

College of Medicine

Covid-19 and EDI at the University of Saskatchewan

Survey Report

August 2021



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Canadian Hub for Applied and Social Research (CHASR)

University of Saskatchewan
Room 260 Arts Building 9 Campus Drive
Saskatoon SK Canada S7N 5A5
Telephone: (306) 966-8409
Facsimile: (306) 966-8819
Email: chasr@usask.ca

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Executive Summary

Members of the University of Saskatchewan were invited to relay noticeable impacts (whether positive or negative) of the Covid-19 pandemic on EDI. An online survey was used to collect information on incidents witnessed or experienced, concerns, successes, and recommendations. A sample of 234 respondents completed the open-ended survey.

The Covid-19 Pandemic Exacerbated Pre-existing EDI Issues

Overall, respondents had identified EDI-related issues that endured through, and were exacerbated by, the Covid-19 pandemic at the University of Saskatchewan. This included multiple examples of racism and discrimination, but in particular for Indigenous staff, students, and faculty. According to numerous respondents, there are notable gaps in cultural safety across the university. Respondents reported persons of colour struggled to have a voice while physically isolated from their colleagues, international students were left at times in dire situations, and Indigenous staff appeared to face less job security and more duties (especially those related to Indigenization, even when outside of the purview of their regular duties).

Greater Impact on Women and Caregivers

Those who are also caregivers had an exceptional burden to bear while working from home. Often, these roles fell to women and this was acknowledged by many participants. Some female respondents felt that their careers would be irrevocably damaged by the loss of research time, and there were anecdotes of males being favoured over female researchers when they applied to restart their research. Some noted that, as women, they were expected to take on additional administrative duties during the pandemic.

Working and Learning from Home in Inequitable Environments

One of the largest changes of the pandemic was the immediate and abrupt switch to working and learning from home. Respondents highlighted the struggle of students living in rural or remote regions with unreliable or absent internet connectivity, those living in crowded home environments, and the lack of equipment for home-based learning and working. Some have children at home who are young and require much care, or who are older and require access to internet and computers for schooling. Finally, others do not have ergonomic or efficient work stations.

What can or should be done?

Overall, respondents felt that the University could have done more to support a more equitable work environment for those who are working and learning from home (e.g., funds or loans of laptops, tuition reductions, bookable spaces for studying), assignment of duties or tasks that were reasonable given what people were experiencing at home (e.g., extended deadlines, flexibility in hours worked), and more supportive messaging about leniency and grace during unprecedented times. For those who experienced or witnessed discrimination, there was a strong call for mandatory EDI training, especially

for those in leadership positions, and routes of accountability that are safe and do not blame the victim. Finally, respondents suggested a thorough and meaningful acknowledgement of systemic racism and bias and tangible efforts to reduce or eradicate those systemic barriers would alleviate many tense and stressful situations.

What were the successes?

Although many reported hardships, others took the opportunity to highlight some successes that have occurred within the pandemic. Notably, the quick response by the University and the swift roll-out of technology to help people communicate, connect, and collaborate while isolated from one another. Some felt the students have been accommodated and supported significantly during this time. Many felt that they have received support from their colleagues and supervisors, with regular check-ins and messages of well-being.

1.0 Methodology

1.1 Objective

The purpose of the survey was to capture experiences and observations deemed biased or discriminatory at the University of Saskatchewan during the Covid 19 pandemic. This encompassed positive and inclusive practices that have occurred as well.

1.2 Survey design and distribution

The survey was designed by the Senior EDI (Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion) Specialist at the College of Medicine, University of Saskatchewan and distributed to university faculty, staff, and students through emails and various communication channels. The survey consisted of 12 questions overall, seven of which collected information on demographics. Others were primarily open-ended questions, allowing for respondents to communicate concerns in their own words.

The survey was programmed on the Voxco online survey platform by CHASR. Distribution was managed by the research team. Data collection began April 13th 2020 and the survey closed July 16th 2021.

1.3 Analysis

Survey data was managed by CHASR, was downloaded into an Excel file and cleaned. Frequencies for demographic questions were calculated and are presented in graphs. The open-ended dataset was then uploaded into NVivo for qualitative analysis. All responses for a particular question were inductively coded and categorized by content and organized into emergent themes. These themes are summarized in this report, using de-identified exemplary quotes to support those themes. Quotes may have been edited for spelling and grammar.

Responses from Indigenous respondents were then isolated and reviewed for additional analysis. Each section of the report includes a summary of findings from Indigenous respondents.

2.0 Findings

There were 235 surveys completed. Upon data cleaning, one survey was removed from analysis (all responses in open-ended questions referred to only wanting to review the survey, rather than complete it). Altogether, data from 234 respondents were included in the analysis. Although it is not known what the specific completion rate for this survey was, given the method of distribution, the number of responses overall is quite low, and is not a representative sample of the University of Saskatchewan.

2.1 Demographics

The majority of respondents identified as a woman (65%). Only a small proportion identified as non-binary or preferred not to disclose. Fewer than five respondents selected that they prefer to self-identify (Figure 1).

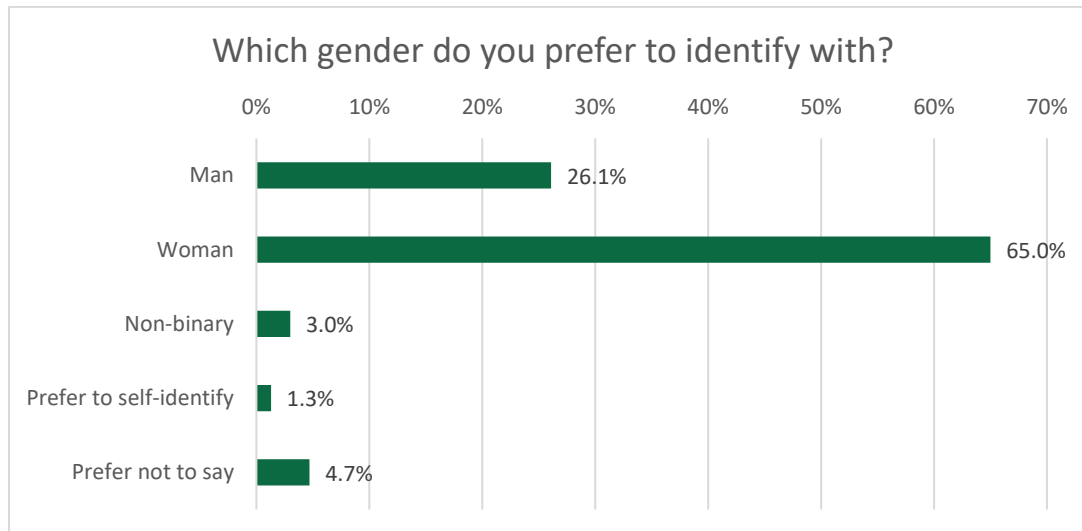


Figure 1 – Gender identity of respondents, n=234.

The majority of respondents identified as White (64%). Nineteen percent identified as a non-Indigenous, racialized person and 10% identified as Indigenous (First Nations, Inuit, and or Metis). Respondents were able to select all that apply, so there were possibilities for multiple ethnic identities. Altogether, 2.6% selected “Other”. The distribution is listed in Figure 2.

