

A SENSE OF BELONGING

Report on Social Inclusion
at Mohawk College

Dear Colleagues:

I am pleased to present A Sense of Belonging: Report on Social Inclusion at Mohawk College, which is the result of the Task Force and Forum on Diversity that I introduced early last winter. Since then, the Task Force has heard from over 200 staff and students and engaged a small team to consult on students' and staff's experiences and perceptions of diversity on campus. The aim was to learn from the rich diversity in our classes and halls so that we can increasingly engage in activities and dialogue that ensure the Mohawk experience is a global one. The report outlines five recommendations that have been prepared for consideration by the Board of Governors.

The initial consultation, done in partnership with the Mohawk Students' Association, heralds a renewed focus on social inclusion as part of the College's strategic priorities. An expanded Social Inclusion Committee is now in place to guide the efforts of this initiative. Karen Pashleigh has joined the committee as my Co-chair from Corporate Services, Paul Armstrong and Marco Felvus are taking a leadership role from the Academic team and Michelle Ball is leading Student Services' involvement. Other committee members are stakeholders from across the College, including the MSA.

Reflecting on my own experience in the post-secondary environment, I am struck by the powerful stories that individuals have shared with me about their own struggles to feel they belong – and how they have overcome obstacles with the support of peers.

As we look forward to the Mohawk experience grounded in a new Academic Plan, we have an exciting opportunity to take a more focused approach to learn from the diverse experiences of our students and staff, and to celebrate the many cultures that make up the Mohawk family.

The Social Inclusion initiative is an essential part of our journey to implement Mohawk's Strategic Priorities and Academic Plan. It will engage our students and staff to help ensure that the World is our Classroom and that we are positioned to learn and lead in the global context.

I look forward to working with you on this important initiative.

Sincerely,

Wayne Poirier

Vice President, Student Services

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Introduction

Inclusion is a sense of belonging that helps us feel connected to society as a whole and engaged in our lives and the lives of those around us.

In January 2012, Mohawk College specifically added social inclusion to its Strategic Plan as a priority action of sustainability, committing to “Ensure Mohawk engages, welcomes, and supports a diverse student body and community.”

That decision drives a new, deliberate, coordinated approach to create a social inclusion framework for the college that celebrates Mohawk’s diversity more meaningfully, enriches curriculum and broadens the global perspective.

It envisions that, over time, social inclusion will be embedded in the way Mohawk does business – in recruitment and hiring, training and professional development, and above all, teaching and learning.

This Report’s five recommendations suggest a direction that would facilitate advancing to action.

Social inclusion is integrally linked to creating supportive environments and strengthening community.

At an individual level, it indicates how connected people feel to their communities; more broadly, it is about supportive relationships, involvement in group activities and civic engagement.

Social inclusion can be understood only in relation to social exclusion, which is felt through the effects of marginality and inequity on people’s opportunities to contribute and to participate in their communities.

This Report focuses on groups at Mohawk College who are vulnerable to marginalization because of gender identity, sexual orientation, culture, ancestry or heritage, socio-economic status, age, spiritual or religious affiliation and disability, including mental illness.

A timely response to changing demographics

Mohawk’s community, both within the college and beyond it, is changing. Like student bodies at colleges and universities across Ontario, Mohawk’s student population is becoming increasingly diverse according to ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation and ability. This student diversity reflects similar changes in the demographics of greater Hamilton.

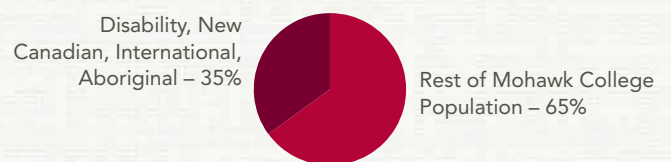
At Mohawk:

- 35% of students are Aboriginal, International, New Canadians or living with a disability
 - 100 countries are represented at Mohawk
- Southeast Asian and Asian are the largest groups
- 10% of students (estimated) are lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, transgendered, queer, questioning or curious (LGBTQ).

