

Report of the sub-committee of the Committee on Diversity and Inclusion

Disability

Committee on Diversity and Inclusion

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Sub-Committee on Disability, inclusion and diversity

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Disability is an expression of human diversity, but for many people with disabilities, opportunities are distant, exclusion ensues, full participation in society is constrained and the realization of potential denied. While this societal state of affairs is tragic for people with disabilities (and the society in which they live), it also presents an opportunity to realize a significant change in the integration of people with disabilities and attitudes towards people with disabilities. For example, technological innovations used by all members of the population have become increasingly accessible, affordable and useable for some people with disabilities e.g. everyday speech to text apps enable hearing to communicate readily with profoundly deaf, and profoundly deaf and non-speaking to communicate with hearing individuals.

Although steps have been taken to acknowledge disability and provide a basis for action in international law, such as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, disability is still often described in terms of disease models, as a problem to be fixed usually by medical care, thus preventing a number of challenges to change. What is referred to as 'ableism' still dominates environmental design and navigation, and determines the terms of participation in the workplace and academic contexts. Indeed university staff and students with disabilities can present challenges to the status quo, disrupting ideas of traditional and linear academic and career trajectories and participation in the workplace, pushing the boundaries of what is actually possible for all humans based on reconfigurations of conceptions of disability. What was once seen as impossible or unmanageable or unaffordable, now seems theoretically and entirely possible. It is this thinking, much of which has been propelled by feminist and other critical theories of society and its intersectionalities, and work by outstanding disability scholars that has continued to raise questions about societal responses to inclusion and diversity.

Social change in academic environments towards people with disabilities with eventual diffusion to wider society is possible with a multi-pronged approach to the inclusion of people with disabilities. At the University of Ottawa, one part is to pay increased attention to accessibility policies and procedures for staff and students with disabilities, enabling their participation and encouraging their inclusion, and increasing understanding of disability. Another approach is the pursuit of Disability Studies as an interdisciplinary means to study society, as part of the fabric of the University's academic mission. Disability Studies are becoming increasingly important to developed societies and societies in development. Disability Studies are making theoretical, evidentiary and action-based contributions towards a society in which disability is seen, accepted and included as part of the human condition rather than a problem to be fixed.

Recommendation

The creation of an interdisciplinary University of Ottawa Institute for Disability Studies with programs at the advanced level, and a research focus on disability that will provide a leading light and leadership to academic study of disability in the Canadian and global context.

Appendix - Diversity, inclusion and disability – An Institute of Disability Studies

One approach to diversity, inclusion and disability proposed for the University of Ottawa is an interdisciplinary Institute of Disability Studies.

A well-structured, organized, governed and administered teaching, research and knowledge dissemination hub such as an Institute, serves to: raise the profile of its host organization; diversify the organization's research profile, talent and partnerships and collaborations and; inform and reflect an institutional culture of responsiveness to inclusion and diversity - one that is innovative, technologically comfortable and accessible.

The Institute will adopt a critical approach to teaching and research, distinguishing multidisciplinary disability studies in society from clinical/medical studies in health care and physical restoration and rehabilitation. Critical disability studies has particular strengths for interdisciplinary engagement, advancing theoretical knowledge in research and knowledge production, teaching, knowledge dissemination and implementation. The Institute's contributions will include helping to provide solutions at all levels of societal organization to problems of exclusion of which people with disabilities and diverse intersectionalities are part.

A scan of academic programs in Canada and the world reveals some Disability Studies programs at advanced levels, (graduate and postdoctoral) which are critical in nature. The *voice* of those who have been oft-excluded (people with disabilities) is central to their work. These locations are recognized for their leadership; their academic production; their influence on social and health policy; and advancing global thinking around society and disability.

The development of the Institute will capitalize on the existing pockets of interest in disability-related studies at the University of Ottawa. It will take some inspiration from components of international and domestic offerings of disability studies, research centres and program characteristics (some examples are provided at the end of this appendix), and learn about the models that differ from critical disability studies to ensure there are no conceptual gaps. Given that a natural partner of the University of Ottawa, Saint Paul University, has had a sustained interest over years in disability and counselling, an opportunity now presents itself to propose an interuniversity Institute, combining the strengths of both institutions. Development will proceed at a measured pace to ensure a thorough and thoughtful planning process. The hosting University of Ottawa's experience of interdisciplinary studies, its strengths in evaluation and governance – to name a few - show that the University of Ottawa with its partners, has significant advantages for a fully successful permanent Institute.

Two key institutions:

- i) UK – University of Leeds Centre for Disability Studies <http://disability-studies.leeds.ac.uk/>
- ii) The Society for Disability Studies (SDS) <https://disstudies.org/index.php/about-sds/> - not a research institute per se but a leading international organization that promotes the study of disability in social, cultural, and political contexts.

Examples of academic disability studies centres/schools.

Canada – Ryerson University School of Disability Studies <http://www.ryerson.ca/disabilitystudies/>

Canada - York University – Critical Disability Studies at
<https://hhs.viu.ca/disability-studies>

Canada - University of Manitoba – Canadian Centre for Disability Studies
<http://www.disabilitystudies.ca/ccds---about.html>

United States - Department of Disability and Human Development University of Illinois at Chicago
<http://catalog.uic.edu/gcat/colleges-schools/applied-health-sciences/dis/>

Australia - Centre for Disability Research and Policy at the University of Sydney
<http://sydney.edu.au/health-sciences/cdrp/about.shtml>

United States