

**Organizational Review on  
Systemic Discrimination in the  
UBC Alma Mater Society**

**May 2010**

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(SPARC BC) in collaboration with PeerNet BC**

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# Executive Summary

## Preamble

The UBC Alma Mater Society (AMS) strives for equity and diverse representation in all its institutional structures and processes. However, despite diversity in the broader campus population, many members of the AMS believe that diversity is not well represented in the governance structures of the AMS. In an effort to address this issue, the AMS contracted the Social Planning and Research Council of BC (SPARC BC) and PeerNet BC to conduct an organizational review of systemic discrimination in the AMS, focusing on the inter-related issues of equity, diversity and systemic discrimination.

According to the Discrimination and Harassment Policy of the AMS, amended October 8, 2008, discrimination refers to unfair or differential treatment of an individual or group, whether intentional or unintentional, on the basis of one or more prohibited grounds. These grounds include but are not limited to those contained in the B.C. *Human Rights Code* and are: race, colour, ancestry, place of origin, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, gender, gender identity, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, family status, physical or mental disability, religion, union membership, union activities, political activities, age, etc.

Systemic discrimination can be understood to be a form of discrimination that is “built into organizational structures and processes, and often involving informal activities and cultures.”<sup>1</sup> While some forms of systemic discrimination can be addressed through the *Canadian Human Rights Act* and the *Employment Equity Act*, systemic discrimination remains a difficult issue to pin down. Indeed, the fact that systemic discrimination is likely hidden makes it difficult to diagnose and address. This does not mean that systemic discrimination does not exist.<sup>2</sup>

While Canadians show a strong disapproval for overt racism, attitude surveys reveal an underlying “distinct racial hierarchy in preferences for neighbours, co-workers, and potential spouses for sons and daughters.”<sup>3</sup> These preferences can extend to a range of other identity issues, including sexual orientation, gender, and physical ability. The possible implications for institutional equity are widespread, affecting promotion, engagement and pay of those discriminated against. However, how profound the real impacts are remains under researched.<sup>4</sup>

Systemic discrimination is made more complex by the fact that it can be perpetuated by informal practices imbedded in normal organizational life, which have become part of the system. Thus, practices retained over the long-term that may not have started as discriminatory become so because they fail to address the changing context of equity and human rights embedded in Canadian law and society.<sup>5</sup>

## Review Method

The goal of this review is to present an external perspective on equity, diversity and systemic discrimination in the AMS. We have identified both concerns about and recommendations for addressing systemic discrimination. We have linked our recommendations to broader governance concerns, such as representation and engagement.

Our organizational review revealed a number of organizational barriers to greater inclusion and diversity in the AMS. While principles of inclusion, transparency and engagement are enshrined in the founding documents of the AMS, our research shows that not all students feel adequately represented by or engaged in the governance body of the AMS.

This review was conducted in three phases. The first was a review of documented structures and processes. Researchers analyzed governance documents, such as the AMS Constitution and Code of Procedure, and recent council decision making on key diversity issues, such as the proposed non-voting disability seat. Second, an online survey was conducted through AMS list-serves. The results of this survey then contributed to a series of focus groups, where AMS members were invited to provide feedback on questions about systemic discrimination in the AMS and offer suggestions regarding future strategies the AMS can implement to address concerns regarding discrimination.

## Results of Review

Three key issues have been identified regarding equity and diversity in AMS governance:

1. Many AMS members feel under-represented and unheard by current and past AMS Council governments.
2. Many AMS members feel that issues of systemic discrimination are not adequately addressed in AMS governance.
3. Many AMS members feel that AMS Council decision making processes are ineffective and do not reflect diverse viewpoints existent in the many branches of the UBC AMS.

Our recommendations are informed by these issues and have been organized according to a strategic planning framework. Three overarching **Goals** are presented, each representing an ideal state of affairs regarding issues of diversity, equity and discrimination. **Objectives** are statements that articulate specific types of changes that need to happen in order to achieve the overarching goals. Each objective is supported by a very brief description of a series of **Strategies**, which outline a course of action that can be taken by the AMS to achieve the objectives, which support the overarching goals. The goals, objectives and strategies are presented below.

**Goal 1: AMS Members are Better Represented and More Engaged**

**Objective 1.1: Increase Transparency and Efficiency of AMS Council Decision Making**

**Strategies:**

- a) Clarify relationship between Council and committees
- b) Develop a committee coordinator
- c) Increase the lead time for agenda distribution
- d) Provide a streaming video feed of Council meetings
- e) Continue using non-voting seats

**Objective 1.2: Improve Engagement of Constituents Outside of Council Meetings**

**Strategies:**

- a) Research issues of engagement
- b) Use diverse types of meetings to consult with stakeholders
- c) Support AMS groups to become more engaged with the Council

**Objective 1.3: Increase Communication with Constituents**

**Strategies:**

- a) Develop a clear communication plan for the AMS Council
- b) Make Councilors more accessible to constituents

**Objective 1.4: Increase Voter Participation**

**Strategy:**

- a) Harmonize and promote elections

**Goal 2: Diversity and Equity Programs and Policies are Appropriately Implemented, Supported and Monitored**

**Objective 2.1: Strengthen Implementation of Diversity and Equity Programming**

**Strategies:**

- a) Conduct Review of the Equity Program
- b) Develop Sustainable Mainstream Mechanism to Address Issues of Systemic Discrimination

**Objective 2.2:** Improve Evaluation and Monitoring of Equity and Diversity Programming

**Strategy:**

- a) Develop clear monitoring and evaluation strategy for equity programming

**Goal 3: Council Decision Making and Internal Communication Processes are More Effective**

**Objective 3.1:** Enhance Training of Councilors for Roles and Responsibilities

**Strategies:**

- a) Implement communication training during transition
- b) Provide ongoing opportunities for training

**Objective 3.2:** Innovate AMS Council Decision-Making Processes so it can Accommodate an Increased Number of AMS Voices in Decision Making Debates

**Strategies:**

- a) Streamline Council processes
- b) Research, develop and experiment with innovative strategies for decision making

We recognize the challenges in governing a body as complex as the AMS on a largely volunteer basis. For this reason, we applaud the AMS for addressing issues of systemic discrimination. Although we are critical in our analysis of the AMS, we are also hopeful that the AMS can take the findings of this review and take practical steps toward making AMS governance more inclusive of diverse voices. In sum, this report represents an invitation to the AMS to demonstrate leadership in the field of diversity and equity in Canadian society. We are hopeful that the AMS will rise to the challenge.

# 1. Introduction

The UBC Alma Mater Society (AMS) strives for equity and diverse representations in all its institutional structures and processes. However, despite diversity in the broader campus population, many members of the AMS believe that diversity is not represented in the governance structures of the AMS. In an effort to address this issue, the AMS contracted the Social Planning and Research Council of BC (SPARC BC) and PeerNet BC to conduct an organizational review of systemic discrimination in the AMS, focusing on the inter-related issues of inclusion, diversity and systemic discrimination.

According to the Discrimination and Harassment Policy of the AMS, amended October 8, 2008, discrimination refers to unfair or differential treatment of an individual or group, whether intentional or unintentional, on the basis of one or more prohibited grounds. These grounds include but are not limited to those contained in the B.C. *Human Rights Code* and are: race, colour, ancestry, place of origin, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, gender, gender identity, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, family status, physical or mental disability, religion, union membership, union activities, political activities, age, etc.

