

# Report of the sub-committee of the Committee on Diversity and Inclusion

Admissions Equity Policy

Committee on Diversity and Inclusion

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## Subcommittee on Admission Equity Policies

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First-generation immigrants face hurdles from the day they land in a new country, starting from trying to adapt to a new society and culture, learning a new language, not being established like most other students, trying to help their families get established in Canada, and integrating in society, etc. Regardless of their skills and efforts, the reality is that they must constantly deal with challenges that others do not even have to consider. Since the playing field is not level, our concern is that the admission committee is aiming for equality rather than equity when making their decisions.

Equality assumes that all applicants are the same and that they have the same history or background or that they have started from the same place, while justice and equity are about striving for fairness. Equality doesn't consider the past while equity seeks to level the playing field. Why should this matter? Because sometimes things like wealth are accumulated under very unequal circumstances. Various systemic issues seen in our societies such as racism, ableism and sexism can mean that some people simply start off under better life circumstances than others. Equality would suggest that everyone should get the same treatment. Justice or equity suggests that something has to be done to encourage fairness, in light of past inequalities; and it makes sure that people from different backgrounds get access to the same opportunities.

We understand that it is difficult to accommodate all, but first-generation immigrants, who are most likely from visible and religious minority groups, would profoundly benefit from an admission policy and procedure that takes into consideration principles of equity.

Under the subsection of the Eligibility–Selection Policies in your website it states that *“age, gender, race, religion and socio-economic status play no part in the selection process”*. It also states that *“Given the extremely competitive nature of the admission process, and out of respect for applicants who have adhered to our policies, we will not consider letters sent to us detailing special or unusual circumstances. We are unable to make any exceptions to our stated policies.”*

Unfortunately, race, religion, socio-economic status, and many other factors effectively do play a part in the selection process. They are factors that shape individuals' lives and may easily prevent them from reaching success in a given endeavour even though these individuals may have all the necessary abilities for it. Though we understand that this language was likely adopted to stress that the program does not discriminate based on any of the prohibited grounds listed under the Ontario Human Rights Code, we believe the language should be changed to reflect equity goals. For the admission committee to disregard such factors in the selection process is to assume that no one is adversely affected by them.

Many universities in Canada and the US have attempted to establish admission policies that “level the playing field” for applicants from different backgrounds. Categories of people like aboriginals, visible and religious minorities, first-generation immigrants, and African Americans (in the US) are extended certain accommodations to ensure that they have a fair chance and an opportunity to succeed. Furthermore, the University of Ottawa's very own Faculty of Law “has created an **Access Admission** category to facilitate the entry into law school of students who have experienced barriers of a systemic, ongoing nature, or who are from groups which have experienced identifiable social or economic barriers to education.” More information on this can be found at the following

link: <http://commonlaw.uottawa.ca/en/students/admissions/admissions-criteria/first-year-applicants/access-applicants>

Other medical schools such as Manitoba incorporate Enhancing Equity and Diversity from the first step of the admission process throughout the whole process.

University of Manitoba Faculty of Medicine Selection Process:

- A. Calculation of the Adjusted Grade Point Average (AGPA)
- B. Operative MCAT Score Determination
- C. Enhancing Equity and Diversity

All applicants can complete the section of the application that reflects these attributes that apply to them. A numerical coefficient is derived based on the answers and the applicant's scores are weighted

1. Rural Attributes
2. Advanced Academic Attributes
3. Socioeconomic and Cultural Diversity

i. The University of Manitoba's College of Medicine recognizes that in order to meet its social accountability mission and meaningfully serve the complex and diverse health care needs of Canadians, there must be enhanced diversity of registrants. It is further acknowledged that diversity encompasses many dimensions including ethnicity and religion, gender and sexual orientation, geographic origin, and socioeconomic status. Accordingly, all eligible applicants will be invited to complete a supplementary questionnaire that would identify family, economic and sociocultural characteristics or attributes. The Admissions Committee evaluates diverse attributes in the following three (3) domains:

- Family history
- Economic information
- Other socio-cultural determinants

ii. Attributes within each domain may contribute to a numerical coefficient for modification of the composite score for selection of candidates for interview and ranking of applicants for offer of admission.