In Hamilton:

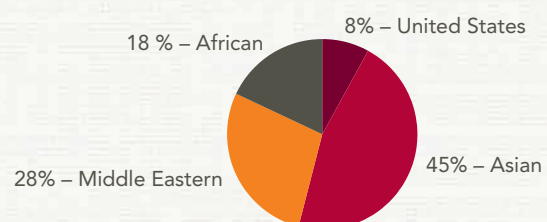
- 13.6% of current population are new Canadians
- Aboriginal people represent the fastest growing demographic in Hamilton
- Over 50,000 individuals in Hamilton consider themselves to be Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and/or Queer (LGBTQ) according to the 2006 Census.

Mohawk College Diversity Profile



New Canadians in Hamilton

13.6% of current population



Background and Context

The World Health Organization (WHO) has just announced that it is opening a new Collaborating Centre on Social Inclusion and Health, one indicator in a growing body of international research evidence about the importance of inclusive environments that support diversity.

This research underscores Mohawk's decision to sharpen its focus on social inclusion for three reasons:

- Social inclusion is a determinant of health closely linked to positive mental health.
- It is also a key correlate of student success and academic achievement.
- An inclusive workplace increases employee engagement and productivity.

Social inclusion affects health

Discrimination because of gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, religion and disability can lead to poor mental health. Among youth, the psychosocial stress of discrimination contributes to mental health problems and substance abuse. Studies show that:

- Aboriginal Peoples are at a much higher risk of poor mental health than the overall Canadian population:
 - 43% of young Aboriginal people have been diagnosed with mental health problems, including behavioral disorders and anxiety.
- Lesbian, gay and bisexual Canadians also report higher rates of depression, anxiety, substance use, and attempted and completed suicides.
- Young people age 15-24 are more likely to report mental illness and/or substance use disorders than other age groups.

Feeling connected to others, being involved in community groups and activities builds social connectivity and inclusion. Such supportive environments help people solve problems, cope with change and deal with adversity.

Initial consultations with Mohawk's counselling service indicate that counsellors have identified social exclusion as the root cause of a number of mental health issues affecting students in vulnerable groups, noting that some students seek counselling for culturally specific and sexual orientation concerns.

Social inclusion influences education

Social inclusion improves educational outcomes. Studies around the world increasingly find that students do better academically when they feel connected to their schools, their teachers and other students.

Noting that Ontario's diversity can be one of its "greatest assets," Realizing the Promise of Diversity, Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy, identifies equitable, inclusive education as the means to realize the potential of that diversity. In addition to respecting the full range of differences among students, inclusive education insists that they "see themselves reflected in their learning environment."

Inclusive education identifies and addresses the discriminatory factors that threaten student success. These barriers related to race, gender, ethnic origin, religion, socio-economic background, physical or mental ability and sexual orientation both limit students' abilities to learn and affect hiring and promotion practices.



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Social inclusion at Mohawk to-date

Mohawk's current and planned social inclusion initiatives build on previous diversity/inclusion activities. The following is a sampling of those initiatives:

1982 – Mohawk College Human Rights Policy and Procedure established: It has had 6 revisions, most recently in 2003. "Mohawk College is committed to providing a working and learning environment in which all individuals are treated with respect and dignity. Every employee and student has the right to work and learn in an atmosphere of equal opportunity that is free from discrimination and harassment."

2002 – Peace Park and Peace Pole created: Mohawk College's response to 9/11 – with a focus on peace, designed as a place of reflection in support of peaceful measures.

2002-2005 – CARE (Compassion, Acceptance, Respect, Empathy) Initiative introduced: Included a diversity awareness campaign and student poster competitions.

2003-2004 – First annual Mohawk College Accessibility Plan under Ontarians with Disabilities Act implemented: ODA became Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) in 2005. Mohawk College is beginning its 10th year of accessibility planning to support the new Integrated Accessibility Planning Standard required by the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act.

2007-2008 – CARE re-launched with broader mandate: Identified diversity issues, raised awareness about the need for a 'diversity space' in the college and investigated best practices of wellness and diversity centres at other institutions.

