

Committee for Equity and Visibility in Academia (CEVA)

2017-2018 Annual Report

Presented to the Department of English June 21, 2018

INTRODUCTION

The Committee for Equity and Visibility in Academia (CEVA) is an ad-hoc committee of graduate students, undergraduate students, and faculty members in the Department of English at Concordia University. As a committee, our goal is to invite dialogue between students, faculty, and administrators in order to shape future practices and policies that will lead to greater equity within the department and across the university.

CEVA began in 2014 with discussions between graduate students, resulting in an open letter written by Caitlin Spencer and Mona'a Malik, circulated among the cohort, signed by SAGE members and alumni, and sent to Department Chair Andre Furlani and the Department Hiring Committee. The letter expressed concerns about the hiring process for new faculty and the lack of people of colour (POC) among current faculty, leading to more conversations on the topic of diversity. At its genesis, CEVA was a graduate-student-only subcommittee of SAGE (called the SAGE Subcommittee on Representation and Visibility in Academia and then CEVA by Fall 2016). This subcommittee did an incredible amount of work researching issues of diversity and equity at Concordia and in Canadian academia more broadly, and they have laid the solid groundwork upon which CEVA now builds. CEVA is now an independent committee consisting of students from all levels of the English program as well as a few core faculty members. Our hope is that we can continue to build on the work begun by students before us—notably, the work of the women of colour who began CEVA—and grow larger and more active in the department and in the University as a whole.

On February 12, 2016, SAGE called a Special General Assembly on Race, Respect, and Responsible Marking. At this SGA, the graduate cohort voted to adopt nine motions with the aim of improving inclusivity and equity within the department.¹ One of the adopted motions was the formation of a committee to hold “year-to-year discussions on issues of representation in the department; pervasive trends in academia that limit the inclusion of people of colour, queer, trans, and women authors and theorists; and unconscious biases in marking and hiring practices” (Annual Report 2016). Today, CEVA is the fulfillment of that motion. Another motion adopted was that this subcommittee would write end-of-year reports accessible to students and faculty to assess change and progress from year to year. This report is a fulfillment of that motion and builds upon the existing report completed in the spring of 2016.

In the following pages, we offer a report on the activities of CEVA from the last school year, Fall 2017-Spring 2018. We briefly outline the 2016 Annual Report, describe our progress in building upon that work, give an account of CEVA's accomplishments from this past year, and offer suggestions for how the next group of committee members can move forward. CEVA was built on a passion for this department and a desire to see it become even better than it already is. We offer this report in the spirit of collaboration, and with a commitment to the fact that Concordia University was founded with principles of inclusivity in mind. Moving forward, I would like to echo the statement that concluded the 2016 Annual Report:

as a discipline focused on narrative, it is our responsibility to be aware of which narratives we are perpetuating, which ones we are neglecting, and the practical effects these choices have on the work

we produce and the environment it is produced in. Our department is not exceptional in its reproduction of structural inequality, but it has the potential to *become* exceptional in pushing back against that inequality.

2016 ANNUAL REPORT: SUMMARY AND PROGRESS

For CEVA's 2016 Annual Report, committee members did an immense amount of work researching and collecting resources and statistics on representation, diversity, and inclusivity in the English Department and in Canadian Academia more broadly. The 2016 Annual Report represents a short compendium of this work and lays out a strong theoretical argument for its continuity and its commitments, namely: greater representation of marginalized voices on course syllabi, greater representation of people of colour within department faculty—actualized through a re-imagined hiring process—, and the adoption of anonymized grading and inclusive teaching practises. We encourage all those interested to review this report in full. Here, however, we will briefly lay out some of the Report's core interventions.

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

One key aspect of the 2016 Annual Report was aligning CEVA's commitments with Concordia University's *Strategic Directions*, nine goals that will allow the institution to “thrive as a university in a changing landscape, tethered to our core values and historic mission while eyeing a future in which the status quo is unlikely to be sufficient” adopted in 2015. The 2016 Annual report aligned CEVA's initiatives with a number of the University's nine strategic directions. For example, Goal 2: Teaching for Tomorrow aims to “deliver a next-generation education that's connected, transformative, and fit for the times.” According to Concordia's plan, the report states, “this would include investing more time in teaching, increasing rewards for excellence in teaching, and creating a more active pedagogical process.” The 2016 Annual Report also aligns CEVA's goals with a number of other Strategic Directions, and here we will quote at length from the report:

Having a curriculum that better represents the work of academics with diverse life experiences will bring new perspectives to current research, and more fully represent the diversity of Concordia's students, bringing us closer to Concordia University's goals to Go Beyond; Embrace the City, Embrace the World; Double Our Research; and Take Pride. Go Beyond aims to “push past the status quo and go the extra mile for members of our community,” while Embrace The City, Embrace the World involves an “ongoing commitment to providing accessible, advanced education,” specifically focusing on inclusivity and responsiveness, “opening our doors to the diversity of people and institutions that make up Montreal.” The goal to Double Our Research at Concordia also speaks to the importance of transnational thinking in terms of research and creative production, and comments on the importance of Indigenous cultures and communities. The richness of this sociocultural lens remains untapped in our department; Indigenous literatures should be a much greater part of the Canadian literature aspect of this program.

Perhaps most relevantly, the ninth goal of Concordia's Strategic Directions is Take Pride, which states:

Concordia is a plural place with a rich history. Shaped by the progressive and humanist commitments of its founding institutions, Concordia today reflects the diversity and texture of Montreal, with an educational mission that continues to be premised on inclusiveness, connection, and social mobility. We honour our inheritance as we work together to design a great university for the era to come. This task is demanding, and it requires the entire community to strive for first-rate work, and to be intentional about marking and celebrating our successes.

A commitment to equity in hiring practices, diversity in syllabi, and fairness in grading aligns with this goal of an educational mission “that continues to be premised on inclusiveness, connection, and social mobility.” Taking steps to address disparities concerning race and representation in our teaching staff and course content better aligns our department’s activities with Concordia’s assertion that this university “reflects the diversity and texture of Montreal.”

Working within this core mandate of the Strategic Directions demonstrates to Concordia that the Department of English is committed to bolstering our reputation as leaders in the Humanities, and will hopefully spur on other departments to do the same.

DEPARTMENT STATISTICS/SYLLABI COUNT

One of CEVA’s initiatives has been an evaluation of graduate seminar syllabi for the 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 school years. Members of the committee analyzed the texts assigned on these syllabi for representation of women, people of colour, and openly LGBTQ+ authors. A full statistical breakdown of these findings can be found in the 2016 Annual Report, but here we will only point out that the quantitative results of the syllabi count confirmed the qualitative concerns of students that sparked the founding of CEVA in the first place. We encourage those interested to read the full breakdown in the 2016 Annual Report.

The findings of the syllabi count were presented to faculty in a department meeting in the Fall of 2016 by CEVA co-chairs Chalsley Taylor and Tess Liem. Although there was some support expressed by a few faculty members, the overwhelming response to the count findings were critical, and questions hinged mostly upon issues of methodology. CEVA members were disappointed at the lack of support among faculty and were disheartened that this work was met primarily with defensiveness. Though syllabi count has proved a contentious object, we feel its findings serve as a testament to the importance of CEVA’s continued activities, and we have used its findings as a prompt to think about how to move forward in seeking greater inclusion for marginalized voices within the department. In the 2016-2017 school year, graduate student Karissa LaRocque created a new and rigorous methodology protocol and members of CEVA undertook a syllabi count for that year. The count was not completed in its entirety and so there is no available data, but the comprehensive methodology and counting system is available upon request should any future members of CEVA wish to conduct another count.

HIRING

The 2016 Annual Report contains research on equity hiring practices in Canadian Universities and details some of the difficulties of implementing and tracking equity considerations. Since CEVA’s inception, we have been concerned with how to respond to the barriers to equality in hiring practices laid out in the report. Since 2015, members of CEVA pushed for more student involvement and greater transparency in the hiring process. In the 2016-2017 school year the English Department was fortunate to get to hire for two new tenure track positions, and during the hiring process the Department made graduate students part of the process by giving us the opportunity to have meetings with all of the candidates and to offer our input to the department hiring committee. We were pleased that the department responded to our concerns and offered students greater involvement with the process, but, as there was no student representative on the hiring committee, students’ concerns had no weight in the actual hiring process. CEVA still would like to see student representative on the hiring committee. Following the hiring process of the 2016-2017 school year, CEVA began discussing how best to achieve this goal. Graduate student Liam Lachance was in contact with faculty member and senate representative Nathan Brown, who would hopefully take these concerns to the senate to see what the process for adding a student to a hiring committee would be. As of now, process on this front has stalled, but it is an initiative that could be reinvigorated if a future CEVA member would be interested in following up with Nathan Brown and/or the department chair.