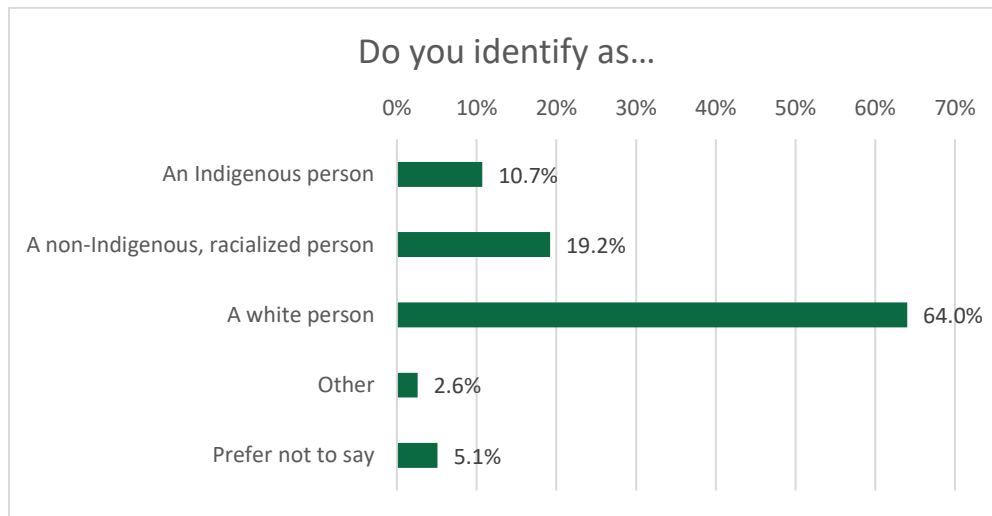


Figure 2 – Ethnic identity of survey respondents, n=234. Respondents could select all that apply.

Nearly 15% of respondents identified as having a disability (defined as “those who have persistent physical, intellectual, mental, psychiatric, sensory or learning conditions or those who consider themselves and believe an employer or potential employer would consider them disadvantaged in finding, retaining or advancing in employment because of that condition”). Nearly 5% preferred not to disclose (Figure 3).

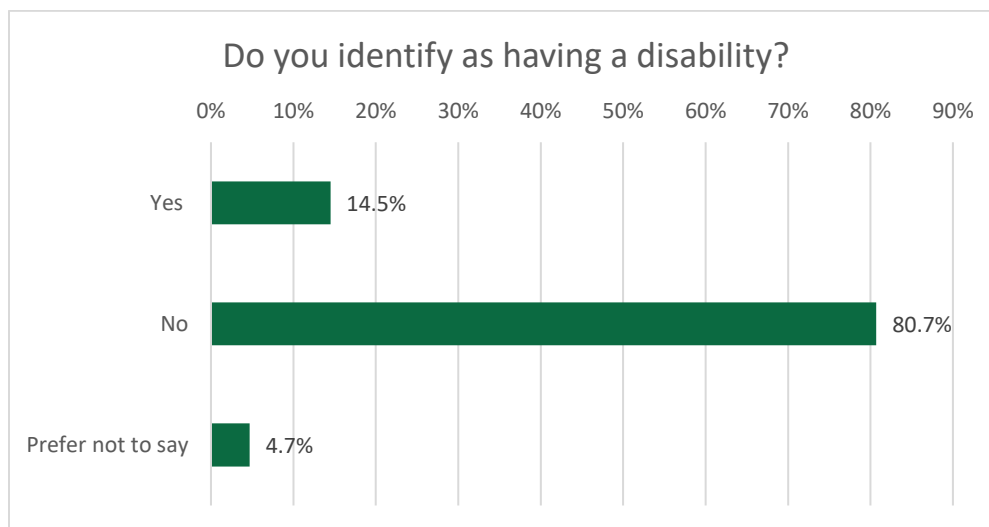


Figure 3 – Percentage of respondents self-identifying as having a disability

Respondents were asked to identify their role at the University of Saskatchewan. Fifty percent identified as a staff member, and most of those who selected “Other” provided entries that were suitable to also be captured under the staff category (an additional 1.7%). Trainees (19.7%) and non-clinician faculty (18.8%) were the next most common identified roles (Figure 4).

By gender (men and women only, as there were few respondents in other categories), women made up 19.7% of trainee, 64% of faculty (clinician and non-clinician combined) and 48.7% of staff respondents.

By racial identity, Indigenous person made up less than 5% of trainee, 7.8% of faculty (clinician and non-clinician combined), and 15.9% of staff respondents. Non-Indigenous, racialized persons made up 37% of trainee, 14.1% of faculty (clinician and non-clinician combined), and 13.1% of staff respondents.

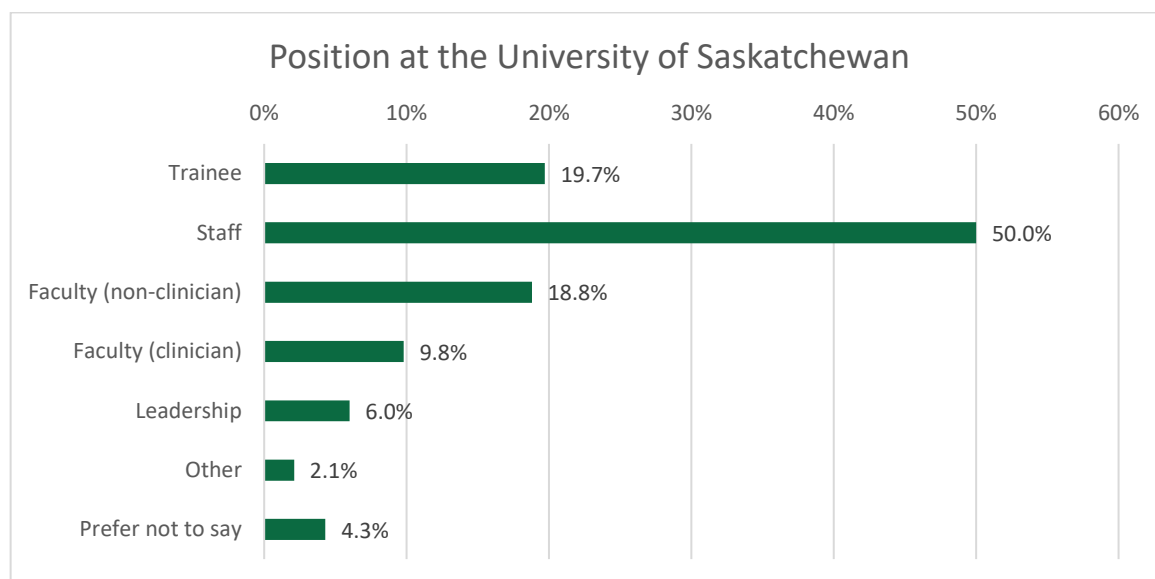


Figure 4 – Distribution of position(s)/role(s) of respondents, n=234

The largest proportion of respondents were from the College of Medicine (29%). A sizeable proportion (18.4%) of respondents preferred not disclose the college, school, or unit they belong to (Figure 5).