2009 – Wellness & Diversity Committee/Hamilton Positive Space Collaborative consultations held: Included college management, faculty and staff in

discussions about diversity issues and establishing a physical diversity facility.

2011 – The Mohawk College Accessibility Steering Committee approved: Established to give more strategic focus and leadership to accessibility planning. Replaced the Accessibility Committee formed in 2004.

2011 – New Aboriginal Education & Student Services Centre opened: Consolidates student service initiatives formerly housed in three separate locations throughout the college into a more welcoming multi-use environment that facilitates interaction among students, staff, and Elders, including counselling, group meetings and mentorship.

2012 – Social Inclusion Committee launched: A new team, created by the Vice-President Student Services to steer and coordinate social inclusion initiatives, to establish a framework that addresses the diverse needs of Mohawk students and staff and to provide inclusivity education to the broader College community. Membership, which will expand, currently includes representatives of relevant stakeholders and service providers from across the college.

Beyond Mohawk

- Several other Ontario colleges and universities have established dedicated social inclusion/diversity spaces and programs, including Wilfrid Laurier University, University of Guelph, McMaster University, York University and George Brown College.
- In Hamilton, the Hamilton Centre for Civic Inclusion and The Community Wellness Centre specifically support marginalized groups.

“Everywhere should be a positive space.”

— Mohawk Student

Research Findings

To inform recommendations for a new social inclusion framework, Student Services developed and conducted four integrated research activities between January and August 2012. Research included a range of methods and techniques to elicit both quantitative and qualitative data from a variety of college stakeholder perspectives.

The guiding question underlying all research was How to create a more inclusive environment at Mohawk College?

Research results showed that overall, students and staff see Mohawk as an inclusive place. As one student said, I love to be part of the vast conglomeration of cultures in this college!

Respondents identified lots of diversity/inclusivity related activity, but noted overlap and duplication, lack of coordination and the need for better communication.

Methodology

1. Online Survey – *Building an Inclusive Environment at Mohawk College*

An in-depth survey was developed to gain insight into student/staff opinions and feelings about how Mohawk is doing at creating an inclusive environment, with a secondary purpose to create a cultural demographic snapshot. Questions covered personal experience, observation and awareness levels.

FINDINGS

Inclusive environment

- 73% of respondents report a sense of belonging and acceptance, ‘always’ and ‘often’
- 76.1% of respondents find it ‘extremely’ or ‘very important’

that Mohawk offers a range of events/clubs/services that reflect diversity

- awareness of events, clubs and services is very low
- 33.6 % say that diversity issues are ‘rarely’ or ‘never’ discussed in the classroom
 - 31% say ‘sometimes’.

Cultural snapshot

- 188 respondents (149 students, 32 staff)
- 17 different ethnic groups
- 22 religious/spiritual affiliations
- 44.4% do not identify as indigenous to North America
- 32% report first languages other than English
- 4 top first languages are Arabic, Gujarati, Chinese and Hindi
- 45.1% are first generation students.

2. Diversity Forum – *Building an Inclusive Culture at Mohawk College*

Facilitated staff and student roundtable discussion groups gathered qualitative data on diversity and inclusivity themes related to:

1. Gender identity and sexual orientation
2. Mental and physical illness and disability
3. Age and adult privilege
4. Language and ability
5. Culture, heritage and ancestry
6. Socio-economic status
7. Religion and spirituality

- Facilitators led discussions with common questions, attached as Appendix B
 - Questions enquired about personal experiences and challenges
 - Key element was to seek input on future inclusivity activities and initiatives
- Note takers recorded answers.

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As with all the research for this project, forum questions addressed the overarching theme of how to ensure that Mohawk College “engages, welcomes, and supports a diverse student body and community.”

FINDINGS

“I sometimes feel everyone around here is too PC.”

