

Osgoode Hall Law School is Committed to Combatting Anti-Black Racism

In collaboration with all law schools in Canada, Osgoode Hall Law School issued [a statement](#) earlier this summer denouncing all forms of anti-Black racism and committing to combatting anti-Black racism in legal education and in the legal profession. Now Osgoode wishes to provide further background and updates about its own specific efforts in this area.

In 2018, the Black Law Students' Association (BLSA) at Osgoode prepared a report entitled [Recommendations Addressing Anti-Black Racism at Osgoode Hall Law School](#) (2018 Report) which documents instances of anti-Black racism at Osgoode. The 2018 Report was a response to the vandalism of posters celebrating the achievements of prominent Black individuals which had been affixed in the Gowlings Hall atrium in Osgoode for Black History Month. Immediately following the defacement of the posters, Dean Lorne Sossin denounced the incident and emphasized Osgoode's "commitment to building and sustaining an inclusive and welcoming community."

We acknowledge the effort invested by BLSA members in preparing the 2018 Report, which provides ten recommendations for addressing anti-Black racism. It is clear that these recommendations were crafted with much care and attention to the way systemic racism operates and the various strategies needed to combat it. Osgoode remains committed to working toward fulfilling these recommendations within our collegial governance processes. Since 2018, important progress on the ten recommendations has been made, and we are pleased to provide the following update on progress to date. We also acknowledge that the work of combatting systemic racism is an ongoing project. We commit to providing our students with ongoing updates on our initiatives addressing anti-Black racism.

The first recommendation of the 2018 Report calls on Osgoode to host an annual Black Excellence event. Osgoode is committed to hosting an annual Black Excellence event, either paired with the annual Lincoln Alexander Awards event at the end of Black History Month or as a standalone event.

The second recommendation calls for a mandatory session for first-year Osgoode students on anti-Black racism within law school and the legal profession. The fifth recommendation calls for changes to Osgoode's course on Ethical Lawyering in a Global Community, including instruction on anti-Black racism and what it means to be an ally. Osgoode has retained Tomee Sojourner-Campbell to serve as a visiting faculty member for the fall and winter semesters of the 2020-2021 academic year. Prof. Sojourner-Campbell will teach a module addressing anti-Black racism within Canadian law for Osgoode's first-year Ethical Lawyering in a Global Community course.

The third recommendation calls on Osgoode to integrate discussions of Black history and anti-Black racism in Canadian law within its curriculum. Each summer since 2018, Osgoode has hired research assistants to research materials addressing anti-Black racism within Canadian law and Indigenous legal topics for instructors teaching first-year courses. We are in the process of developing an online repository which will organize and house this material. We are grateful that BLSA has identified an excellent list of resources which have been added to this repository. Our long term goal is to develop this material into sample modules or lesson plans corresponding to each of the first-year courses and then to do the same for high enrollment upper year courses.

The fourth recommendation calls on Osgoode to hire more Black professors and to ensure Black professors are more strongly represented in its first-year program. Osgoode has recently received approval from York University to conduct a dedicated search for a Black tenure-track faculty member who we anticipate will teach in the first-year curriculum. This search is subject to the approval of Osgoode's Faculty Council.

The sixth recommendation calls for mandatory equity training for all faculty members and student leaders. In 2018, Osgoode's Standing Committee on Teaching and Learning arranged to have Dr. Carl James, Professor and Jean Augustine Chair in Education, Community & Diaspora (now also Senior Advisor on Equity and Representation to York University), to lead a session for first year instructors on addressing racism in a classroom setting. The session was very well attended; however, it was not mandatory. We are working toward holding similar sessions for faculty members during this academic year.

The seventh recommendation calls on Osgoode to hire an equity officer who could oversee the implementation of BLSA's ten recommendations as well as other anti-racism strategies. We are in the process of researching the potential mandate and the specific scope of duties of an Equity Advisor in order to assess the feasibility of this recommendation.

The eighth recommendation calls for a Black Wellness Counselor at Osgoode who can provide culturally appropriate mental health resources and supports to Black students. We are discussing the possibility of a partnership with another York faculty or York's central administration so as to make this resource available to Osgoode students.

The ninth recommendation calls on Osgoode to issue a formal public statement denouncing racism. Dean Lorne Sossin issued a statement in response to BLSA's 2018 Report. We reiterate Dean Sossin's denunciation of anti-Black racism.

Finally, with respect to the tenth recommendation, Osgoode is committed to working with BLSA to establish a permanent commemoration celebrating Black excellence and contributions to the legal profession by members of the Black community.

The Osgoode administration also acknowledges the content of the recent [open letter](#) sent by BLSA in the wake of the Black Lives Matter marches and rallies. We unequivocally denounce police brutality against Black people in Canada and abroad. Black lives matter. Osgoode continues to express its unwavering support for Black students and the Black community.

BLSA's recent open letter calls on Osgoode to make a financial contribution to a Black-led, community-led organization providing services to Black Canadians. We are presently considering some recommendations in this regard made to us by BLSA, bearing in mind that any such contribution should also have a nexus to Osgoode students or prospective students.

Successive cohorts of BLSA members have invested significant time and energy into helping Osgoode implement initiatives to address anti-Black racism. We acknowledge and are tremendously grateful for their work, while recognizing that ongoing support of Black students at Osgoode requires that the administration take responsibility for carrying these and other initiatives forward.

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