

CAUT EQUITY FORUM – RECASTING EQUITY

February 6 – 8, 2009 – Toronto

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AUNBT sent two people to this conference: Alope Chatterjee and Jennie Hornosty

The format of the conference included a dramatic production (a series of skits), plenary sessions and four break-out working groups whose goal was to work on the theme of ‘developing an equity culture on campus’. Each group was to focus on one of the following areas:

- 1) Equity within associations
- 2) Collective bargaining and contract language, including pursuing equity through grievances
- 3) Recruitment, Promotion, Retention
- 4) Transformation of research and teaching

At different times during the conference, participants commented on how the diversity of faces in the room was different from that generally found amongst the powerful and privileged in the academic milieu.

Penni Stewart, CAUT President, opened the conference by noting that this ‘working conference’ was CAUT’s first equity conference. She reminded the delegates that it was twenty –five years since the Abella Report, which established a regulatory framework for employment equity was released, and outlined four main issues we should consider:

- a) we need to rethink what equity means and not just equate equity with ‘quantity’
- b) we need to look at the implications of equity for cultural practices – so for example, the resistance and tensions around notions of excellence and equity
- c) we need to consider the role of local associations in promoting equity– are they a vehicle of change or a brick wall? How can local associations build and sustain an equity culture?
- d) we need to ask how CAUT can further equity?

“Equity in Your Face” – a series of skits performed by Kristine Nutting and Cortney Lohnes from Edmonton, Alberta was followed by a discussion facilitated by Piet Defraeye (Alberta). The skits were both very disturbing and thought provoking for they challenged in a very ‘in your face” way the common understanding of equity which focuses on numerical targets. In the debriefing discussion, a number of points were made, including the following:

- the formal environment in universities is reproducing the academy in ways the make many people (racialized minorities, persons with disabilities, indigenous people, gay people, those who are older) feel that they are not part of shaping the university

- there are systemic “violent hierarchies” in the academy
- there is an “industry of equity” which stems from the language of the Abella Report that constructs equity as a numbers game
- “equity” has been hijacked by universities to keep it as a place of white privilege – systemic and structural inequalities are not examined
- white feminists – who already are privileged in universities - have benefitted from equity programs – while they may use the language of diversity and equity, that is often not what they practice
- white feminists use the equity agenda to benefit their own careers
- treating people fairly is not the same as treating people equally
- the real barriers to equity are very subtle which makes the “violence” experienced by those constructed as “Other’ very difficult to confront

Saturday morning began with “A Nuu Chah Nulth Origin Story” told by Richard Atleo (Manitoba).

Indigenous peoples tell stories to illustrate important principles in life. To those who are trained to only accept the scientific method as valid for obtaining knowledge these stories may appear as ‘myth’; however, there are other ways of knowing which are equally valid. A different way of accessing knowledge is through ‘vision quest’. The origin story points to the importance of respect and recognition of all forms of life and an acknowledgement that each life form has value.

In the academy today there is a lack of respect, acknowledgment and recognition of different approaches to knowledge - it makes invisible those who adhere to different views.

To have equity means more than filling out forms and counting numbers.

Recasting Equity: Panel: Audrey Kobayashi (Queens); Piet Defraeye (Alberta); Yasmin Jiwani (Concordia); Richard Atleo

From slightly different perspectives, each of the panelists critiqued the existing model of equity in universities. They stressed that true equity will only be achieved with a fundamental transformation. Specific points made were:

- equity programs ignore pre-employment factors such as child care and education which can be sources of discrimination
- equity requires that we change the way we relate to one another; the goal must be to change the culture of the academy and human relations within it
- equity is about the recognition of others as equal
- when equity and human rights offices are part of the administrative structure, the administration can close those offices overnight, as was the case at the University of Alberta
- equity must include the equitable distribution of resources – there must be “redistributive justice”
- without the redistribution of vital resources, equality and equity is “a hollow game”
- equity is often not integrated with academic life, but is seen as a special issue