As of the 2017-2018 school year, addressing hiring practices and faculty representation has not been a direct initiative of CEVA. One of our core overall goals, however, has been to find ways of educating staff, faculty, and students alike on issues of systemic discrimination and implicit biases that might be shaping hiring practices and contributing to the fact that the English Department's faculty continues to be predominantly white. We hope that as we continue to incite conversation about diversity and representation in the department, that hiring practices will be one of those areas affected.

CONTEXTS AND FURTHER READING

The 2016 Annual Report also includes an annotated bibliography containing contextual sources for the concerns outlined in the report, as well as departure points for further reading and consideration on these subjects. We have continued to build on this list, and it is available on the SAGE website and in the 2016 Annual Report, and we encourage those interested to read it.

CEVA ACTIVITIES 2016-2017

There is no Annual Report available for the 2016-2017 school year, but CEVA was active during this time as it continued to build upon earlier work. Much of the efforts undertaken by CEVA in the 2016-2017 academic year can be found in a Google Drive accessible to future CEVA committee members. This google drive contains:

- The full 2016 Annual Report, a shortened report prepared for presentation at a department meeting, and the results of the syllabi counts;
- A list of funding proposals CEVA approved and funded for the 2016-2017 academic year;
- Agendas and meeting minutes from 2015-2017;
- A list of suggested speakers CEVA could invite to Concordia;
- A document describing agreed upon "group norms" that have governed members of CEVA's engagement with one another;
- A short list of resources for new members to CEVA to use to educate themselves on practices of inclusivity and diversity;
- A document describing recommendations for inclusive classrooms

INTER-REALITIES

On November 27th, 2016 CEVA, along with Concordia's C-FAR, the CSU, and McGill's Black Student Network, hosted an event titled Inter-Realities: Lived Marginalization in Art and the Academy. This day of panels, conversations, and performances gathered Black, Indigenous, POC, queer, and trans academics/artists/writers/activists to discuss their experiences navigating systemic obstacles, discrimination, and oppression inherent to the publishing and arts industries in Montreal and beyond. This event prioritized accessibility and served as an important site for exploring the issues that drive CEVA's work. The event was a success, although only one English faculty member attended and for only a portion of the day. Moving forward, this event can be used as a model for the kind of accessible and ethical events that CEVA could run. See the event Facebook page for a more thorough description of the event, as well as artist and academic bios.

RA POSITION

One of CEVA's major initiatives of the 2016-2017 school year was the proposition of a research assistant position. Originally, CEVA conceived of an RA who would work with professors to help them update their syllabi and diversify course readings by adding BIPOC/LGBTQ+ theorists and authors. This RA would also be available to field questions from faculty relating to how to diversify their courses or to create a "shadow syllabus".² The idea behind such an RA position was proposed to faculty at the department meeting on October 28th, 2016. CEVA then began discussing the position with department chair Andre Furlani, who expressed enthusiastic interest in the position. Dr. Furlani then offered to take a leading role in the construction of the RA position and drafted a proposal for how the RA might function. His basic proposal was that the RA could be assigned to work with small groups of professors with overlapping teaching/research areas and to research how to help professors diversify their specific area of study, e.g. the RA would work with medievalists to research female writers of the medieval period. CEVA received his proposal at the end of the 2016-2017 school year. As many members of CEVA promptly graduated and left the program, development on this front stalled.

In the 2017-2018 school year, CEVA again took up the question of the RA position. Our new proposition for this position can be found in the next section of this report, CEVA Activities 2017-2018.

