

Towards a New RSID: A Call for Systemic Reform

Drafted Aug 31, 2020 by the RSID Student's Course Union and collaborators

towardsanewrsid.com

Section 1: Introduction

A message to the Ryerson University Dean of the Faculty of Communication and Design (FCAD), currently Charles Falzon, and Lois Weinthal, Chair of RSID, from the School of Interior Design Student's Course Union (RSID CU). This letter is an acknowledgment and response to the promise of dedication that was given by FCAD to establish and instate the FCAD EDI (Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion) program and to review existing hiring practices, student recruitment policies, program, and course curricula¹. This is our contribution to this conversation as students that attend the Ryerson School of Interior Design as well as a show of our dedication to ensuring that these efforts continue indefinitely.

The outlined sentiments and requests below specifically address further concerns that require the attention and commitment of the Ryerson School of Interior Design (RSID) administration, faculty, and staff. As well, please note that while we use the term BIPOC in the below letter, people of colour are not simply their skin, they experience marginalization as a result of intersectional discrimination, and so should be considered not as a monolith but a collective of unique lived experiences. We also would like to acknowledge that in referring to BIPOC throughout this letter, Black and Indigenous individuals especially feel the brunt of racial injustice in our society.

Section 2: To the Dean of FCAD

This letter is to reflect the sentiments shared by the RSID CU (Ryerson School of Interior Design Student Course Union), and the students we represent. The RSID CU urges for the systemic reform of the Faculty of Communication and Design, and in each of the nine (9) schools that it governs. The systems of power and governance presently in effect within FCAD and its nine (9) schools perpetuate the inequities that disadvantage BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Colour) individuals and result in an environment that is incongruent with FCAD's status as a leader in creative education and affiliated fields. We ask for a model that builds upon the 2020 Anti-Black Racism Campus Climate Review published by Ryerson University² and actively redresses the legacy of systemic oppression and racialized violence on campus by institutionalizing anti-racism practices and, further, celebrates and acknowledges the work of diverse and marginalized communities (including but not limited to race, gender, orientation, class and ability) that have contributed to the shaping and movement of communication and design industries.

We ask that you use the unique influence and power that is afforded by the administrative role you hold at Ryerson University to implement new systems that support, too, the needs, concerns, and agendas of BIPOC members of FCAD. As your students, we are limited in our agency, and consequently, rely on your commitment to recognize that those in positions of power hold a responsibility to support those who are not in positions of power. Specifically, we rely on your commitment to establish and maintain new models that will encourage and respect diversity throughout FCAD and your nine (9) schools.

This systemic reform is not simply a call for the inclusion of BIPOC individuals by virtue of their identity as someone who is BIPOC. This can be manifested through actions such as disguising tokenism as diversity or

¹ FCAD News: A message from Dean Charles Falzon in solidarity with the Black community against racial injustice [\[link\]](#)

² 2020 Anti-Black Racism Campus Climate Review [\[link\]](#)

virtue signaling which are consequently, both not enough but also extended forms of structural violence. Rather, we are requesting for the restructuring of a system that currently operates on exclusion by rejecting and stifling BIPOC voices and their experiences in order to maintain existing (and problematic) power structures. We would like to emphasize the specific prejudice against darker-skinned members of these racialized groups as well as the intersectionality of exclusion for individuals who identified as members of more than one marginalized group. As a step in what should be a continual effort, we ask for you to direct attention and support to the items we are advocating for and have written about on the following pages of this document as actionable steps towards a common goal. These points account for only a fraction of the experiences of BIPOC FCAD students who have felt disadvantaged and discredited by the systems at FCAD and within their individual Schools as a result of their cultural identity.

We will not accept the system in its current state with its tolerance of the above practices. We will bring our continued efforts, attention, and care to this, and we expect no less from FCAD administration. We expect these items to be met, and eventually exceeded by our Faculty and implemented within the Schools of FCAD, with real action, concentrated, and continuous efforts from your part in the form of an articulated model for diversity and equity centered around justice and not simply inclusion. In the same way that industries of media, design, and creativity do not end with Eurocentric ideologies, neither should our education and student experience at Ryerson. We expect at least 50% of the seven (7) action items raised within this open letter to be placed in effect by the start of the **Winter 2021 Semester**. Further, we expect and insist on a consistent, open dialog to be maintained with FCAD students regarding these specific plans, leading up to and following their dissemination in the form of RSID EDI reports to be publicly released each semester (see action item 4.4). These items must be incorporated into new models (i.e. constitutions), cited as footnotes within the associated documents. Ultimately, they must be reflected in the structure and curriculum of FCAD Schools and put into effect by the **Winter 2021 Semester** at the latest. We expect explicit disclosure of the specific action items that were used or referenced from this address to the FCAD Dean, faculty, and staff in the spirit of complete transparency. The references and resources cited in this letter do not make up a comprehensive list, and it is expected that they will be supplemented by additional and further research from FCAD.

