

Faculty of Education's Diversity Policy approved by Senate

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An aggressive new policy that seeks to ensure a more diverse student population in the Faculty of Education's Bachelor of Education program has been approved by Senate.

Under the recently approved policy, 45 per cent of new applicants to the program will be admitted based on the applicants identifying themselves as being from several "diversity" categories. The remaining 55 per cent will be admitted based on highest admission score.

The goal of the policy, which has been in development since 2012, is to ensure that graduates of the U of M education program help to create a more diverse teaching force in the province, representing the "cultural, ethnic, regional and social diversity of Manitoba."

"Manitoba is a community of great diversity and as the Faculty of Education, we need to be making a more concerted effort to ensure that our teachers reflect that diversity," says Melanie Janzen, associate dean, undergraduate programs, who, along with former associate dean, undergraduate Jerome Cranston, professor Clea Schmidt and Rosanna Caruso, academic development officer, worked on revising the final drafts of the motion and moving it to Senate.

Although education is not the first faculty to have such a policy, (social work has been a leader in campus in developing a more equitable admissions policy, Janzen says, allowing for 40 per cent of admissions to be members of Educational Equity Priority Groups) this is one of the more aggressive campaigns as compared to other education faculties in Canada, she notes.

"I am very pleased that the faculty's Diversity Admission Policy has been approved by the University of Manitoba Senate and think that the policy sends a very strong message that the faculty wants to take a leading role in diversifying the teaching force of Manitoba," adds David Mandzuk, dean of the Faculty of Education.

The policy, which comes into effect in September 2017, will allow administrators to make every effort to admit 45 per cent of all available positions in each stream of education (Early, Middle and Senior Years) on the basis of applicants' voluntary self-identification in one or more of the diversity categories. Those categories include:

- Canadian Indigenous Peoples: Canadian First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples—allocation: 15 per cent of each stream
- Racialized persons: Those who have been treated differently based on their perceived racial backgrounds, colour and/or ethnicity. Includes non-Canadian Indigenous peoples—allocation: 7.5 per cent of each stream
- Persons with a gender identity/sexual orientation difference: those self-identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender/transsexual, two-spirit or queer (LGBTQ)—allocation: 7.5 per cent of each stream
- Persons with disabilities: those who have a physical, mental, psychological, sensory or diagnosed learning disability: 7.5 per cent of each stream

- Disadvantaged persons: members of the University of Manitoba ACCESS Program (those who have not had the opportunity for university study at the degree level because of social, economic or cultural reasons, or residence in remote areas) or those who have experienced other barriers because of their religion, creed, language or state of social disadvantage—allocation: 7.5 per cent of each stream

If there are not enough applicants in either of the admission categories, unallocated spaces from one admission category can be re-allocated to admission applicants from the other category based on competitive ranking.

Janzen says the policy is an important step for the faculty because it's an attempt to change the makeup of the Manitoba teaching force so that it better reflects the students and families served by teachers across the province.

"In addition," she says, "the policy attempts to address the social and historic inequities faced by marginalized groups. For example, Manitoba's First Nations, Métis and Inuit have faced tremendous historical injustices that have not allowed them the same opportunities as other Manitobans. This policy attempts to address those injustices."

She notes that the old "special considerations admissions categories," which allowed for five per cent of intake for Aboriginal applicants, along with 2.5 per cent for "disabled" candidates and 2.5 per cent for "visible minorities" used outdated language and did not address the greater diversity of candidates, including those who self-identify with various gender identities and/or sexual orientations.

Along with those who worked on the policy within the faculty, Janzen notes that there were numerous community consultations with groups including the Rainbow Resource Centre, Manitoba Aboriginal Directorate and Manitoba Education's Diversity Education, as well as several departments within the U of M.

"Student Accessibility Services meets with approximately 500 new students each year, most coming directly from the secondary school system. The potential increase of teachers with disabilities also allows students in the school system to see themselves in the field and to consider higher education," said Carolyn Christie, coordinator of SAS, in a letter of support.

Tony Tavares, consultant for Manitoba's Diversity Education and International Languages, called the policy "ambitious and innovative," in a letter of support.

He said that such policies are "a critically important aspect" of creating institutions and organizations that are committed to equity.

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