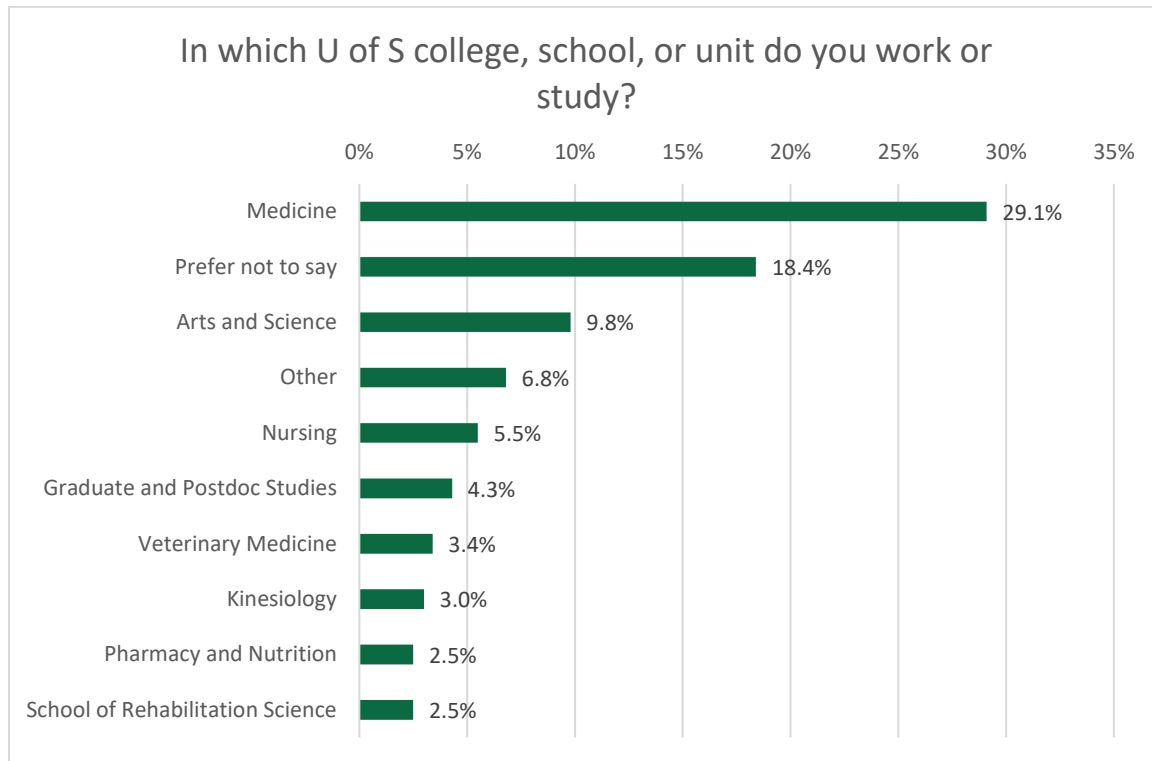


Figure 5 – Ten most frequently selected colleges, schools, or units of respondents

If the percentage of respondents who selected a college, school, or unit was less than 2%, they were not listed in the Figure 5 (includes Agriculture and Bioresources, Edwards School of Business, Centre for Continuing and Distance Education, Dentistry, Education, Engineering, School of Environment and Sustainability, School of Public Health, Johnson Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy, and various “Other”: OVPR, finance-related departments, Health Sciences, TLSE, UofS Library, ICT/IT). There were sixteen (6.8%) respondents who selected “Other” which could not be categorized together in a meaningful way.

2.2 How did the Covid-19 pandemic affect Equity, Diversity and Inclusion at the University of Saskatchewan?

Respondents were given a chance to discuss any issues/situations related to EDI that they have observed or experienced over the course of the Covid-19 pandemic. Altogether, 57.7% of respondents completed this question while 42.3% stated no issues to report.

Duration of Events

Respondents who relayed situations (n=135) were asked to provide approximate dates of the situations they described. Some were able to provide a specific date, likely indicating a very explicit incident (14.8%). A few (8.1%) described situations that occurred over one to four weeks (approximately). Others gave spans of time or dates that suggested situations lasted one to six months (24.4%). Just under half (49.6%) described a timeframe that is ongoing. Among those, over half reported events occurring over at least one year, suggesting these were problems they had observed or experienced long before the Covid-19 pandemic.

The themes that follow are those that emerged from the comments in this section. Although not all comments were directed toward situations that arose as a result of the pandemic, all were included in the analysis as these were presented as persistent issues that were observed or experienced both within and outside of the pandemic timeframe.

2.2.1 Racism and prejudice: Before and during Covid-19 pandemic

There were many respondents who used the opportunity of the survey to report on race-based discrimination prior to, or during, the course of the pandemic (56.4%). Responses varied from a general bias observed against those of ethnic minorities to specific and explicit accounts of racism and racial discrimination.

2.2.1a Inequitable and biased treatment of minority students in programs

Five respondents relayed racist experiences and observations toward students of colour at one particular college, citing racist instructors and unfair treatment.

A lot of my professors in my professional college...are racist. They treat me different in a way that is very noticeable especially in the clinical setting. I do not feel at ease at all with any clinical instructor because I feel I have to work twice as hard as my colleagues.

Having lecturers and instructors who teach about cultural safety and awareness but in no way practice it. The [College] is full of all forms of racism. Immigrants most especially the people of color ... have it so much harder. We have to do thrice as much work in order to be seen as smart.

Foreign students! - I have heard terrible stories about how our foreign students are treated and what they are expected to do beyond the rest of us. We need to work to make their experience more equitable to our home grown students.

2.2.1b Anti-Asian attitudes increased during the pandemic

A few respondents felt or observed increased discrimination and avoidance of those of Asian descent. Two addressed the incorrect belief that Asian minorities do not experience racism in Canada. One respondent felt that people had a negative view of them since the outbreak.

2.2.1c Overall lack of cultural safety

Faculty, students, and staff all reported incidents that are exemplary of a lack of cultural safety. Some of the comments were of direct experiences, in which the respondent felt unsafe:

I joined my current unit recently and have experienced harassment and pervasive discrimination. It is not just directed towards me, also my colleagues and when faculty try to access our unit for support.

I am a faculty member who is also a PhD candidate. During my coursework ... I experienced regular discriminatory conduct [from] one professor, IN CLASS.

Other respondents reported observations:

I have noticed fellow employees share rude remarks in response to university emails highlighting inclusion initiatives.

One [professor] was discussing cultural norms for end of life care and turned to the group that looked like they were not white and asked them point blank...othering them in front of the class.

Again, some of these incidents were very specific to the pandemic while others were ongoing and enduring in some settings. The following sections (2.2.2 to 2.2.6) focus more on emergent challenges to EDI related to working from home during the pandemic, the power imbalance and uncertainty for students through the shift to online learning, the struggle for women during the pandemic, and Indigenous respondents' experiences related to EDI during Covid-19.

2.2.2 Working from home: Large variations in experiences

The Covid-19 pandemic forced faculty, staff, and students off campus and into their homes. Although there are some noted benefits of working from home (particularly, protection from the virus), there were some real reported struggles working virtually.

2.2.2a At-home work stations are not equitable

First, there were comments about the challenge of working from home when one cannot be set up as comfortably or efficiently as in the office. Some struggled with ergonomics, internet connectivity, and other various challenges:

As a staff member, it is clear that different staff and faculty members have unequal challenges in working from home, whether it is in having enough space to create a dedicated workspace,

responsibility for children/elders, or technological concerns (hardware, internet access). These differences seem to be not insignificantly linked with age, gender, culture/ethnicity, or more than one of these.

"Remote" working is even more difficult if for whatever reason (finances, gender, age) you do not have access to space, time, and resources - many are using whatever they have at home for Wi-Fi, computer, laptops, desks, screens. Exacerbates further differential of efficiency of output based on your personal living situation.