- there is no equity provision in the Canada Research Chair program – few people get beyond the realization that equity is NOT just about gender
- one can not talk about equity if ALL the people that it concerns are not at the table – we need to hear and acknowledge their voices
- there is little sensitivity to age discrimination– for example, to talk about “faculty renewal” as the rationale for hiring new people implies that older people don’t have new ideas
- age discrimination needs to be factored in discussions of equity

Breakout Discussion Group: Collective bargaining and contract language, including pursuing equity through grievances. (This is the group that I signed up for.) Listed below are some diverse comments made by participants in this breakout group

- At some universities every person on a hiring committee has to go through equity training before she/he is able to be on the committee
- Some places have an equity representative (who is outside the department) on a hiring committee – in some cases this representative must go through two sets of training sessions
- Issue of workload was raised – what is a reasonable workload? What is a good work/life balance and how can workload impact differently on persons from ‘equity –seeking’ groups?
- One needs to make sure there is accommodation in individual cases, but the concept of individual accommodation is also problematic – this privatizes the issue and makes it about the individual rather than looking at the institutional culture and the systemic nature of inequity
- Need to examine tenure and promotion criteria from an equity perspective
- Collective agreements need to include a more expansive definition of equity to include age, sexual orientation, class
- Notion of academic excellence and objectivity need to be problematized

Tensions and Complements: Academic Freedom and Equity: Panel: Enakshi Dua (York), Mark Neufeld (Trent), Rinaldo Walcott (OISE, Toronto). Bonita Lawrence

Each of the participants talked about sources of tension based on their experience. All agreed that there is resistance to equity in academe. Below are some of the main points:

- There are different types of disabilities but only some are acknowledged as legitimate. Those who suffer from S.A.D. (seasonal affective disorder) or other mental health issues may be seen as potentially ‘dangerous’ or violent and hence discriminated against
- For indigenous peoples indigenous control of post-secondary education is about giving voice to their people. When such an institution is censured by the dominant group, the colonial model is in fact being perpetuated – need to consider how we support indigenous institutions that don’t perpetuate the history of colonization
- Existing policies are often inadequate – racial minority people may get hired but are not tenured

- One must ask who is evaluating and who is determining the criteria for tenure and promotion – you can't have academic freedom if persons from equity seeking groups are not involved in the evaluation.
- Diverse multi-racial and multi-cultural policies are needed – people don't want to be patronized any longer.
- Need to determine what sorts of anti-racist policies exist at universities – and how extensive and effective these are
- There is a lack of will on the part of senior administration to implement anti-racist policies – their first response frequently is to deny that racism exists within their institution
- Senior administrators need to be made accountable – each year they should be required to provide a report of what they have achieved in terms of equity
- Need to acknowledge that the Canadian academy is racist – people leave universities because of the climate of racism
- Feminists have structured dividing practices between 'women's committees' that are steeped in white privilege and 'other' groups
- Need to ask when you are writing a job ad, WHO are you thinking of – someone in your own image?
- How does one create equity within an inequitable institution – how do we disrupt the power of whiteness?
- For some, academic freedom is not the number one issue in the academy right now; rather it is the lack of real equity

Breakout Discussion Group:

- Need to be careful not to create hierarchies of equity which would pit equity seeking groups against each other
- Local associations need to deal seriously with equity, not just the CAUT
- Important to have comprehensive equity language in collective agreements
- Academic freedom and academic integrity do not exist without equity

First Summary from each of the four Groups:

- Difficult for people on the margins to break into a hegemonic system.
- Faculty associations don't always address concerns of equity
- Need better contract language to address equity
- Need to have a more expansive definition of equity
- Need to be careful not to prioritize equity concerns
- Faculty associations need to educate members with respect to equity
- What are faculty associations doing to undermine inequity?
- Hiring and tenure and promotion processes can undermine equity – what networks do people recruit from? – What gets counted as scholarship? – What service counts?
- Collegiality can be used to marginalize people who are not from the dominant group.
- Need to transform research and teaching – need to change the competitive nature of universities

