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Federal funding will help Laurier increase equity, diversity and inclusion among researchers

WATERLOO – Wilfrid Laurier University is reaffirming its commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) within research with assistance from a pilot Government of Canada grant program.

Federal Minister of Science and Sport **Kirsty Duncan** visited Laurier May 9 to announce details of a new initiative to promote EDI within academia, which includes \$384,700 in funding over two years for Laurier. Laurier's funding is part of a national strategy called the **Dimensions: Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Canada** program, which is providing \$5.3 million to 15 Canadian academic institutions to address EDI.

The Dimensions program was inspired by the [Athena SWAN Charter](#) developed in the United Kingdom to advance gender equity in science. Similar programs have also been developed in Australia, Ireland and the United States. The new Canadian program has a broad mandate to reduce barriers that underrepresented groups may experience in post-secondary research, across all disciplines.

"When we remove historical barriers and create a more diverse and inclusive culture within academia, we gain new perspectives that can lead to breakthroughs in science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics," said [Deborah MacLatchy](#), Laurier's president and vice-chancellor. "This is truly an exciting time for the research world as doors open and the talent pool deepens. The proactive steps we are taking now will pay dividends in the future as we create knowledge, examine fresh perspectives, and learn from each other."

The new **EDI Institutional Capacity-Building funding program** will help institutions work toward identifying and eliminating systemic barriers impeding the recruitment, retention and advancement of underrepresented groups within academia, including women, Indigenous peoples, people with disabilities, racialized people and people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, two spirit, or with other gender or sexual minority communities (LGBTQ2S+ communities).

Laurier will allocate the majority of its funding toward hiring a **senior advisor in equity, diversity and inclusion**, two **EDI faculty colleagues** and a **research associate**. The new senior advisor, who will be a tenured faculty member, will guide the development of a comprehensive institutional strategy and provide advice, support and expertise to units across the institution for achieving their EDI-related goals.

The two faculty colleagues will be existing faculty members who will dedicate a portion of their time to supporting evidence-based decision making on EDI and the implementation of these strategies at Laurier. The research associate will help bring together new and existing EDI expertise and provide day-to-day support to Laurier's **community of practice on EDI** — a group that will include people in the new positions as well as existing faculty and staff with EDI-related roles.

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“In addition to helping to support Laurier’s commitment to be a more inclusive institution, the community of practice on EDI will examine how we define research excellence,” said **Robert Gordon**, Laurier’s provost and vice-president: academic.

“We want to broaden perspectives and consider the ways knowledge can benefit and impact people beyond academia. We’ll be considering how community-based research can be enhanced to maximize its impact and how important Indigenous research can have more meaningful and effective benefits. We’ll also examine the accessibility of research and the ways knowledge can be more effectively disseminated to benefit everyone.”

Though the two years of federal funding will help give the project momentum, Laurier is committed to investing in EDI on an ongoing basis. The senior advisor is being hired on a five-year term with the option of renewal.

“Our desire is to continue to close gaps where our representation does not reflect the diversity of our broader community,” said **Pamela Cant**, Laurier’s assistant vice-president: human resources and equity. “It’s about opening the doors so that all members of our community and of our society have the opportunity to thrive, grow, learn and advance.”

The Dimensions program includes a charter developed from consultations held across Canada with members of underrepresented groups and post-secondary researchers and leaders. The charter’s principles commit participating institutions to embracing EDI across disciplines and to implementing specific measures to address systemic barriers underrepresented groups face within academia. MacLatchy signed the charter on Laurier’s behalf during the announcement event.

“Today’s launch of Dimensions, along with new grants and a robust charter, will help remove systemic barriers and improve access for everyone to equal opportunities, treatment and recognition in research,” said Duncan. “This truly is a critical and transformational step for Canadian post-secondary institutions. We know that when we bring together diverse points of view, our health, environment, communities and economy can thrive.”

Working to address EDI within research isn’t new to Laurier. The university already has a [Canada Research Chairs Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan](#) in place and supports a number of groups working on EDI issues, such as the [Laurier Centre for Women in Science](#); the [Centre for Indigegogy](#), which focuses on decolonizing education; and the [Laurier Centre for Community Research, Learning and Action](#) and [Social Innovation Research Group](#), which both focus on inclusive, community-engaged research.

The Dimensions program is supported by the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC), the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC).

Learn More

- [Government of Canada makes bold moves to increase equity, diversity and inclusion in research](#) (NSERC news release)