Other challenges came from not only what is available to individuals in their homes as far as work environments are concerned, but also the perception of the attitudes about working from home:

We got a "fun" activity to be performed by students and staff (if we wanted to participate). The "fun" activity was to take a picture of your "new" workplace to be posted on the website. This activity was almost like saying, we want to confirm if you are working, so let's do this "fun" picture activity. If someone, especially the ones in a not very favorable situation to work from home (either caring for kids, seniors, homeschooling, living outside their home countries, with family being affected by COVID-19 or other health issues in their home countries or anywhere else), this activity had probably triggered more concerns and anxiety for not being able to do all the work that has to be done and also smile to the picture.

The above situation showed a lack of awareness of the struggles of some home environments and trying to balance those struggles with working to meet expectations of supervisors and employers.

2.2.2b Dual roles of care-providing and working full-time

Unsurprisingly, those who are responsible for caring for others reported excessive burden with working from home. Much of the struggle appeared to stem from perceptions of a need to work regular hours and put in a full day of work every day, despite additional roles and responsibilities. Suggestions from others to "simply" find alternatives to childcare when other options were impossible or out of reach added to the stress. Respondents iterated that much of this burden fell on female students, faculty, and staff:

U of S work from home policy that ignores the fact that some employees (particularly women) have children at home and may be the primary caregivers for them at this time. E.g., stating that the employee should keep their regular work hours when working from home - nearly impossible if children are home; and potentially gendered impacts of such a policy.

I feel that employees such as myself with small children are still expected to be as productive at home as I would in office. Last minute meetings (via WebEx and phone) are not as easy to sit in on with small children running around the house. Comments such as "Well your husband is home, right?" assume that children can be whisked away to some magic room to remain quiet for 1 hour to 2-hour long meetings.

It feels like I am expected to keep track of every minute spent working and ensure to make it all

up. There are constantly comments about fairness, and being available, and making sure productivity doesn't drop. It's minor, but constant, and makes for a stressful work environment.

The inconsistent messaging about working from home was also noted. There was supportive messaging coming from the University as a whole, while others experienced disparate messaging from their Colleges, departments, or units:

I would really like to see a lot more messaging and support from senior administration that we are trying to carry on the work of our institution through unprecedented times, and that we may not be able to have high levels of productivity. The university Faculty and Staff Newsletter has been good, but I don't think it's enough. I would have liked to see more messaging like this coming in an email from the President.

While it is acknowledged that this is a hardship, no active process or considerations are applied to my situation, just work as usual.

In our unit, there does not seem to be any message to people caring for dependents. I asked for such a message within a week of campus closure and the response was "great question".

The reported impact of managing every role and task within the same time frame was colossal for some respondents:

There has been no support from the university in terms of making the re-opening of daycares a priority. The message from the university is that childcare is not an employer issue. If you want your early career researchers in particular to succeed and if you want diversity in your numbers, it is. Irrevocable damage is being done to my research career.

There is a continuing lack of acknowledgement of the challenges of working at home with children who are also at home. We have no childcare, no family in the province, and were not willing to put our child in an unsafe summer camp for the sake of getting work done. I am able to perform all of my job duties, but face continual pressure to get things done immediately.

I was told "why don't you get your wife to take care of them?" This is blatantly discriminatory, and quite frankly, disturbing as it is counter to equal rights in that it is perpetuating the stereotype that only women are capable of caring for children. Honestly, I am so upset with the university and my college for their lack of foresight that I have contemplated quitting many times. I am disgusted with the University of Saskatchewan and my Dean.

2.2.2c Parents' vs. Non-parents' experiences

Although it was not reported by more than a couple of respondents, there were reports from those without children at home of feeling that they were expected to take on more work. Although there were acknowledgements that what parents experienced during the pandemic was challenging, these respondents felt that inequitable expectations were falling on them:

I do feel for parents who are now dealing with unforeseen child care issues, but it's not really fair to put higher expectations on people without children because of it. I'm grateful to still have a job in the current situation, but it is a little hard to take when your co-workers are only working an hour or two a day and you're putting in full days and are being told that 'we' should be doing more.

While I am understanding that parents have responsibilities outside of work that require their attention, I often feel that the assumption is that non-parents do not have the same level of personal responsibility which is both unfair and incorrect. Non-parents have aging parents or other personal responsibilities that also occupy their time, but the expectation is often that they will need to pick up the slack. This discrepancy has become especially prevalent since COVID-19.

2.2.2d Working from home can be isolating for those who already struggle to belong

The mandate of working from home during the pandemic was to physically isolate from others to reduce the spread of the virus. However, this isolation transcended the physical and negatively impacted the ability to meaningfully communicate for some respondents:

Being a female is difficult enough, having an accent is even more difficult, combine that with remote meetings and the levels just go up from there.

Not having an opportunity to discuss workplace issues face-to-face (only by email or choppy WebEx) is not conducive to fully explaining one's viewpoints and perspectives, particularly with superiors (e.g. faculty, chairs, and supervisors). Consequently, the lack of opportunities for quality conversations has led to inequitable relationships.

For one respondent, not being physically present in the workplace resulted in practices that were not inclusive to others (but the respondent did not disclose to what groups or individuals in particular):

Since the implementation of work from home, some individuals are now exhibiting practices that are less inclusive of others and other more in silo to get things done.

2.2.3 Students faced much uncertainty and increased challenges

The sudden and rushed process to move an entire university to online learning was unprecedented, and of course, there were repercussions for both students and faculty. Although the move to online was executed to keep students from losing time in their schooling careers, there were those who felt the University did not do enough to reduce the uncertainty, particularly for graduate students:

Power differentials between grad students who have little control over the situation and others including supervisors - no acknowledgment of these realities in addressing things like the extended time in grad programs that many students will have as they are unable to do their research OR their supervisors are temporarily preoccupied with other concerns such as moving their classes online, etc. which then means the supervisors are not available or able to keep things moving for students (i.e., providing feedback on drafts, etc.). U of S has not taken any

steps to acknowledge these challenges or accommodate for them, such as partial tuition reductions, etc. while many students are in limbo over circumstances beyond their control.

Additionally, not every instructor heeded the advice of the University to transition for final exams, putting some at an unnecessary disadvantage during a tumultuous time:

Many of my students have reached out because they are alarmed that they are being forced to continue with final exams under these circumstances. The university advised to consider take home type exams and giving students 24 hours or more to complete them, but some instructors have chosen to ignore this advice.

2.2.3a Tuition fees did not reflect online learning environment

Many students struggle to pay for school; tuition for the 2019-2020 school year was paid for an in-person learning experience, and that was taken away due to the pandemic. Many felt that was unfair based on the quality of the learning experience, others felt it was unfair to expect full payment when many students lost their jobs.

I do believe it unfair that the tuition for online learning is the same as face to face teaching (which is what was paid for).

Not refunding tuition for classes being provided online; it is not the same value as in person lectures.

I'm worried about being able to afford tuition since I am unable to work right now. The tuition freeze is nice, but it's still very expensive.

2.2.3b Students felt they were not included in decision-making

One respondent felt strongly that he or she had received enough evidence that students were not being well-represented at decision-making tables regarding their learning situations over the course of the pandemic:

Too often I hear from students about how the response initiatives of their colleges are completely out of touch with the realities of students' lives. I receive reports from student executives and volunteers who have been added to planning committees that their voices and commitment to solutions are not being valued. We the students have begun to believe that these representative positions are little more than an optical illusion. The tokenization of student representation involves a lot smiles and nodding followed by platitudes of "we hear you". The subsequent actions of faculty then demonstrate a complete discount and dismissal of input.