Systemic discrimination can be understood to be a form of discrimination that is “built into organizational structures and processes, and often involving informal activities and cultures.”<sup>6</sup> While some forms of systemic discrimination can be addressed through the *Canadian Human Rights Act* and the *Employment Equity Act*, systemic discrimination remains a difficult issue to pin down. Indeed, the fact that systemic discrimination is likely hidden makes it difficult to diagnose and address. This does not, however, mean that systemic discrimination does not exist.<sup>7</sup>

This report presents the findings of an organizational review process that demonstrates that systemic discrimination is an issue in AMS governance. The report consists of six sections, including this introductory section. In the next section, the review methodology is explained. In section three, a review of AMS governance structures and processes is presented. Section four presents the results of the online survey. In section five, we discuss the results of the review of AMS governance document and the results of the online survey. Section six offers a set of recommendations for the AMS to use in addressing systemic discrimination. Appendix 1 consists of the online survey questions. Appendix 2 consists of the focus group agenda. Appendix 3 consists of the references.

## **2. Methodology and Limitations**

SPARC BC and PeerNet used three research approaches to conduct this review of systemic discrimination. An initial review of documents and AMS Council decision making provided researchers with an understanding of how the AMS operates and makes decisions. Researchers developed a survey based on the concepts from the documents reviewed. This survey provided an opportunity for AMS members to voice their opinions on how the AMS engages issues of diversity and discrimination. The results of this survey contributed to the series of questions posed at three focus groups. These focus groups allowed students to further voice concerns, but also contributed strongly to suggestions for improvement within the AMS, in order to improve its approach to diversity and inclusion.

### **2.1. Review of Governance Structures and Processes**

A review of internal governance structures and engagement processes was conducted. Key documents for this review included:

- AMS Constitution
- Executive Procedures Manual
- AMS Code of Procedure
- AMS Bylaws
- AMS Strategic Framework
- Relevant AMS Policies
- Handbook for Councilors
- AMS Council meeting minutes that address diversity issues

The goal of this literature review was to assess the AMS' approach to diversity and inclusion based on its founding governance documents, procedures, bylaws, policies, and Council decisions. These documents and data were examined from an anti-oppression perspective, in order to highlight key commitments to diversity and inclusion and identify procedural or structural barriers that may perpetuate systemic discrimination.

### **2.2. Online Survey**

Based on the results of the literature review, an online survey was designed and administered to respondents that had a range of involvement with the AMS, including at-large-members, resource group members, AMS employees, Council members, committee members, food outlet employees, club members, services staff or other. Participant responses helped identify systemic barriers that students in the AMS face, strengths of the AMS in addressing these systemic barriers and opportunities for the AMS to improve their approach to systemic discrimination. Survey respondents were also asked for suggestions to improve future initiatives. The survey received 154 responses, with 113 (73.4%) respondents completing every question. The percentages throughout this section were calculated based on the total number of respondents to a particular question. Most



questions had a ‘don’t know/no answer’ option, thereby allowing respondents to opt out where they lacked knowledge or had no opinion on an issue.

Due to the budget of the project, a single online survey was administered and therefore a representative sample of the AMS was not achieved. Therefore the survey findings should be treated with caution. As such, the survey results merely provide an indication of some AMS member feedback and suggestions regarding issues of diversity, inclusion and discrimination.

Scale questions were analyzed in terms of frequencies. The qualitative survey data was incorporated into the recommendations section of this report.

### **2.3. Focus Groups**

Building on the results of the online survey, researchers designed a focus group, which was delivered three times in mid April, on the 9<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>. The focus groups provided a brief introduction of the literature review and survey findings. Participants were then asked to express opinions or concerns about the current approach and provide suggestions for improving the AMS’ approach to equity and diversity issues. In total, seventeen AMS members participated in the focus groups.

The focus group data was not analyzed separately in this report. Instead the data has been integrated into the articulation of recommendations for the AMS in the final section of this report.

### **3. Results of Literature Review Pertaining to AMS Governance Structures and Decision Making Processes**

While an organizational review can serve many purposes, this organizational review is on the challenging and contentious issue of systemic discrimination in AMS governance structures. This literature review examines a range of AMS governance documents and Council minutes in order to evaluate where and how systemic discrimination may be at work in the AMS. As such, this review assumes that systemic discrimination is at work in the AMS and therefore seeks to identify the pattern of systemic discrimination at work in the AMS.

Governance structures often do not actively seek to perpetuate systemic discrimination and it is often very difficult for those in positions of decision making power to perceive practices of systemic discrimination. This is often why public participation from employees and advocacy groups plays a key role in identifying and addressing systemic discrimination.<sup>8</sup> The AMS should be applauded for responding to the interests of AMS constituents by taking a critical look at AMS structures and systems for decision making.

This review of governance structures and processes is organized into two sections. The first section provides a review of governance structures and processes. The second section provides a critique of select AMS Council decision-making pertaining to diversity issues, as well as an interpretation of the attitudes at work in these decision making moments.

### **3.1. Review of Governance Structures and Processes**

This section provides an overview of the operation of AMS governance structures. Documents relating to the principles, structures, and day-to-day governance have been synthesized with an eye to issues of discrimination, inclusion and equity. This section moves from the high-level principle documents, such as Constitution and Mission Statement, to governance-specific documents, such as bylaws and policies.

There is a clear hierarchy amongst the documents, with the Constitution forming the basis of all AMS governance processes. The bylaws are built upon the constitution, providing clear operational rules. The code of procedures and policies, which require a two-thirds majority in council, are subordinate to the bylaws and Constitution. The executive procedures are based on the code of procedures, and require a majority vote of the executive to be passed. Policies are developed to help focus the activities of the Council, but are not binding.

Finally, council motions need to be framed within these documents, recognizing their hierarchical relationship.<sup>1</sup> These documents form the structure for Council's operation as the governing body of the AMS. Other key considerations in providing appropriate context for this organizational review include the mission statement, which is intended to guide the AMS as a whole, the AMS Strategic Framework, which attempts to provide a roadmap in moving from vision to action and the structure of the broader AMS itself as a complex, multi-faceted organization.

#### **3.1.1. Constitution**

The two-page constitution of UBC's AMS provides the foundation of student governance in the university. Among the eleven Objects, or statements outlined in the constitution, there are three that are relevant to this review:

- To promote the principle and practice of student representation at all levels of decision making at the University and on all agencies or other bodies which deliberate on the affairs of its members.
- To advance the cause of higher learning in the Province of British Columbia.
- To promote unity and goodwill amongst its members.

These three statements speak to the aims of the AMS governance structure with regard to the AMS. While there are no direct references to diversity and inclusion in these statements, the language used nonetheless promotes the notion of democratic and equitable engagement of students in all the affairs of the AMS.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Council motions are discussed in *Section 3: AMS Council Decision Making*.