— Mohawk Student

Discussions showed consensus about:

Policy issues

- **Address the issue of ‘the balancing act’.** This challenge concerning inclusion is summed up by the comment of one participant who said: *If people need to be singled out in order to be included, then what’s the point? Everyone should be included everywhere, not on Wednesday evenings from 4-6 around the only people who will accept them.*
- **Create a course on diversity awareness:** An elective course on cultural do’s and don’ts.
- **Develop diversity training and professional development** for faculty and staff to increase awareness and skills: *It’s hard to get proper feedback because teachers are trying not to offend. In India, women do not really participate in activities, so group work is very uncomfortable.*
- **Add more culture-specific academic content** for people from different cultures, e.g. the Practical nursing and Aboriginal Communities Program.
- **Continue to organize forums and discussions** for cross-college groups.

Practical matters

- **Review physical surroundings**
 - **Ensure accessibility:** *It can be tough navigating through public spaces. There aren’t enough ramps or elevators, and those aren’t repaired fast enough when they break.*
- **Provide appropriate support**
 - **Raise awareness on sensitivity:** *Offer a hand, but try not to overdo it.*
 - **Pay attention to privacy issues:** *Not everyone needs to know about my disability.*
 - **Ditto, sexual orientation:** *I have the right to choose when I ‘out’ myself, but some people have condemned me for not being upfront.*
 - **Identify a support resource where you can go ‘to vent your frustrations’ and concerns.**
 - **Provide a place within the school for quiet reflection**
 - **Consider socio-economic issues re: textbook costs.**

3. Share Your Experience – Postcards and Online Submissions

To gather qualitative data, a series of five postcards in both print and e-card format with the tagline *Labels hurt* provided students with the opportunity to anonymously share stories about their positive and negative experiences of Mohawk College’s inclusivity. An online forum on the Student Services website provided the same opportunity. In total, 92 responses were received.

FINDINGS

Positive themes

- **College encourages involvement and inclusivity**
 - *From the minute I started classes at Mohawk College I immediately felt like I was a part of the “vibe” or “atmosphere” of college. I truly felt welcomed to use all of the resources and encouraged to become involved in teams and groups.*

I heard this
amazing speaker...



Labels Hurt

There are 3 ways to join
the discussion:

Attend the Diversity Forum
March 14, 11:00 am – 1:00 pm
Fennell Campus, Room C066

Go to mohawkcollege.ca/diversity
and complete a survey

Fill in this post card



Scan the QR Code with
your smart phone to
complete the survey now



- College staff and services are respectful and helpful
 - Teachers here really appreciate students from different cultures and often we have discussions regarding this topic, this really helped me understand different viewpoints.
- Welcome opportunities to meet and interact with peers from diverse backgrounds
 - Growing up in a town with VERY little diversity in ethnic cultures, coming to Mohawk has opened doors to meet new people and learn of their cultures.
- Felt stereotyped/labeled
 - I think people fear what they do not know or understand.

4. Inclusivity Inventory

Negative themes

- Did not feel included
 - I was at a party at the Arnie and I felt so ignored there. I felt as if I was an unwanted element there.
- Staff don't reflect the diversity at the college
 - You can see cultural diversity among students but not within college staff which is contradictory. An organization should represent the population it serves or works for.












To identify both assets and gaps, an *Inclusivity Inventory* was conducted. Key faculty members were asked about what inclusivity and diversity initiatives they knew about, and what they would like to see in the future to foster a more inclusive environment. Information was gathered through individual contacts and small focus group consultation to compile a list of diversity clubs, events and services. A calendar of events by semester was also created.

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Have you experienced any challenges to inclusivity at Mohawk because of any aspects of your identity?