CEVA ACTIVITIES 2017-2018

INCLUSIVE PEDAGOGY TA TEACHER TRAINING WORKSHOP

On January 19, 2018, CEVA organized a TA Teacher Training Workshop in partnership with Alicia Cundell at the Centre for Teaching and Learning. This workshop focused on creating an inclusive course climate, developing techniques to include more voices in the classroom, and understanding the pedagogical merits of acknowledging privilege and power dynamics in an institution that seeks to be a next generation university. The second half of the workshop offered students and faculty the opportunity to come together to troubleshoot difficult classroom scenarios in small groups and share various perspectives on how to turn tense conflicts into productive teaching moments. These scenarios were adapted from difficult classroom moments experienced by student and faculty CEVA members during their time at Concordia in order to acknowledge that these are problems that exist at our university, problems we can confront and reframe. Continuing to offer such a workshop for students and faculty falls in line with Concordia University's second strategic direction: Teach for Tomorrow. Teaching for tomorrow must necessarily be diverse, inclusive, and, most of all, safe for every student.

The workshop was well-attended by graduate students currently holding Teaching Assistantships. Undergraduate students invested in sharing their opinions on what they want their classrooms to look like were also valuable contributors to the workshop. Eight faculty members attended, although one left during our conversation about power and privilege in the classroom. CEVA plans to continue to work to encourage more faculty to attend these conversations and to realize that discussions of privilege are valuable and important in an academic context. Workshop resources have been posted on the SAGE website and have received positive responses from graduate students who had been unable to attend on January 19.

INCLUSIVE PEDAGOGY BIBLIOGRAPHY

CEVA is currently preparing an annotated bibliography of readings on inclusive pedagogy and on teaching diverse classrooms. This bibliography includes books, articles, and video resources with the intention of

offering new Teaching Assistants (and experienced faculty) a variety of new perspectives on how to make classrooms more productive and accessible.

REPORT FOR THE CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY FACULTY ASSOCIATION

An alliance of CUFA members and undergraduate and graduate students on CEVA produced a report for the Concordia University Faculty Association during the 2018 round of contract negotiation of their Collective Agreement. This document outlined the shared interests of faculty and students working together to ensure that classrooms are safer, more productive environments for all parties, and laid out specific policy measures to effectively address students' concerns. The requests noted in this document arise out of CEVA's ongoing work, and are motivated by recent reports on sexual misconduct as well as the Our Turn report, a survivor-centred, gender-inclusive report by students across Canadian universities with the goal of ending sexual violence on campuses. The Our Turn report ranks universities based on their recognition of intersectionality, their response to and rules for reporting sexual harassment, and overall university climates. At the time of the writing of CEVA's statement, Concordia University holds the lowest score (D- or 52%) out of the 14 Canadian universities evaluated.

The recommendations offered in our report endeavors to improve such a score to truly make Concordia University the "next generation university" its strategic directions proclaim it to be. The recommendations include the following:

- That faculty receive mandatory annual anti-oppressive training organized by a student-approved third party. Section 14.01, paragraph 3, item iii of the 2015-2018 collective agreement suggests that pedagogical training can be included in a teaching dossier for promotion and reappointment, and our belief is that anti-oppressive pedagogy is central to education and must be included;
- That academic unit heads (department chairs) be responsible for organizing this training within their departments, specifically targeting their department's climate and needs;
- That this training be funded by Concordia University rather than by student groups, many of whom have thus far taken sole responsibility for organizing similar workshops.

REPORT FOR THE CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY ENGLISH DEPARTMENT

A similar report to the one listed above will be produced for the English Department to outline the necessity of including anti-oppressive pedagogical training at the annual faculty retreat. Attention to survivor-centredness and intersectionality works in tandem with pedagogical training to make classrooms safer and consequently more productive for all students. We also propose an abridged version of this workshop be included during graduate student orientation with a longer workshop to take place within the first few weeks of classes.

RA POSITION

This year, CEVA once again took up the question of an RA position. We have now been considering an RA position for diversity in the department for over two years, and it has gone through many rounds of re-imagining and conceptualization. The RA position, because it secures department funding and therefore must be supported by the institution, has proved particularly difficult to implement, but it is an initiative that we firmly believe in. We therefore strongly encourage future members of CEVA to continue to push for its implementation. Its incorporation into the department would legitimize CEVA's activities by serving as an institutional acknowledgement of the importance of diversity and representation of marginalized peoples in the English department, and for this reason we remain committed to it.