### 3.1.2. Bylaws, Code of Procedure and Executive Procedures

AMS governance, particularly AMS Council, is largely shaped by three key legal documents: the AMS Bylaws, the Code of Procedure and the Executive Procedures. The Bylaws dictate the governance and decision-making structure of AMS Council, the Code of Procedures dictates procedure for the Council and Council Members, the Senate Caucus, committees of Council, planning groups, student services, core staff, student resource groups, student court and the grad class council. Essentially, this document provides the basis for procedure with the broad set of AMS organizations and bodies. The Executive Procedures outlines the procedures for the AMS Executive Council, including commissions, responsibilities, and a range of other conduct-oriented issues.

While the bulk of these documents deal with day-to-day governance concerns, it should be noted that some effort is made in these documents to promote opportunities for diverse students participation in the AMS governance structure. Of particular note are provisions for child care, in Section II, Article 14 of the Code of Procedure. This article recognizes that an unfair burden may be placed upon women with children who wish to participate in AMS Council. As such, this article attempts to address the systemic barrier through legal and financial means, thus promoting a more inclusive system of governance in the AMS. As more systemic barriers are recognized, these too can be addressed through the procedures and bylaws of the Society.<sup>10</sup>

### 3.1.3. Policies

The policies passed by the AMS Council represent the plan of action on pertinent business. A number of policies specifically address issues of equity, diversity and accessible government. In particular, the *Human Rights Policy*, the *Discrimination and Harassment Policy*, the *University Participation Policy* and the *Equity Representative Policy* directly address issues of discrimination, access to AMS services and structures and inclusion in governance and decision-making processes.

The *Human Rights Policy*, passed January 24, 2007, quotes the AMS Mission Statement and notes that the role of “a university is to provide individuals with the necessary tools to be responsible, committed, self-reflexive, and aware citizens of the world.” Moreover, the policy recognizes the role of many on-campus student groups that would make use of a human rights policy in their work. Finally, the policy notes that “it is our responsibility as the student society to foster a climate of inclusion, respect and safety on campus.” These points lead to direct support for the *United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.<sup>11</sup>

The *University Participation Policy*, passed February 7, 2007, addresses affordable access to university education. This policy notes that BC has the lowest university participation rate in Canada, that financial barriers are the primary reason young people choose not to attend university, and that “students coming from the top economic quartile are 2.5 times more likely to attend university than those coming from the bottom

economic quintile.” For these reasons the AMS developed a policy to “lobby the University and the Government to implement policies that will ensure increased university participation in lower income brackets, with the goal of equalizing access to university education in British Columbia across income quintiles.”<sup>12</sup>

The *Discrimination and Harassment Policy*, amended October 8, 2008, represents a comprehensive response to issues of differential treatment of an individual or group. This policy discusses issues of discrimination and harassment, as well as opportunities for education and prevention. The policy represents the most wide-ranging discussion of issues of discrimination in AMS governance documents, defining it as:

unfair or differential treatment of an individual or group, whether intentional or unintentional, on the basis of one or more prohibited grounds. These grounds include but are not limited to those contained in the B.C. *Human Rights Code* and are: race, colour, ancestry, place of origin, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, gender, gender identity, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, family status, physical or mental disability, religion, union membership, union activities, political activities, age, conviction of a criminal or summary conviction offence that is unrelated to the employment or the intended employment of that person.<sup>13</sup>

This definition covers both overt forms of discrimination and systemic discrimination. Any barriers for individuals or groups in participation in AMS processes and structures that are ‘unintentional’ can be determined to be systemic discriminatory barriers.<sup>14</sup>

A key policy that addresses this issue of unintentional, systemic discrimination is the *AMS Equity Representative Policy*. Passed June 25, 2008, the policy resolves that equity representatives be available within AMS groups and at AMS events to address concerns, facilitate resolutions and report back to those present at events, while keeping issues in confidence when required. This policy explicitly recognizes that discrimination can and does occur within AMS structures. It also represents a vital tool for addressing discrimination, both overt and systemic.<sup>15</sup>

### **3.1.4. Mission Statement**

The Mission Statement provides a succinct description of the AMS’ purpose, sometimes linking language used in the Constitution to outline this purpose. However, it should be noted that the mission statement has the standing of a council motion, and therefore does not carry the weight of a policy or bylaw. The AMS Mission statement is “To improve the quality of the educational, social, and personal lives of the students of UBC.” The full statement further elaborates on this by indicating that the AMS will “advocate student interests” and “provide its members with diverse opportunities to become exceptional leaders.” Furthermore, the statement commits the AMS to transparency, explaining that: “The Society will foster communication, both internally and externally, in order to be democratic, fair, accountable to, and accessible to its members.” The purpose of the AMS is therefore to work toward the Objects outlined in the Constitution,

while remaining transparent, inclusive and democratic while fulfilling the actions outlined.<sup>16</sup>

### 3.1.5. Strategic Framework

The Strategic Framework was developed to provide a bridge between key values and goals laid out in the AMS Constitution and Mission Statement and the practice of governing. The five core values outlined in this document include constituents, resources, stewardship, community and sustainability, with the first and third values being most relevant to this review.

The constituent value explains that the AMS aims to “engage constituents” in an ongoing way that seeks the active participation “in the goals and activities of the Society.” Stewardship is defined as the fostering of “professional governance structures that are accessible, transparent, accountable, and forward-thinking.” These two values, in particular, highlight the importance of diverse engagement and inclusion strategies in the on-the-ground activities of the AMS, while also indicating the importance of a continued consideration of both overt and systemic forms of discrimination that can occur in any governance structure.

The particular outcomes and measurements of success in implementing these values in governance processes are defined as follows:<sup>2</sup>

- **Constituents:**
  - *Active engagement of constituents:* the number of constituents involved; the retention and levels of commitment of constituents
  - *Active consultation of student collective to determine what is important to all constituents:* the number of usable ideas coming from constituents; the number of groups and individuals contributing ideas; assessing constituent satisfaction with the AMS’ contribution to their lives
  - *Encouragement of increased constituent involvement in governance structures:* constituents’ knowledge of AMS governance; voter turnout and comparisons to other institutions; number of candidates running in elections; number of constituencies represented in governance structures; number of vacant seats in governance structures
  
- **Stewardship:**
  - *Effective governance that reduces duplication, increases coordination between governing bodies and creates ease of access for constituents:* number of steps and length of time required for common functions and requests to be processed/completed; satisfaction surveys and consultations; number of constituents participating in consultations

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<sup>2</sup> Outcomes and measurements are synthesized from the document, and paraphrase the original language. Only those outcomes and measurements relevant to this review have been included here. The values are in bold face, outcomes are italicized, while measurements follow the outcomes identified.

- *Development of framework and processes required to enable strategic planning and implementation over medium/long-term: establish, monitor and review benchmarks; track the number and quality of baseline performance indicators obtained; track time and financial resources required to implement the strategic planning process*

The values, outcomes and measurements presented in the Strategic Framework therefore clearly outline the need for strong engagement with all members of the student body that the AMS represents. This Strategic Framework outlines an appropriate strategy for working toward and achieving a democratic and diverse system of governance that enacts the Objects of the Constitution in the spirit of the principles identified in the Mission Statement. Key to this strategy is the recognized need for strong engagement from all members of AMS constituencies. This in turn necessitates tools to improve knowledge of, interest in and access to all decision-making processes used by the AMS.<sup>17</sup>

### **3.1.6. AMS Structure**

The AMS is a complex organization, composed of five wings: resource groups, services, clubs, businesses and Council. While there is neither the need nor the time to expand largely upon this, it is nonetheless important to note UBC AMS efforts to improve diversity and inclusion through its various operating bodies. These include many of the student services, AMS resource groups and some of the core AMS staff.