[http://umanitoba.ca/faculties/health\\_sciences/medicine/admissions/8830.html](http://umanitoba.ca/faculties/health_sciences/medicine/admissions/8830.html)

University of Calgary Faculty of Medicine Selection Process:

Section 5: File Scoring

5.4 Alternative Admission Process

During the file review stage, a number of applicants could be flagged who demonstrate an exceptional ability to assist the Cumming School of medicine in meeting its social accountability mission. The admission committee will review these files using a holistic assessment process. If the application scores in others areas are deemed acceptable, the committee reserve the right to offer admission regardless of the individual component application scores or the final application score.

[https://www.ucalgary.ca/mdprogram/prospective-students/application-manual-2015-2016#quickset-field\\_collection\\_quicktabs\\_5](https://www.ucalgary.ca/mdprogram/prospective-students/application-manual-2015-2016#quickset-field_collection_quicktabs_5)

[http://www.ucalgary.ca/mdprogram/admissions#quickset-field\\_collection\\_quicktabs\\_3](http://www.ucalgary.ca/mdprogram/admissions#quickset-field_collection_quicktabs_3)

<http://cumming.ucalgary.ca/pathways>

University of New Brunswick School of Law:

Applicants must apply in one or more of the below subcategories:

- a) Diversity - membership in a disadvantaged racial, cultural, linguistic or socio-economic group
- b) Significant Achievement - sustained and distinctive non-academic achievement in the paid workforce, at home (in any field of endeavour), or in the community;
- c) Disability - coping with a physical or sensory impairment, or learning disability.

<http://www.unb.ca/fredericton/law/future/admissions/firstyear.html>

Beyond these examples, we have found similar admission processes as the Universities of Saskatchewan and Western Ontario, at Dalhousie Medical School and at Queens.

The Faculty of medicine at uOttawa currently have a policy implemented as part of their admission process to level the playing field for aboriginals only at the first stage of the admission process. This is a great policy and it shows their understanding of the unique challenges that aboriginals face, and it shows their willingness to offer solutions and create opportunities for people who would not be given the chance otherwise. But this policy doesn't go as far as Queens University which created a separate category and pool with distinct requirement for aboriginal applicants to their medical program. More information on this can be found at the following link:

<https://meds.queensu.ca/academics/undergraduate/prospective-students>

By the same logic and to ensure consistency, they should further level the playing field by extending certain accommodations throughout **the whole** selection process to other equity-seeking groups including first-generation immigrants, who in many cases are also visible and religious minorities. By doing so they would consider their challenges and will provide a fair playing field for all and that is equality.

We recommend that they create an **Access Admission** category similar to the university's own faculty of law. This category would allow applicants who have experienced barriers of a systemic, ongoing nature, or who are from groups which have experienced identifiable social or economic barriers to education. These groups are aboriginals, visible and religious minorities, LGPT, disabled candidates and first-generation immigrants.

A separate committee could be responsible for evaluating their application; or a new pool could be created for them. If they would be mixed and compete with the general applicants' pool then they should be accommodated **throughout the whole** admission process and not only at the first stage (ex. GPA cut-off) because this accommodation would not benefit them once they reach the second stage and their applications are compared and competed against the general applicant pool.

For example, if the faculty of medicine WGPA cut-off for Ontario applicants to the English stream is 3.85, then the cut-off for the Access Category could be 3.65 (the same 3.65 could be implemented for the French Stream Access applicants since the "*Consortium national de formation en santé (CNFS)*" category's cut-off is around the same)

Also, the faculty should not mix the Access Applicants with the general applicants' pool; or if they decided to do so they should add 0.2 points to their WGPA calculations when ranking them in the following stages after reviewing autobiography sketches and interviews. This way, these applicants are accommodated throughout the whole admission process and the playing field is leveled.

The same process could be created and implemented for Graduate school applicants. An Access Admission category could be created that is similar to accommodate applicants accordingly.