Section 3: To the Dean of FCAD and the Ryerson School of Interior Design (RSID) administration, faculty, and staff

The RSID CU recognizes and appreciates the sympathy and attention from our School's administration towards matters regarding BIPOC inclusivity in recent months. The responses and interactions between the student body and the administration have been indicative of the School's shared desire to reform its system towards one that will be racially inclusive and considerate of the diversity of RSID community members and establish systems that build legitimate, permanent, and widespread equity within our community.

We hope that through the changes that we are advocating for, that the systems governing FCAD and RSID can be developed to better reflect and support the desires for results towards inclusivity that are shared by RSID students, administration and faculty. We need a system that reflects the feelings and desires of all students, administration and faculty, who share the same sentiment. We expect the School to ultimately meet and exceed the expectations that are articulated in the following text. This would make for a learning experience at RSID that is more inclusive and welcoming for BIPOC ideas, voices, contributions, works, achievements, and experiences within the industry and a system that is intolerant of racism, complicity, complacency, any form of microaggressions, any form of discriminatory act or behaviour, oppression or prejudice.

To support these expectations and sentiments, the below action items are informed by the responses, lived experiences, and concerns of BIPOC RSID students. These are intended to help shape and inform the choices that ultimately allow our School of Interior Design to embody equity and diversity on all levels: from its student

faculty, and staff membership to its school system that at its core, is explicitly anti-racist. In other words, anti-racism should be ingrained, permanent, and inseparable to the School—a core value of RSID.

We want to make known that this desire for reform is not new. It is only now that we feel supported enough given recent mass protests and the solidarity expressed globally behind the Black Lives Matter Movement to explicitly address the issues at hand and ask for systemic reform. With FCAD's recent promise of dedication to these issues, this is the first time we have felt our voices might be heard and that coming forward would not negatively harm us. Due to the power structures we seek to reform, we have not had a platform to even raise these issues in the past. This too must change. We are advocating for efforts against the racism that is entrenched in our School and the Faculty of Communication and Design. As your students, we desire an environment that fosters an educational experience that is inexorably accessible and inclusive for all students and is one that meets our goal of establishing and maintaining equitable standards. For RSID to do better.

Section 4: Actionable Steps to Systemic Reform within RSID

Please note that the order in which these items are presented are not in a hierarchy based on importance. Each action item should be met with equal concern and efforts.

4.1 Include and recognize the history and work of BIPOC in RSID curricula, lectures, and educational enrichment opportunities. This comes with incorporating architecture and interior design from around the world into the RSID curriculum, and acknowledging the work of BIPOC individuals - before, during, and after slavery - and their impact on design as we experience it now. This will mean a change in course curriculum, field trips, and site visits to provide more inclusivity. For example, locations that provide educational opportunities about the impact of slaves on American architecture can be incorporated into the First and Second Year Trip. Also recognize that African and Indigenous design are deserving of attention in their own right apart from slavery and other social injustices that occur. *Moreover, we expect 50% of academic partnerships between Ryerson and international universities within the FCAD Exchange Program and any other international abroad opportunities to include destinations and countries outside of the Western world or with non-Western diasporic communities.*

Further, guest critiques, precedent studies, and project focus for RSID courses have been limited in diversity (read: exclusionary and marginalizing for BIPOC students). Including diverse voices within these areas is a necessary step towards an education that is more equitable and more in accordance with the pluralist mindset of today's society. We require course material including precedent case studies, and project focus to be of international scope and celebrated for their diversity. *We expect at least 50% of guest critics invited to RSID reviews to be either BIPOC individuals, or professionals that are knowledgeable and educated in non-Eurocentric design but ideally both. To ensure that these BIPOC and non-Eurocentric design trained individuals are not being tokenized and that unfair workloads are not put on them to carry the load of diversity education, we request that they be adequately compensated through an honorarium.* This could be promoted by the creation of an honorarium fund for inviting diverse guest critics.