The UBC AMS resource groups “are run by students and aim to support, protect, and celebrate the different backgrounds and beliefs of its membership.”<sup>18</sup> Resource groups include:

- *Allies at UBC*: a “resource group for pro-feminist men who believe there is inequality between genders and are against violence against women.”
- *Colour Connected*: a “group that provides support and information to students who feel alienated and disempowered due to discrimination.”
- *Student Environment Centre*: a group that seeks to provide ecological education, connect and support students voicing their environmental concerns and foster a community of environmentally concerned individuals
- *Pride UBC*: this group provides support to members and friends of GLBT communities at UBC, assist those coming out, educate the UBC community and host events
- *Social Justice Centre*: this group “aims to serve any and all students interested in finding progressive solutions to societal injustice.”
- *Womyn’s Centre*: “a space where women can feel safe, empower each other, and organize against sexism and violence.”<sup>19</sup>

The orientation of these resource groups is clearly anti-discriminatory, and speaks to the ideals and values of inclusion, diversity and participation expressed by the AMS.

However, the need for their existence also speaks to the fact that UBC students continue to feel discrimination on campus, overt or systemic.

The AMS also provides a host of student services, ranging from food services to student employment. Some of these services directly address issues of discrimination, diversity and equity. Key services offered by the AMS that address these issues include:

- *AMS Safety Coordinator's Office*: The AMS Safety Coordinator addresses “safety concerns and the well-being of all students.” This includes both physical safety as well as “issues of emotional and mental safety such as forms of discrimination and oppression based on race, ethnicity, disability, sex, gender, sexual diversity, etc.”<sup>20</sup>
- *AMS Safewalk*: Safewalk is “a free service from the AMS that is looking out for [students’] safety on campus, and operates most nights during the school year with its walking service.”<sup>21</sup>
- *AMS Sexual Assault Support Centre*: The SASC “offers support services to survivors of sexual assault and other forms of violence, as well as their friends, family members, and partners.”<sup>22</sup>
- *AMS Advocacy Office*: This office “provides confidential assistance and representation for students involved in conflict with the University.”<sup>23</sup>
- *AMS Equity Office*: This office works to recognize and respond to issues of systemic discrimination on campus and in our broader communities. The AMS Equity Program coordinates training workshops for equity representatives within AMS affiliates, including clubs and constituencies.<sup>24</sup>
- *Sprouts*: Sprouts runs social enterprises, including a café, grocery store and healthy food box program that are designed to support their education and outreach programs. These include the Community Eats program, which is “dedicated to fostering food security and encouraging community engagement on and beyond our campus.”<sup>25</sup>
- *AMS Food Bank*: This service is designed to provide access to emergency food to UBC students, seven days a week.<sup>26</sup>

Each of these programs addresses some dimension of equity. However, despite their focus on equity concerns, these groups are service deliverers and have no political or decision-making powers within the AMS.<sup>27</sup>

Finally, the AMS consists of about 300 student clubs, including cultural, political, religious, recreational and professional organizations.<sup>28</sup> These organizations are limited to the specific mandate set out when they are formed and can host events with AMS support; however these groups also have little influence on decision-making processes. AMS clubs are mandated to have equity representatives and receive AMS Equity Representative training.<sup>29</sup> These clubs are a key space where principles of equity and inclusion are incorporated.



### **3.1.7. Summary Discussion of Governance Structures and Processes**

The notion of an inclusive system of student government is embedded in the underlying principles of the AMS. The Constitution, Mission Statement and Strategic Framework all represent high-level approaches to the creation of a system of governance that discourages discrimination, while encouraging an inclusive and participatory spirit in AMS structures and processes. As such, the principles are in place to achieve this inclusive governance model.

Comprehensive development of inclusive governance, however, necessarily recognizes the possibility of systemic discrimination in any institution or bureaucracy. While the policies and bylaws begin to address these concerns, for example, through the adoption of a Discrimination and Harassment Policy and a child care provision for Council,<sup>30</sup> there are nonetheless significant gaps in addressing discrimination throughout the UBC AMS. The child care policy, for example, was developed in 2004, in order to encourage representation of parents on Council.<sup>31</sup> The provision, however, has not been used since its implementation, likely because there has been little publicity about it to prospective Council members.<sup>32</sup> This reflects the significant gaps that can occur between principle and practice: the existence of policy addressing equity does not necessarily ensure an equitable governance environment. These gaps are further discussed in greater detail in the following section.

## **3.2. AMS Council Decision Making: A Critical Historical Review of Decisions Regarding Diversity and Equity**

In the AMS Council, representation of diversity remains an issue. With no specific tools or processes to engage the range of minority and marginalized groups on campus, the Council risks failing to recognize not only the needs of the students, but the specific challenges and barriers these students face. This section focuses on Council decision-making, and the historical debates regarding diversity and discrimination that have taken place in Council meetings. These debates reflect how Council approaches diversity and the recognition of systemic discrimination.

### **3.2.1. Non-Voting Native Indian Student Union Representative**

The history of debate over inclusion of diversity in Council processes extends to at least 1990, when AMS Council voted to have a non-voting representative of the Native Indian Student Union (NISU) in Council. While the issue was contentious during the Council meeting, the resolution passed with only one vote against it. The NISU representative at the time, Sandee Doxdator, considered the move a significant achievement in inclusive governance, noting that: “To be a part of the process is . . . one step closer towards understanding each other. People have always been speaking for us. We’ve always maintained our rights to our land and our sovereignty. We don’t want to lecture, we want to talk.”

As noted, there was some opposition to the idea of non-voting representation on AMS Council. The AMS coordinator of external affairs, Jason Brett, who voted against the motion, explained that: “It’s precedent setting, and I think it’s a poor precedent to give anyone special privileges or deny special privileges based on genetic make-up. It’s what got us into this mess in the first place.” This attitude is an example of a well-intentioned approach to equity, but one that fails to recognize the subtlety of systemic discrimination. Brett saw the granting of the non-voting seat as privileging of aboriginal students, a form of reverse discrimination.

However, this concept of reverse discrimination fails to note that systemic barriers exist for full participation of Indigenous people in many public institutions and their governance structures. Doxdator alludes to some of these barriers by explaining that: “It’s hard for native students coming into post secondary education. They are breaking new ground coming into the university and becoming involved.”<sup>33</sup> This statement shows that for many minority or marginalized groups, participation in higher education institutes, especially governance and decision making, is difficult, not because they are not allowed to participate, but rather because the processes and structures for governing and decision making do not accommodate the wide range of governance needs present in a diverse population. Developments such as the motion to create the non-voting NISU seat represent an important way to enrich governance debates and hear from groups that might not otherwise feel comfortable or be able to participate in Council meetings.