2.2.3c Some home environments were not suitable for online learning

Much like various work environments among faculty and staff, students also faced challenges with learning from home, especially if they were living in rural or remote areas, came from a low-income household, or did not have access to a safe and quiet place to learn:

Many of my students come from rural and remote parts of the province. When classes were cancelled and/or when students had to leave university residence, they went home. Many of these students have poor to non-existent internet and mobile phone coverage yet have been expected to follow streaming lectures and despite numerous warnings from the UofS that blackboard will not be a fully reliable platform, exams are being offered online only and (again against all advice) some are offering timed exams.

Students without high-quality internet access and computing devices receive a poor quality education.

The move to on-line learning was very quick and had to be done without much planning or thought. It had impacts on students with low income who were faced with the need to have personal laptops, internet connections, and a quiet place to take part in classes virtually and study since libraries were closed to them.

Being in the classroom, for the most part, created an equal and safe space to learn and study. To have that taken away, for some students, made learning difficult to impossible.

2.2.3d International students faced unexpected challenges

Some respondents felt that many international students were in a unique and troubling situation and not given adequate supports from the University during this time. Some faced being forced to return home, as the conditions of their visas were no longer being met. Others discussed incongruities outside of University and student control that made home and learning circumstances quite difficult. Many of the responses discussing racism and prejudice during the pandemic were focusing on the experiences of international students.

2.2.4 Gender bias worsened in some circumstances

Female respondents felt that their work was not being given the same weight and authority as their male colleagues – both during and before the pandemic:

Interestingly I was made the Covid lead for my division. When instructing the team, I was undermined and told by a number of faculty that people weren't listening to me because I was a woman. This was very disappointing given the significant leadership I had shown.

Gender includes less acceptance of knowledge, processes when presented by women vs men, belittling of ideas/leadership, etc. with women not demonstrated with men in similar roles or even presenting similar ideas.

2.2.4a Careers of male faculty valued over female faculty

There were numerous examples respondents could give of their work being undervalued or disregarded because they were female, including the research that was prioritized during the pandemic:

Access to campus for researchers - Men are being disproportionately favoured in the requests to

access campus. Men's research has been more likely to be declared as "essential" while the work of women faculty is deemed to be "non-essential." The EXACT same request was submitted once by a woman and it was denied. It was resubmitted by a man, and it was approved. This is not an anecdotal case. The broader number of approvals support the claim that this is a disturbing pattern.

If you look on the list of emergency accepted exempt research due to Covid19 there appears to be interesting biases in men vs women whose work has been approved, as well as use of Dr. as part of title, or not.

Others felt that their careers were irrevocably halted or damaged due to the Covid-19 pandemic (and more so than the burden that their male colleagues would face):

Gender-based salary discrepancies. Hard to tell what the effect of COVID19 has been, but given that women have disproportionately affected by increased care-taking duties, it is likely that career-advancing outputs (such as publications) will affect women more than men. If this is not taken into account when assessing merit and promotion applications, women will be disadvantaged in these processes in coming years, leading to greater salary inequality.

2.2.4b Women disadvantaged due to societal expectations of duties

Of the 30 respondents who identified inequitable work and struggle for parents who are working from home, 27 were female. As noted in Section 2.2.2b, the caregiving responsibilities tend to fall on the women of the household, which now must be done simultaneously with their work.

Women are still carrying most of the activities and therefore their work is suffering or they are more taxed.

My workload has tripled and in a dual academic family with two kids to homeschool it is unrealistic for us to keep up the pace.

However, childcare responsibilities are not the only gender bias occurring in regards to work expectations for females during the pandemic:

Due to the situation of having all of the clerical workers at home, I feel that as a woman I am asked to take over more clerical duties (out of my scope of work) than my male coworkers.

As the following respondents highlight, jobs and careers of women were negatively impacted by the closures of campus and research facilities. Again, these are the words and concerns of female respondents:

As a pre-tenure faculty, I am being offered an additional year to make tenure to make up for this delay in research. However, as I have already had maternity leave, this will have negative financial implications. I will reach the ceiling of assistant professor wages several years prior to being due to apply for tenure, which means my wages stagnate while my colleagues hired at the

same time as me are continuing to climb the wage scale. And of course being early in my career this will have long term ramifications.

With COVID19, personal, family and financial demands have increased along with concerns about my education, research and academic future. The communication, deadlines and demands have not changed to the same degree as the COVID19 crisis. The demands and the direction of the research projects remain unclear. Crippled by fear that I will not be successful, graduate or will be viewed as not being able to meet deadlines if I do not take on all of the work and requests even during this time.

2.2.5 EDI not given priority during Covid-19 pandemic

One respondent was able to give a strong example of how the pandemic affected EDI efforts on campus. Essentially, feeling that it was pushed aside rather than embraced during a time when experiencing inequity was much more likely for people:

In a recent discussion of course offerings that represent minoritized viewpoints, faculty expressed concerns that such courses would be cancelled or marginalized in efforts to focus on "core" courses, under fiscally difficult conditions.

Another two respondents felt that there is not enough understanding of EDI amongst faculty and staff, in general:

Also, with more Canadians in a team, it is not easy to have a conversation on a call when they are not aware of EDI, as different people from International countries come from a diverse background. All are not so confident to speak up and if they are, they have a fear of not being welcomed.

Faculty do not understand, and therefore do not prioritize, EDI.

2.2.6 Indigenous Respondents' Experiences

Although the responses in Section 2.2.1 included all respondents, those who identified as an Indigenous respondent were then isolated from the sample and analyzed separately and are presented in this Section. Indigenous faculty and staff appeared to face additional burdens during the Covid-19 pandemic.

2.2.6a Anti-Indigenous attitudes prevail

Indigenous and non-Indigenous respondents alike highlighted the continued racist attitudes and behaviours toward Indigenous faculty, staff, and students. Some incidents were outright aggressive, and others more nuanced.

I was reminded I was hired through Aboriginal career start. Now this was not said but it was very much implied 'That I should be grateful to have this job no matter what.' After the meeting was over I walked back to my office and told my co-worker that the world is in a pandemic and

people are dying and the university area I worked in just pulled the race card!

I am having difficulties with [Unit]. In my opinion they are not culturally safe. Despite many meetings with the supervisor nothing changes and as an Indigenous senior researcher who serves Indigenous communities I am told to 'read the cultural safety manual they developed'. It is beyond insulting.

2.2.6b Indigenous staff: burdened with job insecurity and more work

It was Indigenous respondents who highlighted that the majority of those receiving permanent layoffs as a result of the pandemic appear to be those of visible minorities, Indigenous persons, and women. Other respondents discussed a particular challenge that has emerged from Covid-19 related to maintaining anti-racism and Indigenization efforts. According to the respondents, it has been the responsibility of Indigenous staff and faculty to maintain reconciliation-related work while others, "focused on self-care and getting through the pandemic."

I've witnessed employers assign tasks to Indigenous staff that focuses on Indigenous initiatives even though this does not fit with their job title...One way that COVID-19 has exacerbated these situations is that we are all in very isolated scenarios so we don't see the bigger picture so it is difficult to feel connected to other Indigenous staff in meaningful ways.

With fewer allies carrying their share of the load for reconciliation, Indigenous people are having to lift and do more, or carry the guilt or shame for the University not doing enough.

2.3 What could have or should have been done to resolve the incident(s) / experience(s)?

Respondents were asked what reactions would have, or could still, improve the situation that they had described. Altogether, 167 respondents provided suggestions.

