

Fall 2021 Chair's Update on Anti-Racism Efforts in the Department of Arts, Culture & Media

Dear ACM students, I am pleased to update you about ACM's ongoing efforts to reform its curricula and practices to be more pro-actively anti-racist and inclusive.

My March 2021 letter to ACM students described work that has been happening and expressed my desire to hear more from you this year. With this communication, I am starting a new practice of sharing regular updates on anti-racism with you at the start of each academic term.

On April 23, 2021 we staged a Listening Session for ACM Student Leaders facilitated by UTSC Special Advisor to the Dean on Inclusive Recruitment and Equity Education, Maydianne Andrade. Prof. Andrade anonymized this student feedback and prepared a summary that was shared with all ACM faculty and staff. To paraphrase the concerns raised by the student leaders:

1. irregular or inconsistent understanding or attention to inclusive teaching across ACM
2. an absence of mechanisms for safely disclosing practices that are inequitable or harmful
3. a desire for more frequent and transparent communication and opportunities for input.

On June 24, 2021 ACM staff and faculty met with Prof. Andrade and discussed these findings, and I can share that this early feedback was received with gratefulness and it will inform our dialogue going forward.

As Chair, my main focus in this work for the 2021-22 year will be on developing new mechanisms for listening and receiving reports of exclusionary or unsafe practices in the Department. Receiving feedback from students is essential. Stay tuned for details on timing and methods for sharing your input.

Meantime, ACM continues to prioritize curricular reform, co-curricular programming and experiential learning and student engagement in research that foregrounds issues of equity, diversity and inclusion. Some examples:

- Available funding for student projects focused on EDI and anti-racism through our Departmental IDEAS grants (deadline to come mid-Fall, watch the ACM student newsletter for application instructions)
- The [ACM Writing Circle](#), provides an opportunity for us to come together and to engage in monthly expressive writing exercises that honor, and celebrate our experiences, identities, and stories. Each session will use an EDI (Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion) themed prompt to guide our writing. Sign up via CLNx.

- A local [“durational reading” of the Truth and Reconciliation Report](#) by Theatre & Performance faculty and students led by ACM post-doctoral fellow Jeff Gagnon (Meetings are Tuesdays 1-2pm, all ACM students are welcome to sign up via [CLNx](#))
- Cultural Competency Workshops facilitated by Anushay Khan (Winter 2022)
- [Equity and Diversity in the Arts](#) 2022 Artist-in-Residence Shellene Drakes-Tull, who leads UTSC’s Modern Day Griot Project based on the principles of Nguzo Saba, will lead a “story society” for ACM students (Winter 2022)

This is of course in addition to a broad suite of other workshops, artist and scholar engagements with diverse artists across ACM throughout the year, which you can learn more about [here](#)

Changes are also afoot in our curriculum. The UTSC-wide Campus Curriculum “Working Circle” aims to produce structural, curricular change across the whole campus, ACM included. ACM is also working on a new curricular offering focused on Equity and Diversity. Expect to hear more about this as the academic year goes on.

I will issue another update on our work in January 2022. In the meantime, as ever, please feel welcome to reach out to me with questions, comments or ideas on anything you read here or on what’s important to you about this work.

Barry Freeman

Chair, ACM