Unfortunately, the NISU dissolved some years later, and the seat sat vacant for at least 5 years. It was decided by the Code and Policies Committee in 2000 to eliminate the seat from the Council structure.<sup>34</sup>

### **3.2.2. Voting Seats for Indigenous and International Students**

The debate over diverse representation in Council was revived in 2005, when a motion was put forth for a referendum that would allow students to vote on the addition of 1 voting seat each for Indigenous and international students. Again, this was a contentious issue, with some representatives, such as Ian McKechnie, concerned that this move would “change the fundamental democratic structure of Council.” This attitude corresponds to the notion of reverse discrimination discussed earlier, where supporters of an existing governance structure fail to see the barriers inherent in that system that limit the participation of representatives from minority or marginalized groups. The failure to recognize systemic barriers contributes to the perception that democracy will be undermined by the “special inclusion of specific groups.”<sup>35</sup>

A rationale for inclusion of marginalized groups in governance structures was articulated by an opposing voice in the debate, Lyle McMahan, who noted that:

Indigenous students have never appeared at Council except for one recent meeting. This would be a welcoming gesture, a proactive step, recognizing the unfortunate history of First Nations people.

McMahan also noted that other governance structures, such as the Canadian Federation of Students, had seats for queer students, women, mature students and First Nations people. McMahan’s perspective was that these seats enriched the debate, and were necessary in addressing discrimination in governance structures.<sup>36</sup>

The tension in this debate arises from a difference in opinion about whether systemic barriers exist in the AMS governance structures. On the one hand, some representatives feel that, due to the overall democratic structuring of the AMS, minorities should be able to participate through existing processes such as committees, election process, etc. On the other hand, other representatives see the structures in place in the AMS as inherently exclusive, rooted historically in a tradition that privileged, and continues to privilege caucasian, middle and upper class, heterosexual, able bodied people, especially males. It is this latter understanding of discrimination that sees the creation of special council seats as an important step toward equity and diversity in governance.

Ultimately, while the resolution for the referendum question was passed, the referendum results failed to achieve the three-quarters majority required for the bylaw change, in the case of both seats.

### **3.2.3. Non-Voting International Student Seat**

The opportunity for a seat for international students emerged again in November, 2008, when a motion was put forth to create a non-voting seat for international students. Advocates gave a presentation to Council, arguing that the seat would bridge the gap between international students and Council. While the strongest advocates felt that the seat should be a voting seat, they recognized the possible divisions created by such a motion, and the International Students' Association (ISA) only asked for a non-voting seat.

One representative, Tahara Bhate suggested that this might lead to other groups, such as First Nations students and disabled students, asking for a seat.<sup>37</sup> This perspective again sees the creation of spaces in which minority and/or marginalized groups are able to voice their concerns as incompatible with the existing conception of a democratic electoral process that determines the members of Council.

By contrast, another Council representative noted that Council can and should accommodate diverse voices in the decision-making process. Jamil Rhajiak focused on the importance of the ISA's desire to be involved in Council, noting that through a seat for international students "we can find out what [their] issues are; we can bring them forward."<sup>38</sup>

This debate highlights the ongoing tension between maintaining the existing governance structure and the idea of innovating UBC AMS governance to be capable of accommodating a greater diversity of voices in its formal decision making process. On November 19, 2008, the motion was voted on and carried, creating a non-voting seat for international students.

### **3.2.4. Non-Voting Disability Seat**

Diversity in representation was discussed again by Council in November, 2009, when a motion came forward for the creation of a non-voting seat for students with disabilities. Rory Green and Emma Ellison presented the numerous barriers facing participation of students with disabilities in Council and the benefits offered by the creation of the seat, at which point the motion was discussed.

Resistance to the motion was voiced by several representatives. Tahara Bhate resisted the notion that systemic discrimination was at work, noting that there was a representative on Council with hearing disabilities who had "found a way to participate through normal channels."<sup>39</sup> Another representative, Matthew Naylor, noted that the Council operated under a certain structure: representation by popular faculty. He suggested that any move to change the type of representation should be done holistically, rather than piecemeal.

Many representatives also voiced support for the motion. Timothy Chu noted that the current governance system was not adequately representative of diversity on campus and that this seat would “bring forward different perspectives,” allowing Council to hear about the various barriers in place. He also noted that many students had come forth to tell Council that they were not being adequately represented, and that this seat was an opportunity to change that.<sup>40</sup>

At play in these debates is resistance to the notion of adapting existing governance structures to represent the diversity of students at UBC. While student guests were communicating to Council their need for greater representation, the motion was eventually defeated by a vote of 10 (for) to 21 (against).

### **3.2.5. Recent Changes to AMS Structure and Programming**

The opposition to diverse forms of representation on AMS Council, largely in the form of non-voting seats, has recently met further challenges, with the election of a new Council. On March 31, 2010 the new Council voted to remove the non-voting International Student Seat.<sup>41</sup> More recently these efforts have led to an agenda that aims to restructure the AMS, reducing or eliminating many of the equity programs or policies that have been developed to date. The agenda for the March 31, 2010 Council meeting included a review of the Ombudsperson Position, the removal of the Equity Coordinator Position, the attempt to shift responsibility of equity workshops to the UBC Equity Office, and the discontinuation of the Safety Office as a student service in order to merge it with Safewalk.<sup>42</sup>

## **4. Survey Results**

The survey (Appendix A) developed based on the findings of the review of governance structures and processes. 154 people completed the survey, with 113 (73.4%) answering each question. In this section, the results of the quantitative results of the survey are presented. The response to the open ended questions on the survey have been integrated into the recommendations section of the report.

### **4.1. Demographics**

#### **Age**

The majority of respondents were between 18 and 30 years of age, with 51.6% of respondents were between 18 and 22, 33.5% between 23 and 30. 12.3% were over 30 and only 0.6% were under 18.

#### **Gender**

57.0% of respondents were female while 37.7% were male and 5.3% indicated other in their response.

#### **Affiliation with the AMS**

Students were asked to indicate their affiliation with the AMS. Respondents were allowed to select more than one affiliation, to allow for the various roles they may have in relation to the AMS.

Most respondents (62.6%) identified as members at large. 24.5% identified themselves as club members. A further 16.1% said they had another affiliation than the types listed, and 13.5% said they were resource group members. 8.4% of respondents were council members and 5.2% were services staff. 3.9% were committee members, 3.2% were food outlet employees and 2.6% were core staff

Most respondents (72.6%) chose only 1 affiliation with the AMS. However 17.6% chose 2 affiliations, 7.8% chose 3 affiliations, and 2.0% chose 4 affiliations.

#### **AMS Participation**

The majority of participants were actively engaged in AMS politics and governance issues. 72.6% of respondents had attended a council meeting and 80.5% of respondents voted in the last election.

## **4.2. Responses to Questions about Diversity and Discrimination in the AMS**

Survey participants were generally dissatisfied with AMS efforts to engage issues of diversity, inclusion, equity and discrimination. Responses reveal that a large proportion of respondents felt more could be done to address such issues.