- Need to consider how best to provide support to those who are marginalized in the classroom
- Creating equity can be messy and full of tensions and contradictions and not something that can be changed in a day.
- Simply having equity committees is not enough – need to integrate it into all aspects – the culture, teaching and research

Strategies and Tactics: Moving beyond the numbers, affirmative action, promotion and tenure, creating commitment in faculty associations: Panel: Ruthann Dyer (York), Rosanna Carreon (Ottawa), Malinda Smith (Alberta) Doreen Fumia (Ryerson), David Newhouse (Trent)

This final plenary session raised some key points that need to be kept in mind if we are to move forward:

- Financial resources are needed to address equity, but need to also consider whether the political will is there on the part of senior administration
- Is there a critical mass of students who are ‘equity minded’ – or ‘entitled folks’?
- Need to think about the substantive piece of equity which is about recognizing patterns of disadvantage
- Equity requires the redistribution of resources to equity seeking people.
- To transform the academy we need to transform ourselves – this includes making clear that equity must not be restricted to gender equity
- Need to create anti-racist strategies – overt prejudice is condemned but everyday practices include subtle forms of racism
- Need to create a task force on racism and anti-racism and report on how to change the current culture
- In 2008 – there were 120 aboriginal faculty in Canada, and 500 aboriginal graduate students in MA and PhD programs
- Equity needs to be tied to improving the quality of academic life
- There is a difference between “knowledge equity” and “presence equity” – need to bring indigenous views into the academy - aboriginal people want their knowledge to be present in the university, not just their physical presence
- Need to address the “gaps of knowledge” which values certain types of knowledge but not others
- Clauses against harassment and bullying in collective agreements are important equity clauses
- Faculty associations need to aggressively challenge the idea that there is such a thing as pure objective “excellence” – what we mean by excellence is constructed and it has traditionally been the dominant group which has defined its meaning

Breakout Discussion Groups:

- There is a danger that equity observers on hiring and tenure and promotion committees will be compromised by those within a department or faculty

- The responsibility for equity should be placed on the employer –could be argued as a health and safety complaint that it is the employer’s responsibility to provide an equitable environment and workload
- Need to expand the prohibited grounds of discrimination beyond those in current Human Rights Codes
- The position of contract academic staff needs more attention in the light of equity

Plenary Session: Recommendations and Wrap-up: Penni Stewart (CAUT President); Rosemary Morgan (CAUT staff)

Note takers from each of the four discussion groups summarized the key points from their group, along with some recommendations of how to proceed. These points included:

- Need to pursue both individual and collective strategies to address issues of accessibility for persons with disabilities
- Need to look at “knowledge equity” – that is how do disciplines construct “core” knowledge? Who decides what is important? These decisions get translated into job ads and who gets hired
- There needs to be levels of accountability – discretion can be used in inequitable ways
- Need a more inclusive model of equity that goes beyond gender to include the other equity-seeking groups
- Need to encourage new academic staff and students to become involved with advocating for equity
- CAUT should put equity as a top priority for the next five years including putting resources into equity. Equity should be seen as important as academic freedom and should be treated as such in terms of: Council speakers, coverage in the Bulletin; having an equity representative at all levels
- Faculty associations need to reach out to members of non-traditional groups and respond to their needs, and signal to the membership that equity is a priority
- Faculty associations with support of the CAUT should have workshops on inclusivity
- There is increasing casualization of the academic work force – equity for this marginal group needs to be addressed
- Need to constantly be vigilant of how research and scholarship is constructed
- Need to develop curriculum building across the university community and research around equity
- It was noted that there were few faculty association presidents present at this workshop – equity issues should be seen as a priority for them
- Change begins on the Council floor during general meetings. Faculty associations need to bring forward motions on equity matters.

The Conference ended with a commitment by Rosemary Morgan to put together the various recommendations and email these to the conference participants. A draft of this has been circulated – and after input from participants, these will be posted on the CAUT

website. Since this document is a “draft” meant for feedback, I have not appended it to this report.