

October 25, 2012

To the Carleton Community,

I write this letter to dissent as a member of the Commission on Inter-Cultural, Inter-Religious and Inter-Racial Relations on Campus. I had joined this Commission in the hopes of working towards a campus where there is a strong critical capacity to engage in difficult discussions within a fundamentally democratic and respectful manner. Instead, I find the final report does little to build a more democratic and healthy space for people of diverse experiences to enter into dialogue.

Before explaining why I believe this report fails to reach its goal of improving inter-religious, inter-cultural and inter-racial relations, I would like to express my support for many of the ideas that emerged to improve the specific experiences of Aboriginal and Jewish community members. It is not the final recommendations of the report that have forced me to dissent, but the process undertaken by the Commission, particularly the research methodology used, that I cannot support. I believe the process is of as great of impact on our community as the recommendations.

As a graduate student in the Carleton community I place a great deal of importance on its reputation for promoting intellectually rigorous research. This report fails to achieve what I have learned to be standards of rigorous research. As a result, this report endangers the academic reputation of Carleton. If this report is what we promote publicly as our vision of research, I worry it will negatively impact the reputation of the university and the perceived quality of the education offered. For instance, the report failed to perform a rigorous methodology when it engaged in biased sampling, most notably the biased sampling of Jewish students and faculty in our community. The survey of Jewish students at Carleton was distributed directly to Hillel and other Jewish groups. The survey was then further distributed by having the students in those groups send it to other Jewish students and faculty they knew. This form of snowballing methodology fails to reach a representative sampling of Jewish people on our campus. As a result, it is a problematic method for building a representative position regarding the 'Jewish experience on campus'.

When I joined the Commission they had already decided to hone in on the specific experiences of Aboriginal and Jewish people on campus. I had no problem with the choice to focus our efforts on specific groups on campus. What I did find problematic and cannot support is the construction of this focus as a result of an entirely neutral analysis of a 2010 student wide survey. What this construction implies is that it was these two groups who emerged as those in need of specific support. Having read this survey data, I cannot support such a conclusion. There was a diverse range of students who expressed the need for greater respect and improved services on this campus. The decision to focus on any particular groups was therefore an explicit selection, not a result of neutral analysis of this data. The evidence of selectivity can be seen both in the choice to hone in on certain groups and the methodology used to gain further insight.

Finally, I vividly recall sitting in a meeting of the Commission while a definition of anti-Semitism was being explained. I found this part of the presentation helpful in making clear one way in which certain behaviours are clearly anti-Semitic - this was the assumption that all Jewish people were somehow associated and even responsible for the actions of the state of Israel. I thought this a valuable insight and reflected upon it during the rest of my time on the Commission. I found myself returning to this reflection primarily because a great deal of the issues identified by the Commission were incidences of public criticism of Israel. This troubles me. If I continue to hold the Commission's earlier explanation that assuming all Jewish people are associated with and responsible for the actions of Israel is anti-Semitic, than the later conflation of criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism appears to be engaging in anti-Semitism. The final report states that "The university community must acknowledge that some anti-Israel politics, activities and sentiments which occur on the Carleton campus are perceived as anti-Semitic." This challenges the earlier position presented that such conflation is actually anti-Semitic behaviour. Fundamentally I feel that this report engaged in the exact conflation that earlier was deemed to be a form of anti-Semitism. I cannot support such an endeavour. As a result I must publicly dissent from the final report of the Commission. I continue to be committed to participating in activities that can create a more democratic and respectful dialogue on campus, but I must make it clear that I believe this report to have a negative impact on this goal.

Sincerely,



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Member of the Commission on Inter-Cultural, Inter-Religious and Inter-Racial Relations on Campus