How students felt about AMS efforts to promote diversity in the last 5 years:

- 27.1% felt things were worse
- 27.8% felt things were the same
- 26.3% didn't know or had no answer
- 18.8% felt things were better or much better

How respondents felt about the effectiveness of the AMS in advocating student interests:

- 45.1% said poor or very poor
- 32.3% said fair
- 15.8% said good or excellent
- 6.8% didn't know or had no answer

How respondents felt about diverse opportunities for leadership in the AMS:

- 42.9% said poor or very poor
- 27.1% said fair
- 18.8% said good or excellent
- 11.3% didn't know or had no answer

How respondents felt about the effectiveness of the AMS in fostering fair, democratic and accountable communication:

- 53.4% said poor or very poor
- 27.8% said fair
- 13.6% said good or excellent
- 5.3% didn't know or had no answer

Whether respondents felt there was fairness, respect and consistency in the relationships between the different AMS bodies:

- 48.1% said disagree or strongly disagree
- 28.6% said agree or strongly agree
- 23.3% didn't know or had no answer

Whether respondents felt that Council capitalizes on and values and capitalizes on different ideas and perspectives and this shows in the way it makes decisions, establishes committees and deals with issues:

- 47.1% said disagree or strongly disagree
- 24.5% said agree or strongly agree
- 14.2% didn't know or had no answer

Whether respondents felt the AMS successfully used new or improved methods and approaches for addressing discrimination:

- 57.1% said disagree or strongly disagree
- 24.1% didn't know or had no answer
- 18.8% said agree or strongly agree

Whether respondents felt satisfied with demographic diversity on Council:

- 52.4% were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied
- 19.0% were neutral
- 15.8% were satisfied or very satisfied
- 7.9% didn't know or had no answer

Whether respondents felt satisfied with the process for developing the Strategic Framework:

- 32.5% didn't know or had no answer
- 30.2% were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied
- 23.0% were neutral
- 14.2% were satisfied or very satisfied

Whether respondents felt satisfied with AMS process for including diverse members in its governance structure:

- 53.9% were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied
- 34.9% didn't know or had no answer
- 16.7% were neutral
- 15.9% were satisfied or very satisfied

Whether respondents felt satisfied with AMS Council decision making processes:

- 48.4% were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied
- 23.0% were satisfied or very satisfied
- 16.7% were neutral
- 11.9% didn't know or had no answer

Whether respondents felt satisfied with the degree to which the AMS produces and engages statistics on under-representation of minority groups in its governance structure:

- 53.1% were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied
- 19.0% didn't know or had no answer
- 16.7% were neutral
- 11.1% were satisfied or very satisfied



## 5. Discussion of Literature Review and Survey Results

This section discusses the central diversity and equity issues existent in AMS governance as gleaned from the review of governance documents and the survey. As such, this section provides a sturdy frame of reference for the development of recommendations that are articulated in the following section.

Although the AMS embraces diversity and equity in principle, and while debates about such issues remains strong in Council meetings, recent efforts to address issues of diversity and equity in governance have done little to demonstrate AMS's commitment to cultivating welcoming and inclusive governance climate for UBC students.<sup>3</sup>

There are several dimensions to issues of diversity, equity and discrimination in governance. One aspect of the problem is the structure of representation. AMS representation by faculty leaves many categories of students feeling underrepresented and/or unengaged, which was repeatedly expressed in the survey. Attempts to restructure this representation, however, have largely met with little success. The elimination of a non-voting seat for Aboriginal students, and the non-voting international student seat, as well as the decision not to create a non-voting seat for students with disabilities, represents an unwillingness to engage in reform that might better serve the core values of the organization.

Another concern is the evidenced unwillingness on the part of many Council representatives to support programs that address diversity and equity issues. The AMS Equity Program was an important step in the AMS's movement towards its goal of promoting the principle and practice of student representation at all levels of decision making at the University and on all agencies or other bodies which deliberate on the affairs of its members. The Equity Program was strategically aligned with the University's Equity Office, filling a gap created by the unique role of the various arms of the AMS.<sup>43</sup> In having a branch of the AMS concerned with diversity and equity in governance, the AMS demonstrated a commitment to the issue of providing safe spaces for diverse student participation in governance. The elimination of this program with no expressed plan to develop other strategies to address issues of diversity and equity in governance is a troubling direction for the AMS and undercuts some the organization's core operating principles and policies.

The proceedings from debates in Council about diversity, equity and representation in Council reveal that many representatives refuse to acknowledge problems regarding representation and systemic discrimination. At the heart of this debate is the notion that reforms to address diversity and discrimination in the AMS would weaken democracy. Our contention is that greater diversity in all the AMS governance strengthens democratic decision making, helping address historical inequities that are alive and well today.

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<sup>3</sup> There are some notable exceptions, including the AMS Equity Office and the creation of a non-voting seat for international students. Unfortunately, it appears that as of the completion of this review many (or all) of the AMS programs that represent substantive action on discrimination and diversity issues have been cut (e.g. the non-voting international student seat) or are under threat (e.g. the Equity Coordinator Position).

Based on the findings of the review and the survey, it is possible to define three central challenges for the AMS in its ongoing effort to animate its cores purposes for UBC students:

1. Many AMS members feel under-represented and unheard by current and past AMS Council governments.
2. Many AMS members feel that issues of systemic discrimination are not adequately addressed in AMS governance.
3. Many AMS members feel that AMS Council decision making processes are ineffective and do not reflect diverse viewpoints existent in the many branches of the UBC AMS.

In the next section, we address these concerns through a series of goals, with specific objectives and strategies for achieving them.

## 6. Recommendations: Goals, Objectives and Strategies

Once the survey was completed, three focus groups were conducted in the SUB building. The primary goal of these focus groups was to develop recommendations for strengthening the AMS' approach to addressing concerns about systemic discrimination.

Our recommendations are organized according to a strategic planning framework. Three overarching **Goals** are presented, each representing an ideal state of affairs regarding issues of diversity, equity and discrimination. **Objectives** are statements that articulate specific types of changes that need to happen in order to achieve the overarching goals. Each objective is supported by descriptions of a series of **Strategies**, which outline a course of action that can be taken by the AMS to achieve the objectives, which lead to the overarching goals.

### 6.1. Goal 1: AMS Members are Better Represented and More Engaged

#### **Objective 1.1: Increase Transparency and Efficiency of AMS Council Decision Making**

Council meetings currently represent the key decision making forum for the AMS. As such, they need to be as transparent and efficient as possible. While constituents are currently allowed to attend any meetings that are not designated 'in camera,' the focus groups and organization's review data indicate that there are structural and attitudinal barriers to achieving more diverse constituent participation in AMS governance. The strategies listed below aim to address these barriers and move the AMS toward stronger democratic engagement with its members.

- **Clarify relationship between Council and committees:** A key barrier to greater attendance of Council meetings is their length. Debate often occupies a significant proportion of the meetings, and proposals are often reworded during these meetings. In the governance structure that the AMS uses, committees are often a useful forum for streamlining decision-making processes. Committees should be used to research, debate and revise any proposals that would become bylaws or policies. Once debate and revision occur at the committee level, Council meetings would be largely focused on voting on new measures. This clarification would also allow Council to reduce the number of in camera sessions, as many sensitive or confidential items could be discussed at the committee level (where appropriate).
- **Develop a committee coordinator:** To further facilitate the clarification of the relationship between Council and its committees, a new position should be created to coordinate the many diverse committees. This dedicated role would ensure that duplication of committee work does not occur and would help facilitate communication about committees to constituents, and committees to Council.