Challenges experienced:

	Respondents	% of Respondents	
Ignored	37	14.6%	
Made uncomfortable	36	14.2%	
Marginalized	12	4.7%	
Offensive/insensitive language used to refer to you or aspects of your life	14	5.5%	
Racial slur/called a derogatory name	9	3.6%	
Treated as a stereotype	24	9.5%	
Treated differently in any way	22	8.7%	
Verbal threat	1	0.4%	
Violent action	2	0.8%	
Violent threat	0	0.0%	
I have not experienced any of the above	95	37.5%	
Other	1	0.4%	
Response	167		

FINDINGS

- The inventory identified 5 clubs, 10 major events and 8 diversity services in addition to program specific activities
- Recommendations from respondents about how to enhance programs and services going forward clustered in three main areas:

1. Formalize the project

- Prepare a project charter or terms of reference to guide committee
- Clarify the definition/purpose of this project/committee

2. Solicit input widely and through a variety of avenues

- Involve focus groups in the definition

- Seek the broadest possible representation for focus groups from whole college community

3. Encourage specific and general cultural events

- Collaborate with other colleges on theme days/activities/ guest speakers
- Plan 'fun' events that include everybody
- In athletics, provide opportunities to international/ immigrant students to play sports popular in their countries of origin.

Research Findings Summary

International studies demonstrate that social inclusion has significant benefits to both health and education outcomes, and increasingly, it is a priority within post-secondary institutions.

As the demographic thumbnails of the student and Hamilton populations show, Mohawk’s internal and external environments are changing, and will continue to do so, confirming a present and growing requirement to entrench social inclusion throughout the college’s services and academic programs.

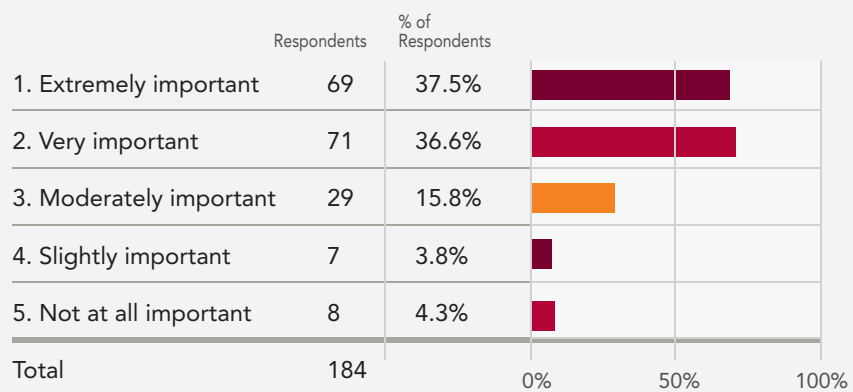
The findings of both the quantitative and qualitative research studies detailed in this report show that Mohawk is building on a strong foundation as it moves forward on social inclusion. Overall, students and staff see Mohawk as an inclusive place. 73% of respondents report a sense of belonging and acceptance, ‘always’ and ‘often’. The College is seen as encouraging inclusivity, staff and services are viewed as being respectful and students appreciate the opportunity to interact

with people from diverse backgrounds. As one graduating student said, *"I feel privileged to have had the opportunity to attend such an amazingly inclusive and welcoming school."*

The research also found that there is a lot of diversity/ inclusivity activity already available at Mohawk and an appetite for more. 76.1% of respondents find it ‘extremely’ or ‘very important’ that Mohawk offers a range of events/ clubs/services that reflect diversity. At the same time, students expressed confusion about the type of activities available and where and when they take place, who to talk to for certain issues, or how to start or join a club.

Both the quantitative and qualitative studies highlight two key concerns going forward. The first is that Mohawk’s faculty and staff members don’t reflect the student body and diversity issues are not included regularly in the classroom. Diversity issues are ‘rarely’ or ‘never’ discussed in classrooms 33 % of the time, and only ‘sometimes’, 31%. This appears to be due to low awareness about diversity issues, not because they are considered to be unimportant or irrelevant. One student noted, *"I sometimes feel everyone around here it too PC."*

How important is it that Mohawk College offers a range of student groups/clubs, events and activities that reflect the diversity of the Mohawk community?



The second concern speaks to the critical balancing act required to implement social inclusion initiatives.

