legislation pertaining to EDI;
- Establishing and maintaining an EDI Committee; and
- Hiring a coordinator to support the work of the EDI Committee.

Goal #2: Nurture a respectful and inclusive institutional culture through communication, education, and leadership across the institution

Priorities:

- Reinforce expectations for inclusive behaviours;
- Clarify safe processes for raising issues of inequity, harassment, and discrimination;

- Integrate an EDI approach in core institutional systems, policies, and practices.

Some of the actions that will be undertaken to meet these priorities include:

- Supporting leadership to champion EDI at Aurora College;
- Supporting faculty and staff to pursue education and training related to EDI;
- Providing input on policies and procedures that can support EDI;
- Exploring how the college's physical spaces can support EDI; and
- Developing an EDI communications plan that will support the work of the EDI Committee and its mandate.

Goal #3: Support the development of a diverse workforce

Priorities:

- Improve equitable outcomes for under-represented/marginalized groups in hiring and advancement at all levels;
- Clarify and strengthen support for inclusive, flexible work options and accommodations based on individual needs;
- Develop and enact an Indigenous targets staffing strategy.

Actions that will be undertaken to support these priorities include:

- Exploring how staffing and flexible work options support an equitable, diverse, and inclusive workforce;
- Embedding Aurora College's EDI principles into new faculty and staff onboarding;
- Continuing the implementation of an Indigenous staffing strategy;
- Continuing to gauge the diversity of the college workforce and its satisfaction with the college's EDI strategy and implementation.

Goal #4: Strengthen the link between an inclusive institutional culture and effective student and community engagement.

Priorities

- Plan for incorporating EDI into the student body;
- Celebrate significant EDI news and events in collaboration with student groups through multiple communication methods;
- Provide opportunities for authentic student engagement;
- Listen to student voices to better understand their diverse needs.

Actions that will be undertaking to meet these priorities include:

- Exploring best practices for engaging the student body around EDI issues;
- Connecting with existing student organizations active in the EDI field;
- Surveying students as to their needs and interests regarding EDI;
- Developing a strategy for rolling out an Aurora College student body EDI plan.

Reporting

The EDI Committee is responsible for implementing the EDI Strategic Plan. It will prepare a yearly report to ELT to be submitted by June 30 of each academic year. The report will be published and shared with staff, faculty, students, and the public.