

[Draft] Mandate and Responsibilities

Religious Inclusion Working Group

History

During the initial stages of the President's Action Committee on Anti-Racism (PACAR) and the latter implementation of its Action Plan, discussions with engaged community members identified areas that warranted additional attention. One such area was the need to support and advance a culture and practice of inclusion toward our community's diverse religious and cultural groups (as well as those who do not profess religious practice) as an important component of anti-racist work. When PACAR established working groups to begin taking immediate steps to implement the identified recommendations and other priority actions, the Religious Inclusion Working Group was formed to answer this identified need.

Mandate

The overarching principle of the Religious Inclusion Working Group is that StFX University values respect for the diversity of people within its community and the various religious, philosophical, and cultural traditions and identities that guide their individual lives. The university also recognizes the importance of spirituality and religious inclusion to the overall health and wellness of staff and students.¹

Recognizing these principles, as well as the objects that govern the university, the Religious Inclusion Working Group will develop recommendations to:

- 1) promote the inclusion of all religious, spiritual, and secular groups within the StFX community, especially those currently and historically excluded and minoritized; and
- 2) ensure the PACAR Anti-Racism Action Plan is attentive to issues of religious, spiritual, and secular equity, diversity, and inclusion.

The group will do this using the broadest definition of religion that Religious Studies has to offer,² including: practicing members of institutional world religions (e.g. Muslims, Sikhs), non-practicing/cultural members (e.g. secular Jews), hybrid/multi-identifying individuals (e.g. Quaker Buddhists, Indigenous Catholics), members of newer religions (e.g. Baha'i) and NRMs (New Religious Movements, e.g. Jedi), and the fast-growing demographics of SBNR (Spiritual But Not Religious) and

¹ Troy B. Adams et al., "Conceptualization and measurement of the spiritual and psychological dimensions of wellness in a college population," *Journal of American College Health* 48, 4 (2000): 165-173; Sian Cotton et al., "Religion/spirituality and adolescent health outcomes: A review," *Journal of Adolescent Health* 38, 4 (2006): 472-480; Roger D. Fallot, "The Place of Spirituality and Religion in Mental Health Services," *New Directions for Mental Health Services* 80 (1998): 3-12; Harold G. Koenig, "Spirituality, wellness, and quality of life," *Sexuality, Reproduction and Menopause* 2, 2 (2004): 76-82; Chi Hung Leung and Hok Ko Pong, "Cross-sectional study of the relationship between the spiritual wellbeing and psychological health among university Students" *PLoS one* 16, 4 (2021): doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0249702.

² Sachi Edwards, "Distinguishing Between Belief and Culture: A Critical Perspective on Religious Identity," *Journal of College and Character* 19, 3 (2018): 201-214, DOI: 10.1080/2194587X.2018.1481097.

“Nones” (e.g. secular humanists).³ Ideally, all such community members should enjoy a sense of belonging, respect, and inclusion at StFX.

Responsibility*

- Research, identify, and recommend initiatives and actions relating to religious, spiritual, cultural, and secular equity and inclusion on campus (via data-gathering, Canadian industry best practices, and community consultation). The recommendations should reflect and support the goals outlined by PACAR, across all four points identified in its Action Plan. These include: (1) Environment to Support Inclusive Teaching, Learning, and Research; (2) Working and Organization Environment; (3) Living and Social Environment; and (4) Community Environment.

The Religious Inclusion Working Group will undertake its core mandate and responsibilities by:

- Engaging and consulting with campus and community partners to raise issues of mutual concern; including but not limited to the Chaplaincy, Wellspring, academic departments, staff, professional service departments, the Students’ Union, International Office, etc.
- Fostering collaboration, dialogue, and engagement among diverse faith-based groups and partners, both on and off campus, on religious and spiritual matters to support understanding, cooperation, communication, and community.
- Contributing to the creation of supportive learning and working environments for faculty, staff and students built on principles of anti-racism, equity, and religious inclusion.
- Advising and supporting the work of PACAR on matters of religion, faith, spirituality, secularism, and related religious/cultural inclusion.
- Actively demonstrating good practice in cooperation and intersectionality, especially in supporting the work of other departments (e.g. Chaplaincy), working groups, committees, and the President’s Action Committee on Anti-Racism (PACAR).
- Communicating an annual report on progress to PACAR to ensure that religious inclusion is a central consideration across all of our activities on an ongoing basis.
- Responding to unforeseen issues that arise related to religious exclusion/accommodation on campus.

*some elements of each Working Group’s core responsibilities are expected to evolve based on discussion, emerging data, and members’ expertise.

Composition

- Three (3) faculty members.
- Three (3) student members
- One (1) member of senior administration
- Two (2) staff members, including representation one (1) from Human Resources and one (1) from Student Services.

³ S. Wilkins-Laflamme, “And then there were none: Regional dynamics of non-religious identities, beliefs, and practices among Canadian millennials,” *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses*, 52, 3 (2023), 358-380, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00084298221102926>.

- One (1) member of the alumni
- One (1) community member

In the event that not all of the roles in the above composition are filled, the Working Group will continue its work, with the option of reaching out to people from the unrepresented role (e.g. alumni, Antigianish community) for consultation and input as required. It will also invite input and seek collaboration from campus religious/spiritual identities among individual students, staff, and faculty, as well as from relevant campus groups (e.g. Chaplaincy, religious student clubs, faculty with academic expertise, etc.), and from other PACAR working groups. Such collaboration not only reveals the eclectic nature of religious, secular, and spiritual identities at StFX University, but empowers the importance of equity among them, and their dignity within wider university life.