- **Increase the lead time for agenda distribution:** AMS constituents who do not regularly attend Council meetings may need to reschedule responsibilities in order to attend Council meetings where decisions are made that may affect them. Additionally, students with disabilities often need to make special arrangements in order to participate meaningfully in Council meetings. In order to accommodate these concerns it is vital that Council agendas be distributed significantly in advance of meetings, preferably with a minimum of 2 weeks before the meeting.
- **Provide a streaming video feed for Council meetings:** Many governments now film their proceedings so that constituents may review them at a later date. By instituting a streaming video feed of Council meetings that constituents can access through the AMS website, the AMS can provide constituents with an impartial source of information on Council decisions.
- **Continue using non-voting seats:** While non-voting seats have been implemented with varying degrees of success, the AMS should nonetheless consider the importance of these seats in accessing a broader cross-section of its constituency. Non-voting seats ensure that diverse voices are included in debate, while at the same time honoring the results of the traditional democratic electoral process currently in place in the AMS.

### **Objective 1.2: Improve Engagement of Constituents Outside of Council Meetings**

In addition to increasing constituents' engagement with Council during meetings, the AMS Council needs to proactively engage its members outside of Council meetings. By hosting events and forums, the Council can actively encourage greater participation among its diverse members who may not be able or be inclined to come to meetings.

- **Research issues of engagement:** In order to address the issue of inadequate member engagement with the AMS, further research needs to be conducted into the reasons underlying low participation rates. A climate survey can be distributed to all AMS members to determine why participation rates remain low, and develop strategies and incentives to address this issue. Additionally, research should be done with various branches of the AMS to identify their specific engagement needs (e.g. what do clubs need in order to participate, etc.)
- **Use diverse types of meetings to consult with stakeholders:** Presentations to Council are only one of many ways of ensuring that appropriate stakeholder consultation occurs. By implementing new forums for constituents to voice concerns over a particular policy or decision, the Council can increase transparency and ensure that appropriate stakeholders are consulted about decisions that affect them. Engagement approaches could include open space sessions with stakeholders, town hall meetings, and debates on hot button issues in public. Additionally, Council could encourage greater student participation on committees by actively recruiting members from the various AMS branches to help develop policy. By using a greater diversity of engagement tools the AMS can address issues of discrimination and diversity. For example, where a diversity

initiative is voted against as it is deemed to be an ineffective way of addressing discrimination (e.g. non-voting seat for students with disabilities), follow up sessions with key stakeholders can help Council develop alternative solutions to the issue raised in Council.

- **Support AMS groups to become more engaged with the Council:** Clubs resource groups and services represent a significant component of the AMS; however, our research revealed an engagement gap between Council. Various suggestions to bridge this gap were raised in the focus group sessions, including the development of a resource guide for Council to use on how to include and engage with these groups; and the development of a decision-making collective for clubs that could bring forward suggestions and concerns to Council.

### **Objective 1.3: Increase Communication with Constituents**

In order to increase member participation in the AMS, it is vital that constituents are aware of what programs the AMS is planning and what policies it is implementing. An open and frank communication between constituents and elected representatives is the basis for a strong democracy. Focus group participants felt that many Councilors were inaccessible, and that a large proportion of AMS members do not know what happens in Council.

- **Develop a clear communication plan for AMS Council:** Without a proper communication strategy that allows the AMS Council to communicate with and hear back from the membership, engagement will likely remain a problem. A communication plan would need to incorporate several strategies to be successful. These include: continued advertisements and marketing within the various branches of the AMS by actively communicating with clubs, services, staff and resource groups; development of opportunities for feedback through written confidential forms (as opposed to public forums, such as those described above); development and distribution of succinct summaries of Council decisions and actions publicly available on the website; use of innovative modes of communication (e.g. web 2.0 tools) to broaden the scope of constituents that are aware of AMS Council decision making.
- **Make Councilors more accessible:** Another consistent concern raised by focus group participants was the inaccessibility of AMS Councilors. In order to address this concern, Councilors need to proactively encourage their constituents to bring key issues and concerns forward. This accessibility could be achieved in various ways, including mandatory office hours or mandatory hosting of meetings within each faculty that would provide a forum for students to learn about AMS Council and bring forward their issues.

### **Objective 1.4: Increase Voter Participation**

Another integral component in increasing constituent representation is increased voter turnout. AMS election rates remain low, representing a broader lack of engagement among the membership with AMS decision making. Focus group participants were in agreement with regard to one particular strategy for achieving this objective.

- **Harmonize and promote elections:** Elections occur at different times of the year, decreasing the likelihood of broader engagement of students. By harmonizing elections, and adequately advertising when and where they take place, the AMS can likely boost voter turn out rates.

## **6.2. Goal 2: Diversity and Equity Programs and Policies are Appropriately Implemented, Supported and Monitored**

### **Objective 2.1: Strengthen Implementation of Diversity and Equity Programming**

Although the AMS Equity Coordinator position has been eliminated, it is nonetheless vital that some body continue to play a role designing and coordinating diversity and equity initiatives. It is vital not only to address concerns of discrimination and to promote inclusion and diversity, but also for legal purposes. An organization such as the AMS needs a proactive approach to discrimination issues in order to avoid potential liability. Having processes and structures in place to address potential discrimination complaints in a sensitive way strengthens the AMS legal position. This effort could take a number of forms, including the following initiatives.

- **Conduct Review of the Equity Program:** Focus group participants expressed that the equity program needed improvements. Participants also felt that *some* mechanism was necessary to deliver training diversity and equity within the AMS. Key considerations for conducting the review could include reviewing the curriculum and pedagogy used in the training with a view to ensuring it is engaging and accessible, as well as examining how equity officers can most effectively report back to the Equity Office (or equivalent body in the future). As a relatively new program it was inevitable the AMS Equity Program would experience growing pains; however, limitations of the program do not necessarily justify its elimination. Much can be learned from the program; however, without a review that is conducted through an applied lens, there will be no opportunity to build on the lessons from the first iteration of the program.
- **Develop Sustainable Mainstream Mechanism to Address Issues of Systemic Discrimination:** Participants in the focus groups also felt equity concerns had been isolated, away from the day-to-day operations of the AMS and its Council. Participants noted the importance of making equity a mainstream consideration. Suggestions for doing so included: involving the Equity Coordinator (or equivalent position) to help develop and draft policies and bylaws; requiring

mandatory equity training (or equivalent) for all club officers and Council Executive; and providing further opportunities to respectfully educate the AMS and its membership about the importance of diversity and equity.

### **Objective 2.2: Improve Evaluation and Monitoring of Equity and Diversity Programming**

A key part of project planning and implementation is having an evaluation and monitoring strategy in place. A flaw in the previous Equity Program was its narrow focus on outputs or the number of trainings delivered. A monitoring and evaluation strategy helps organizations understand both outputs as well as outcomes with a view to improving program delivery over time. The following point explains some of the characteristics that ought to be used in the development of a monitoring and evaluation plan for diversity and equity work in the AMS.