2.3.1 Create more equitable work-from-home conditions

The most significant change of the pandemic for most is now that they are working from home. The home experiences and settings varied so greatly, that it is impossible to expect all things from everyone. Most of the comments centered strongly on accounting for this variance, and to offer supports for those who need them:

Our department heads could be assigned the task of gathering data on all faculty and staff and what our home situations look like under these circumstances and have a set of policies in place for different situations.

It would be beneficial for all team members working on the project to receive the same adjustments to deadlines and accommodations when they express a need to additional time or reduced expectation for delivery of content. I have tried to be open and honest in my communications, but feel that my concerns and challenges are being not heard or disregarded where others are being accommodated.

Everyone should have equal access to the tools to do their job.

Letting me monitor and do my duties from home. Give me back the duties that I regularly perform. Give me back my phone line and calendar booking duties.

Acknowledging/recognizing that circumstances might affect an employee's ability to be available during work hours.

Appreciation and fair work conditions for employees on campus. Across campus recognition of non-unionized workers and how they are treated and helped in difficult working situations.

2.3.2 Offer more flexibility and accommodation during these unprecedented times

A general call for flexibility, accommodation, and grace during the pandemic would, according to the respondents, calm many anxieties and struggles that various groups and individuals are experiencing. There were some noted categories in the responses:

2.3.2a For students

Student respondents and those recognizing the challenges for their students advocated for having flexibility in funds and resources for students who are unable to support themselves during this time, and also offering flexibility on learning outcomes and expectations:

Offer a pass/goal option to students, because many don't have access to the same benefits as on campus, and their grades may suffer because of that. Reimburse them for the several weeks they weren't given access to the PAC, the libraries, the Wi-Fi, etc. Do not increase tuition next year. Numerous people have lost their jobs.

Provide additional criteria to help me qualify for more relief. Build in alternatives to "reprimanding" when I have to work over 20 hours a week. Sometimes I don't have a choice. It puts me and my grad chair in a tough spot when they know my struggles and still need to tell me I cannot work to provide for myself.

2.3.2b For those without access to technology at home

It is impossible to learn from home online when there is no or limited access to reliable internet or computers. There were a few calls among the respondents to support students in these situations:

Securing free internet access to a rural area and students/faculty securing computing hardware adequate for students to perform (qualifying models price ranged from 700 CAD to 1500 CAD) considering merit-based access to office and equipment in addition to by classification of essential research.

Provide emergency access to internet and equipment for those with a need (the central U of S fund for assisting students in need was certainly used by many students for assistance with rent etc., but I believe the fund was challenged to keep up with demand, and not well advertised to be used for this purpose.) Access to University Wi-Fi in common areas or libraries with social distancing and cleaning enforced may be considered if approved by public health authorities.

2.3.2c For parents

As noted earlier, parents whose children no longer had access to childcare or schooling were struggling to care for their children, lead homeschool, handle household responsibilities, and work full-time from home. There were many suggestions on how offering some flexibility and reassurances would have benefited this group:

Actively reduce the expectations and amount of hours expected to work with single parenting multiple young children. Provide reassurance about job security and commit to the reassurances.

Understanding from the university level that people with kids that have no access to childcare are not realistically able to put in a full day's work from home. Although our managers are very understanding there is still pressure for us to work full days as the university official statement says that everyone should be putting in full-time work.

Possibly - shorter work weeks (4 days) or less hours during the day so that people can still ensure they are fulfilling family responsibilities.

Formal, explicit guidance and acknowledgement of the particular challenges parents of young children are facing. These challenges will only get worse if the disastrous school reopening plan

goes ahead.

Building flexibility into job expectations so people can work whatever hours they want to in the day. Having clear job expectations so that people know when their job is "done" at the end of the day and can be reassured that they are doing it well and as expected. Build in flexibility or contingency plans for those who have to deal with unexpected sick kids or other family, quarantined kids or get sick themselves.

Many of these suggestions come with the request for strong and unified messaging from the university that faculty and staff have the flexibility needed to accommodate their new realities.

2.3.2d For those with disabilities

There were a few respondents with disabilities who spoke up to suggest a few ways they could be supported – particularly accommodating schedules for days they need to rest. However there were also other accommodation requests:

Preregistering people with disabilities in training spots that meet their accommodations when such spots are limited.

PPE alternatives for common reasons that someone cannot tolerate the preferred equipment.

One respondent was considering the future, when the pandemic would ease and restrictions would lift and how to accommodate immunocompromised individuals, or those living with immunocompromised persons:

Given a number of faculty or their families are immunocompromised -- a top priority must be accommodating them. (e.g., not requiring in-person attendance of campus or teaching, should campus open up)...

2.3.3 Hold people accountable for their discriminatory behaviour

A repeated complaint was that there was no accountability or no safe process to go through to hold certain individuals accountable when they have demonstrated discriminatory behaviour. There were feelings that any processes in place put the onus and blame on the victim, rather than the perpetrator.

It would be great if there was a safe space to go for people experiencing discrimination that took these claims seriously. When I told my supervisor about my experiences, she laughed and told me to file a complaint. She also said maybe I'd be happier working somewhere else.

If a board were implemented where students could respectfully bring up discriminatory behaviours by professional academic advisors at the University of Saskatchewan.

There were a few strong calls for accountability for those in leadership positions who display discriminatory behaviour and for leadership to hold other accountable as well:

Investigate the Dean for discriminatory policies and behaviours. There are a large number of male faculty members that are quite frankly frightened of our Dean as she has systematically fired, harassed or forced out a large number of male staff in our college.

A senior faculty member sent an uncivil email relating to extra service needed during Covid and department head should have stepped in to address the behaviour. Department head needs to show more leadership.

2.3.4 Acknowledge and address systemic and personal biases

One respondent provided a wonderful example of an individual acknowledging her own lack of understanding and then seeking out resources to educate herself:

We had a [professor] use the word "it" for a trans[gendered] person. It was addressed with her and she took the next week to educate herself and then brought back what she had learned, brought in an expert from OUT and changed the way she communicated. This was a brilliant example of what to do. The same prof as above heard that we did not feel we had been given much cultural content so when discussing grieving, educated herself on Indigenous grieving practices, brought us what she had learned and then showed us a video of Indigenous people teaching us about some Indigenous grieving practices. Brilliant.

Others simply requested more equal representation and treatment across the board:

More emphasis on female representation in leadership positions. More equal treatment between staff and faculty.

Others made calls or statements regarding systemic racism in particular. Diversifying leadership and who is creating and instigating policies was mentioned by numerous respondents:

I also think that institutional and structural racism is very real, and just because there is an increase in Black, Indigenous, and students of colour does not mean that the university is a safe place for them to be.

This person needs to move on and let Indigenous people or POC take that up the space in terms of Indigenous programming, initiatives and to be able to have a strong voice to help create positive safe spaces and change for Indigenous people as we are apparently an institutional priority.

I believe that the policies have inherent bias and this is why we need to understand WHO is writing the policy? Did anyone receive cultural safety training? Do they understand that systemic racism, discrimination, bias could be impacting their decisions without them even being aware of it?

I believe that Institutional addresses of Racism (as well as power differential or other inequities) could allow the general public to "check their privilege" and potential find healthier means of dealing with difference in the current times.

2.3.5 Mandatory EDI training for all students, faculty, and staff (including leadership)

Systemic issues are not easily addressed in a short time frame. However, ensuring that the campus community is educated on equity, diversity, and inclusion could help to rectify individual biases, thought patterns, and behaviours. There were specific calls for training to address gender, racial diversity, LGBTQ2S+, addressing unconscious bias, disabilities and ableism, etc., but especially a call for mandatory training for those in leadership positions:

People leaders should be mandatorily [sensitized] towards EDI before they take up any position where they are managing people.