CEVA's RA position was originally conceived of as a resource for faculty. The RA's research areas would include: diversity and representation of marginalized voices, anti-oppression practices, inclusive pedagogy, respectful ways to field heated classroom moments, and the interplay of power and privilege in a university setting. Some ideas for what the RA could include: fielding specific questions via email from professors related to the RA's research areas, creating statements on diversity and inclusion for professors' syllabi, working with professors to diversify syllabi, creating a shadow syllabus for specific courses, presenting on classroom dynamics in classes or workshops, finding guest lecturers with lived experience of topics under consideration that a professor could invite to class, creating alternative assignments for students based on principles of universal design, etc.

We still feel that these are worthwhile pursuits for an RA, but these activities are limited in that they depend on professors to request this help before any work can be done. And we suspect that, as is usually the case with these matters, the professors who could best stand to benefit from this kind of help are often the least likely to ask for it. We also acknowledge that none of this work can be made compulsory because of professor's rights to academic freedom.

Because of the limitations attached to using the RA position to implement changes in individual professor's syllabi and classrooms, and because of the difficulty of getting this RA position off the ground in the last two years, we have reimagined the position in accordance with what we think will be the most practical way of getting it implemented. As of the 2017-2018 school year, we have not taken steps to implement this plan, but we describe one possible iteration of this RA position, and we hope that future CEVA members will push for its implementation in the coming year. Below we outline some ideas:

- In order to ensure that the bulk of the RA's duties do not depend upon the initiative of professors who may or may not wish to take advantage of this help, we propose that the core duty of the RA be to organize and implement a speakers series that fall under the umbrella of the RA's research areas (diversity, equity, anti-oppression, inclusive pedagogy, etc.). We propose that they implement two events per year, one each semester, and be responsible for their organization at every level from finding and inviting speakers to advertising the event and contacting the department chair to request help in encouraging faculty attendance.
- We propose that the activities related to helping specific professors that we have outlined above remain within the scope of the RA's duties as long as the time committed to these activities fall within the paid hours allotted to the position.
- RA positions are typically sponsored by an individual professor, but we think it is unlikely that any single professor would have both the confidence in the research area as well as the time or personal research money to commit to overseeing/guiding the position. Because of the nature of the position as well, we think that it would not be most efficiently suited for supervision from a single professor. Alternatively, we propose that this RA position fall under the jurisdiction of the graduate program committee. As such, it could be formally entrenched in the graduate program, and overseen as part of the program as a whole. Moreover, its official entrenchment could be used as an incentive for students with interest in this area to join Concordia's program specifically to have this work included as part of their graduate student experience. This also increases the likelihood that a student with enthusiastic interest in this area would be part of the graduate cohort. CEVA could offer the resources on these subjects that we have been compiling since CEVA's conception to assist the RA in this work.

CONCLUSIONS & LOOKING FORWARD

We are encouraged to be able to report that many of the desires expressed in some of the earliest iterations of CEVA have begun to be realized in our department. Since 2015, we have seen increased dialogue around questions of equity and diversity in the department as whole, increased student participation in hiring practises, the implementation of lectures and workshops on issues of diversity and inclusion, and the continuation and growth of CEVA as a group that now includes graduate students, undergraduate students, and faculty. There have also been qualitative accounts of an increased consideration of these issues in some faculty syllabi and classrooms by both graduate and undergraduate students. We would also like to warmly acknowledge the small number of faculty who have reached out to CEVA to offer their support and interest in our work, as well as those faculty who have become active members of the committee.

There is still much to do in our department. For future CEVA members, we offer these points of departure:

- Much of the theoretical research on the issues outlined in this report has been done by earlier iterations of CEVA. As such, we encourage future members to draw on this important body of knowledge and use it to move toward implementing practical actions in the department.
- The CEVA google drive created by the 2016-2017 CEVA members contains great resources for new members, as well as contacts for other groups/people within the university working on these issues. Collaboration could be a very powerful tool.
- There have been discussions about collecting first-hand anonymous accounts of students' experiences in the classroom to use as a testament to why changes are necessary and to highlight the importance of inclusivity, representation, and consideration of equity for individual students' learning. This is one initiative future CEVA members could pursue.
- If CEVA wishes to conduct another syllabi count, there are resources and a methodology available for this, contact Jen Tracy (or maybe we will add them to sage site?) We can totally add them to the SAGE website. I want to make some sort of dedicated CEVA page before I pass the website keys onto Marlene.
- Connections with CASE have proved fruitful this year and since they have a larger student base and are often at the school for longer we encourage CEVA members to continue to build this relationship