- **Develop clear monitoring and evaluation strategy for equity programming:** Any future iteration of a diversity and equity program will need a clearly articulated vision of success, goals, and outcome measures. A clear expression of the reporting needs of the AMS from program leaders represent another key component to a successful evaluation strategy. An important part of developing an evaluation strategy involves identifying the types of data that needs to be collected. A number of data sources can help identify concerns and successes in the various stages of program delivery. The development of surveys for equity officers and facilitators who complete the training will be key data sources. Surveys should be delivered at targeted times. A training survey can assess the effectiveness and accessibility of training and a follow up survey 4-6 months later will allow the equity office to track the success of officers in their respective clubs. The surveys should combine quantitative data (e.g. rating the effectiveness of the training) and qualitative data (e.g. open-ended questions to provide suggestions). Additionally, the Equity Coordinator (or equivalent position) should conduct annual interviews with a small group of equity officers and facilitators, to provide in-depth analysis of the program delivery.

## **6.3. Goal 3: Council Decision Making and Internal Communication Processes are More Effective**

### **Objective 3.1: Enhance Training of Councilors for Roles and Responsibilities**

Another key concern for the operation of the AMS is the inadequate opportunities for training provided to Council members. While some training is provided, there are few other opportunities for Councilors and the Executive to learn about decision-making processes and improve their communication skills. Participants at the focus groups complained of communication break downs during Council meetings. As such, it is vital the AMS work to provide appropriate training for all incoming Councilors and Executives, and continue to support their development over their tenure.

- **Implement communication training during transition:** Councilors preparing to govern the AMS need adequate training about the complexities of their work. They need to be educated not only about their roles and responsibilities, but also about how to communicate effectively and respectfully. Non-violent communication workshops are one example of the kind of training that could be delivered to AMS Council to ensure that they are able to effectively work together in the sometimes tense atmosphere of Council meetings.
- **Provide ongoing opportunities for training:** Those Councilors that miss the transition training, or those that want to refresh themselves about what they learned during the transition, should be given the opportunity to attend additional training sessions on governance and respectful communication.

**Objective 3.2: Innovate AMS Council Decision-Making Processes so it can Accommodate an Increased Number of AMS Voices in Decision Making Debates**

As noted in Objective #1, one deterrent to greater member participation in Council meetings is the length of meetings. As such, the AMS Council should investigate and experiment with innovative strategies for making decisions and work with existing processes and structures to streamline Council business.

- **Research, develop and experiment with innovative strategies for decision making:** As a university student body, the AMS has access to cutting edge research and thinking on a range of academic decision making processes. Focus group participants felt that the AMS lacks an innovative edge when developing governance structures and processes. The AMS should therefore conduct research into other governance models that may help prioritize how issues are addressed and decisions made.
- **Streamline Council processes:** The tendency for many larger organizations is to create committees for new and/or emerging issues. The AMS should identify ways of using existing committees to develop and debate proposals. By using committees to undertake background work on issues and presenting clear options to the AMS Council, meetings can be shortened because business items are moved through more quickly. This key time-saving move should remain a priority for the AMS (see Objective #1). A Committee Coordinator can help committees access training about effective preparation for and participation in AMS meetings.



# Appendix 1: Survey Questions

## Preamble

The Social Planning and Research Council of BC has been awarded a contract from the Alma Mater Society (AMS) of UBC to conduct an organizational review on systemic discrimination in the AMS. Part of the review includes an online survey. This survey elicits information about:

- Member satisfaction with AMS governance pertaining to diversity and discrimination
- Strengths of the AMS in addressing systemic discrimination
- Systemic barriers in the AMS faced by AMS members
- Opportunities for the AMS to develop strategies of inclusion and anti-oppression

The survey will take approximately 15 minutes. Your responses will be treated anonymously and confidentially. The results of this survey will be used to inform recommendations for strengthening diversity in the AMS.

### 1. Please provide the following demographic information

Age: Scale

Gender: M/F/Other

### 2. Please indicate your affiliation in the AMS:

Member at large  
Resource group  
Committee  
Council member  
Business services  
Core staff  
Other:

### 3. Have you attended an AMS Council meeting?

Yes/No

### 4. Did you vote in the last AMS election?

Yes/No

### 5. How has the AMS done overall with its efforts to promote diverse interests in its membership in the last 5 years?

Much better, better, same, worse; don't know/not applicable

**6. How would you rate the effectiveness of AMS in advocating student interests?**

Excellent, good, fair, poor; very poor; don't know/not applicable

**7. How would you rate the AMS in providing its members with diverse opportunities to become exceptional leaders?**

Excellent, good, fair, poor; very poor; don't know/not applicable

**8. How would you rate the AMS in fostering communication, both internally and externally, in order to be democratic, fair, accountable to and accessible to its members?**

Excellent, good, fair, poor; very poor; don't know/not applicable

**9. There is fairness, respect and consistency in the relationships between the different governance bodies in the AMS**

Strongly agree, agree, disagree; strongly disagree; don't know/not applicable

**10. The AMS Council values and capitalizes on different ideas and different perspectives and this shows in the way it makes decisions, establishes committees and deals with issues**

Strongly agree, agree, disagree; strongly disagree; don't know/not applicable

**11. New or improved methods and approaches for addressing discrimination are regularly and successfully used throughout the AMS**

Strongly agree, agree, disagree; strongly disagree; don't know/not applicable

**12. Rate your satisfaction with the following aspects of the AMS:**

- Demographic diversity of the AMS council
- Process for developing the strategic framework for the AMS
- Processes for including diverse AMS members in the AMS governance structure
- AMS Council decision making process
- Degree to which the AMS produces and engages statistics on under-representation of minority groups in its governance structure
- *Degree to which the AMS recognizes that informal organizational practices can be discriminatory*
- *Degree to which the AMS acts proactively to eliminate discrimination within the organization*

Scale: Very satisfied, satisfied, dissatisfied, very dissatisfied; don't know/not applicable

**13. The term systemic discrimination refers to the fact that long-standing social and cultural norms and mores carry within them value assumptions that discriminate in ways that are substantially or entirely hidden and unconscious.** Public Service Alliance of Canada v. Canada (Department of National Defence), [1996] 3 F.C. 789. Systemic discrimination occurs when an organization builds barriers into its structures and processes that serve to exclude individuals or groups, based on their gender, race, sexual orientation, or physical ability. **What AMS strategies have been effective in addressing systemic discrimination?**

Open ended

**14. What issues related to diversity and discrimination require action by the AMS?**

Open ended

**15. Do you have any suggestions for how to improve the diversification of AMS governance?**

Open ended

**16. Do you have any other comments?**

## **Appendix 2: Focus Group Agenda**

### **3:00pm: Introductions**

- Brief round of introductions from all participants and facilitators

### **3:10pm: Brief Presentation on Review of AMS Structures and Process and Survey Results**

- A summary of the results of the review and some of the frequencies from the survey will be presented.

### **3:25pm: Questions, Concerns and Comments on the Findings Thus Far**

- Participants will be provided an opportunity to raise any questions or concerns they have regarding methodology, results, and responses/findings.

### **4:00pm: Recommendations for Moving Forward**

- This discussion will be divided into four parts: the three themes identified thus far, and an opportunity to voice anything that may not fall into these categories
- **Representation and Engagement**
- **Resources and Funding**
- **Improving Decision-Making Processes**
- **Other Recommendations**

### **5:20pm: Conclusions, Questions and Next Steps**

- Provide information on timeline for the rest of the project and final deliverables.

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