Regular training for all leadership in very detailed manners such as providing very specific examples of how micro-aggressions occur. This needs to happen at least yearly in order to be effective and should be required for all leadership positions.

Leadership training; following the processes outlined in the collective agreement; awareness about sexism

Training for supervisors on different aspects of privilege.

2.3.6 Indigenous respondents' perspectives of what more could be done

There were 17 respondents who identified as Indigenous who left a response to this question.

There were multiple referrals to Indigenous people being an institutional priority at the University of Saskatchewan, but the sense from those respondents is that indigenization efforts are tokenistic at best:

If Usask is really wanting to indigenize and decolonize, then look to areas of the institution where you have Indigenous programs (long standing) that live under the mercy and 'wise direction of the white man.' Sorry to say so harshly, but it's true.

Things are said to us about inclusion and not being discriminatory to people of different gender, sexual orientation, or culture. But it's said to us in the manner of 'I have to say this.'

...let Indigenous people or POC take up that space in terms of Indigenous programming, initiatives and to be able to have a strong voice to help create positive, safe spaces and change for Indigenous people as we are apparently an institutional priority.

Clear and direct messaging to all colleges and schools to recognized that they have largely ignored the fourth priority of the institution, while trying to maintain the other three. The simple

fact that they felt comfortable doing this speaks volumes to their actual understanding of the institutional-wide priority as not necessarily a top-level priority.

Further, there were calls for additional training among the leadership on biases and micro-aggressions and that this training occurs regularly (see quote in Section 2.3.5). Additionally, more training is needed in other areas as well:

WHO is writing the policy? Did anyone receive cultural safety training? Do they understand that systemic racism, discrimination, bias could be impacting their decisions without them even being aware of it?

I believe there needs to be more mandatory anti-racism training for faculty.

There was a comment about the vacancies left in departments when Indigenous faculty and staff leave that are not filled, and the impact that this has on those left behind. Another comment was critical of a unit filling positions previously held by non-Indigenous staff with Indigenous staff and moving those jobs from permanent positions to short-term contracts, which reduces job stability. Another requested more transparency about “restructuring” to justify letting people go.”

Two called for safer processes to bring up grievances that are safe and appropriate. Three respondents wanted more tangible supports for students during this time. One requested additional supports for parents, and in particular, single parents. And another requested considerations of this year toward the merit process.

2.4 What is going well in terms of EDI at the University of Saskatchewan during the Covid-19 pandemic?

Not all survey respondents completed the survey to convey negative experiences or observations.

Overall, 106 respondents (45.3%) also discussed positive situations, and 61 respondents (26%) only had positive comments (i.e., did not complete the first question on gaps in EDI).

2.4.1 Flexibility and support has been offered

Most respondents boasted strong internal supports from leadership and/or colleagues during this time, offering exactly what has been requested (in the previous question): flexibility and accommodation, and communication with one another.

Overall, the team has been working hard to support one another and to provide opportunities for shifting responsibilities and task priorities to make team success the priority. We have worked hard to create schedules and procedures that allow us to communicate about progress, to check in about how we are doing, and to provide opportunities to socialize and decompress as a way to reduce some of the additional stress created by the substantial changes to our work environment.

I work with great people who are all actively trying to support one another through this trying time.

My department has come together in ways I couldn't image to support mental health and personal transition to working remotely. Well done! Proud to be part of this community!

I think that personally in my unit there is an acknowledgment that the world we are living in is very different and that we cannot expect the same output as we usually would. I am incredibly grateful for my leaders and their realistic approach to this new world.

My supervisor has been very understanding of staff home with sick kids and adjusts due dates accordingly. My supervisor has also been very accommodating of flexible work schedules

I have found that my DH has been quite accommodating and has have my colleagues. They have been very understanding that I often have children climbing into my camera and vocalizing during my contributions to meetings and defenses. I appreciate their ongoing understanding.

I think that the University has done a great job at demonstrating care for and to their employees. The engagement with staff and faculty to help and provide accommodations where necessary has made surviving in isolation during a pandemic as comfortable as possible. This includes Indigenous employees who struggle with the same day-to-day issues and concerns.

However, the fact that many respondents were still asking for accommodation and flexibility suggests that this type of support is not equitable across colleges, schools, departments, and units.

2.4.2 The availability of technology to allow for communication and connection

For many, having technology to facilitate connection and communication among the campus community has been extremely helpful; highlighting systems such as Microsoft Teams. IT support that supports the platforms and the transfer to an online community were also complimented by many respondents.

IT has done a phenomenal job of keeping up with the technological demands caused by moving the entire university online in a few days. What they have achieved is truly amazing and I hope they some kind of recognition for their hard work. Groups across campus have set up weekly zoom calls just to chat and have coffee. Keeping the social aspect of work has been huge for mental health.

Support from IT services to be able to work from home has been extremely helpful and supports the safety of UofS employees.

Teams has made it easy to talk to the entire group regardless of where they are working or what background they have. In that we are all disoriented, we are all the same.

The technological support has also allowed for increased cultural diversity and enhanced cultural connection while physically being apart:

Increased use of virtual platforms has allowed a larger, more diverse group of people to interact on a more regular basis. With increased interaction comes increased opportunity to share various differences in philosophy, religion and cultural beliefs.

We have been able to virtually gather with elders and knowledge keepers online.

Finally, virtual environments have been beneficial in terms of inclusivity – allowing for some of those uncomfortable in a group format to have a voice and to increase attendance to classes for students:

During the COVID crisis, I think it's easier for those that would normally feel intimidated to walk into a room to attend the virtual meetings that we are all having now. It is easier to feel included, but there are still challenges related to bias and discrimination.

The use of Microsoft Teams for meetings allows for a more structured meeting and it provides options for individuals who don't like to speak up in front of large groups to use the chat function to ask a question or make a comment.

Although it was of necessity and not because it was planned, the move to on-line department seminars has resulted in improved attendance.

Technology has the potential to be more inclusive. We use MS Teams for our staff meetings now, which has captioning built in, and honestly this is more inclusive than in-person meetings. I believe students are experiencing this to some degree as well, as they are finding online learning easier for a number of reasons (the selection of classes used to be quite small, technology was lacking, supports weren't in place, etc.).

2.4.3 Students broadly supported at this time

Although there were notes of gaps, broadly speaking, respondents felt that students were well supported during the transition to online learning – including aspects of funding support, flexibility in deadlines, and frequent communication:

Use of the emergency fund for students in need was a good idea, and deserves more funding and coordination. Support for international students who were unable to find work as bridge funding is being considered and should be supported and extended to new students planning to attend in the fall 2020.

Trying to plan, with Public Health, to enable field and lab research to resume (and giving priority to graduate students and Post-docs near the end of their program). Keeping student residences open. Trying to adapt graduate and non-graduate programs so that students can engage in remote learning.

Most instructors I interact with are bending over backwards to support students and create safe options, giving extensions, and being polite and supportive.

2.4.4 Working from home has helped many with a work-life balance

Although there are additional demands for some while working from home, many respondent identified this aspect as a positive outcome. Supervisors have been offering the flexibility needed, and some have enjoyed the opportunity to engage more with their families at this time.

Greater focus on mental health and achieving a good work/ life balance

Increased flexibility in my work day as I work from home. I can start earlier and work later, but take breaks when my son needs support with online learning.