A number of Diversity Forum participants spoke eloquently about the need to ensure careful consideration is given to allow a balance of anonymity and confidentiality for diverse individuals seeking to access services, while recognizing the need for all diverse groups to have a visible presence. As one forum participant said, *"We should not want to segregate the diverse groups — we want to bring them together — everywhere should be a positive space."*

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Recommendations

The report's five recommendations identify the following directions for further exploration:

1. Broaden participation in social inclusion activities across the college
2. Develop a more coordinated and strategic approach to social inclusion initiatives
3. Explore options for an on-campus social inclusion 'hub' with the MSA
4. Continue research to gather faculty and staff perceptions on inclusivity /diversity
5. Review Human Resources policies and procedures to integrate diversity principles, training and professional development



“Love to be a part of this vast
conglomeration of cultures in this College.”

— Mohawk Student



Appendix A

Key Terms

Determinants of health

The broad range of personal, social, economic and environmental factors that determine individual and population health. Social determinants of health refer to a specific group of socio-economic factors within the broader group, that relate to an individual's place in society, such as income, education or employment.

Source: Reducing Health Inequalities: A Challenge for our Times, 2011, The Public Health Agency of Canada

Discrimination

The denial of equal treatment and opportunity to individuals or groups because of personal characteristics and membership in specific groups, with respect to education, accommodation, health care, employment and access to services, goods and facilities. Behaviour that results from distinguishing people on that basis without regard to individual merit, resulting in unequal outcomes for persons who are perceived as different. Differential treatment that may occur on the basis of race, nationality, religion, ethnic affiliation. *Source: Canadian Race Relations Foundation*

Diversity

The presence of a wide range of human qualities and attributes within a group, organization, or society. The dimensions of diversity include, but are not limited to, ancestry, culture, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, language, physical and intellectual ability, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status.

Source: Realizing the Promise of Diversity. Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy, 2009, Government of Ontario

Inclusive education

Education that is based on the principles of acceptance and inclusion of all students. Students see themselves reflected in their curriculum, their physical surroundings, and the broader environment, in which diversity is honoured and all individuals are respected.

Source: Realizing the Promise of Diversity. Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy, 2009, Government of Ontario

Marginalized groups

Members that are denied rights and/or privileges that other non-marginalized groups often take for granted. History also plays a role when describing these groups. The Canadian Human Rights Act describes marginalized groups as including discrimination towards, race, national or ethnic origin, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, family status, disability and conviction for an offence where a pardon has been granted.

Source: Department of Justice Canada

Oppression

The unilateral subjugation of one individual or group by a more powerful individual or group, using physical, psychological, social or economic threats or force, and frequently using an explicit ideology to sanction the oppression.

Source: Canadian Race Relations Foundation

Prejudice

A state of mind; a set of attitudes held, consciously or unconsciously, often in the absence of legitimate or sufficient evidence; means literally to "pre-judge"; considered irrational and very resistant to change, because concrete evidence that contradicts the prejudice is usually dismissed as exceptional. Frequently prejudices are not recognized as false or unsound assumptions or stereotypes, and, through repetition, become accepted as common sense notions.

Source: Canadian Race Relations Foundation



Safe/positive space

Safe spaces are spaces that are created of, by and for members of marginalized or underrepresented social groupings who share common (or similar) histories and experiences, and/or are routinely subjected to and similarly impacted by socioeconomic, cultural, political and other societal hierarchies and oppression. Safe spaces are generally identity and/or issue-experience based.

Source: National Youth Leadership Network, 2012

Social inclusion

Social inclusion is a broad notion that incorporates concepts of social capital, social networks, social connectedness, social trust, reciprocity, local democracy and group solidarity. *Source: The Arts and social exclusion, Review prepared for the Arts Council of England, London, 2001*

Social inclusion has dimensions of both content and structure. In terms of content, it is about supportive relationships, involvement in group activities and civic engagement. Its structural dimensions are about a socially inclusive society 'where all people feel valued, their differences are respected, and their basic needs are met so they can live in dignity'.

Source: Creative connections: promoting mental health and wellbeing through community arts participation, VicHealth 2002

Background Information

2012 Diversity Survey Overall Results

Diversity Forum and Survey questions and detailed results can be viewed at mohawkcollege.ca/diversity under the Diversity at Mohawk tab.



The new Aboriginal Education and Student Services Centre opened in 2011.

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