Spending more time my children.

Working from home is absolutely feasible and productivity is high (likely higher than while at the office since there is no visiting/coffee breaks etc.). With the caveat that we still need childcare. The university/our managers have been very accommodating of our situation and assisted us in getting a home office set up.

I have felt supported in continuing my work from home, with a recognition that I have children at home and also need to be able to attend to them.

A surprising benefit of working from home that was noted by three respondents was that the reduction of daily interactions with an assaulting party (when experiencing discrimination and/or harassment). Although it was perceived as a benefit for the respondent, the issue at hand is still a negative point, as it represents an on-going issue with workplace discrimination and harassment.

Covid19 has affected the situation positively in that physical presence is no longer required on campus and the offensive individuals are more easily avoided.

The COVID situation has helped in that the requirement for electronic communication, harassment is traceable and therefore is no longer overtly in play.

Management is religious and biased against LGBTQ staff. This has actually gotten better since COVID, not sure why. Maybe because they don't have to actually see their staff members?

Those who have been offered the flexibility needed to adjust to their various roles and responsibilities spoke with a stark contrast to those who had not been offered that flexibility. Explicit messaging from supervisors and administration about the need for flexibility should start and/or continue.

2.4.5 Observations of EDI efforts on behalf of individuals and groups

Numerous responses highlighted the progress or work they had seen throughout the university on activities focused on inclusion and anti-racism.

I have had the pleasure of working with several individuals in leadership at the university who have demonstrated through both word and action that they are committed to improving equity across the campus. Hiring of Indigenous faculty, and being explicit to the old guard that the new hires provide are valued team members is occurring more.

My academic unit encouraged staff and faculty to participate in EDI initiatives and to report any concerns about EDI issues to the unit head or to our HR SBA so that these could be explored and resolved

I've noticed some departments at USask tend to be very inclusive in their hiring practices. I'm referring here to instances where I've noted that Indigenous staff members have been hired to fill roles that are not specific to Indigenous requirements.

More discussions about race in the last year colleagues are speaking up about issues in a way that is productive with other colleagues.

Significant effort to be inclusive of a spectrum of perspectives and observations in patient care, servicemen and patient flow discussions and planning, orient access to outpatient and emergency services.

Many individuals on campus work hard to improve their own efforts in the directions of EDI and sustainability. However, that is simply not enough.

2.4.6 Good communication throughout the pandemic

Frequent and clear communication from the university and within units had been highlighted by many respondents as a positive aspect of the pandemic.

The requirement for electronic communications during the COVID19 crisis has been great as communications are all documented.

Initially, there was a very quick turnaround time in getting information from the university with regards to the situation.

We receive messaging about mental health and how working from home (especially during this time) is different. People are open and sharing their personal experiences in a meaningful way.

I feel that the frequent and scheduled communication is benefitting all individuals in our college despite the negative repercussions of the present situation (closed labs, online only classes, cancelled practicums, etc.)

2.4.7 U of S took swift and effective action to protect people

Some respondents took this opportunity to praise actions taken by the University of Saskatchewan to ensure everyone's safety during the time of the pandemic. Covid-related communications come out in regular intervals, and the regulations and restrictions in place have allowed for people to take decisive action.

The University keeps spread of Covid under control on campus, which is good.

I feel that a really good job is being done by Usask in making everyone feel safe and protected while on site. People have been very good at showing appreciation and being understanding of the extra stress this situation has created.

I have experienced the demonstration of concern for the safety of faculty and staff on the part of both Senior Administrators and unit level leadership.

I think the university tries to manage the situation without any bias to personnel or group.

2.4.8 Indigenous respondents' perspectives of what is going well

Nineteen respondents who identified as Indigenous left a comment. Seven respondents commented on the beneficial roll-out of technology and software to facilitate and maintain connections while working off-campus. There were also seven comments regarding the overall supports and approach to safety for the campus community, and that the University has delivered well in these areas. Three mentioned the support for students during this time. Three commented about Indigenous-specific supports with two of those mentioning the hiring of Dr. Jackie Ottmann as beneficial in supporting Indigenous initiatives and people on campus. Finally, one respondent commented that being at home has been a positive in that they are no longer exposed to negative attitudes of his or her coworkers.

3.0 Conclusions

Overall, respondents had identified EDI-related issues that endured through, and were exacerbated by, the Covid-19 pandemic at the University of Saskatchewan. This included multiple examples of racism and discrimination, but in particular for Indigenous staff, students, and faculty. According to numerous respondents, there are notable gaps in cultural safety across the university. Recommendations for mandatory EDI training and accountability for discriminatory behaviour came from many respondents as possible ways to make better the situations that were reported in the survey.

Many times, departments and units failed to support female respondents. Examples included disregarding the extra duties of being a primary caregiver to a child or children at home, by assigning extra administrative duties to female colleagues, and stalling their return to research. Respondents requested and recommended unified messaging and support for parents, flexibility in work hours and expectations to manage all roles and responsibilities, and leniency on the expectations for merit and promotion during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Respondents used the survey as an opportunity to highlight the differential work environments that resulted from being taken off campus and moved into the home. There are many staff and students who are at a disadvantage when it comes to Wi-Fi or internet connectivity, computer access, and/or safe and ergonomic work stations. For low income students and students who have lost their job as a result of the pandemic, meeting basic needs may be a struggle; online learning experiences were not what was paid for and expenses continue in order to engage in an online learning experience. Calls for flexibility, financial and tangible supports for students were made by many respondents (some students, some faculty) who have witnessed and experienced very real challenges for students.

International students in particular were mentioned by respondents – the uncertainty of the situation grew exponentially for those who are no longer meeting the requirements for the visas, or for those whose programs would have to be extended when unable to do research during the lockdowns and closures. It was noted that some accommodations were made for these students (e.g., being able to stay in residence when the University closed), but respondents wished for more acknowledgement of the excessive burdens placed on international students at this time, including systemic racism.

Finally, the “survival mode” of the University during the pandemic has reportedly left gaps in the priority of indigenization. Indigenous respondents reported multiple issues in the indigenization process (e.g., policies and programs led and written by non-Indigenous leadership), including leaving this important work to Indigenous staff and faculty, despite many of the responsibilities being outside the purview of their regular duties.

However, there were also numerous examples of what has gone well. Many gave credit to the university for putting everyone’s safety first and acting swiftly with the outbreak of the pandemic. The technological advances have rolled out efficiently (as efficiently as they could) to ensure that

communication, connection, and collaboration was maintained while members of the campus community were dispersed across the province and country. Numerous respondents have highlighted supportive responses from leadership and colleagues, and others used the opportunity to emphasize EDI-related efforts they have noticed during the pandemic.

In summary, many of the situations reported would be rectified with mandatory EDI training, addressing systemic bias in favour of White, male, heterosexual members of campus, and an accountability process for those who display discriminatory behaviour. In particular to the pandemic, most are asking for flexibility and leniency from the campus community at this time. Strong, clear, and unified messaging from the university to staff, students, and faculty that acknowledge the challenges many are facing in conjunction with explicit support for those who are struggling was strongly requested. It was acknowledged that this messaging does come through various channels currently, but clearly all supervisors are not conveying the support equally across colleges, schools and units.

Canadian Hub for Applied and Social Research (CHASR)

University of Saskatchewan
Room 260 Arts Building 9 Campus Drive
Saskatoon SK Canada S7N 5A5
Telephone: (306) 966-8409
Facsimile: (306) 966-8819
Email: chasr@usask.ca