Raising the standard within RSID curricula to embed diversity, includes the avoidance of treating it as an additional separate entity. We expect to be explicitly taught about the existence of and taught how to navigate the inherent biases and prejudices that exist within the design industry. We acknowledge and commend the efforts behind the **Winter 2021 Semester** elective (IDE 501) that emphasizes African design/building techniques and practices and we would like to contribute more to this conversation. We believe that although an elective is a step in the right direction, that this type of education should be mandatory and embedded within the course material and curriculum of every course including our compulsory courses/credits, for example, included within the mandatory IRH course materials for a more worldly perspective. In the future, we see this course as an opportunity to hire a Black professor who is knowledgeable about the area. This

opportunity also exists in history courses in general. *We expect 50% of course material within mandatory courses to address design that does not conform to a Euro-centric perspective and informs students of the full context of the influence of topics including but not limited to slavery and colonialism which has facilitated the building of these works as well as the history and design made by Black people before, during, after slavery and colonialism.* With this item in effect, half of the lecture modules in the IRH courses must focus on non-Eurocentric design and highlight other cultures, whereas in the past the majority of the IRH curricula has been dedicated only to European art history.³ Where European art history has been taught in great depth and provided a much greater presence in course outlines, the wealth of art history that can be found in other cultures (such as African, Indigenous, Islamic, Asian, South Asian, etc.) has been briefly introduced, grouped together and covered in merely a few lectures, at most. When we design for cultures that we are not educated enough about, that our education system only scratches the surface when teaching us, we lend ourselves to cultural appropriation. *Readings and precedents in each course must contain at least 25% authors and designers from marginalized communities. In readdressing the anti-Black racism on campus, at least one reading and precedent in each course must be from a Black scholar or designer. We ask that you reference the Decentering Whiteness in Design History Resources List for examples of work to include that would accurately represent the contributions of Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian, and other designers and scholars of colour.*⁴

4.2 Hire BIPOC faculty, staff, and administration. The absence of racial diversity exemplified within the presently employed faculty and staff members at RSID is disappointing and disheartening⁵. The lack of racial diversity among the presently employed full-time faculty and staff members at RSID is unacceptable. *We expect to be taught about the rich history of African, East Asian, Indigenous, Islamic, South American, Southeast Asian and more diverse cultural histories of design by those that are experts in these fields as members of these racialized groups themselves.* In its current state, it appears that the School favours predominantly White representation over BIPOC individuals, especially darker-skin toned individuals, among BIPOC). Hiring practices must be re-examined and reformed in order to recruit more diverse candidates. *We request that at least one of the interviewed candidates for all future RFA and CUPE hires be a BIPOC educator. As a goal for the future, we hope for a percentage of 50% of RSID educators and faculty to be BIPOC individuals which includes RFA and CUPE hires as well as staff. In addition, we hope to extend the goal to encompass the entirety of FCAD and its nine (9) schools, their roster of professors and hiring practices.*

We believe that the lack of Black employees throughout FCAD and in RSID must be seriously considered. While we understand that the faculty teaches what they know and that this is an issue throughout FCAD and its nine (9) Schools, we are also disheartened that the RFA hiring committee has not taken this into consideration when hiring. *We expect within RSID, at least one (1) tenure-track RFA and two (2) new BIPOC CUPE professors to begin teaching by the start of the **Winter 2021 Semester**, or the process for a new BIPOC tenure-track RFA to begin.* This comes out of our need to ultimately see one (1) section for each year of IRN and IRD courses respectively to be taught by a BIPOC professor. This would give students the option of consulting BIPOC professors about course material who are more equipped to understand the intricacies of projects that are centred around more diverse cultural concepts. Moreover, interior design is inseparable from lived experience. The understanding of what interior design is and is not is also shaped by the lived experience of its designers and educators. In order to develop a curriculum that supports an inclusive and equitable understanding of interior design, we need BIPOC educators not only in IRH courses but especially in IRN. More diversity within the faculty and staff in turn will provide all students with different perspectives and approaches towards design, increasing our engagement with the subject matter and an awareness of how to contribute to a diverse society. We will feel properly represented as students, and will ultimately take that

³ 2019 IRH110 History of Art, Design, and Material Culture I Course Outline [\[link\]](#)

⁴ Decentering Whiteness in Design History Resources [\[link\]](#)

⁵ RSID Advisory Council Members [\[link\]](#)

knowledge into the working world as designers who use their power to shape the world around them, and their field to be more inclusive. Finally, the lack of BIPOC representation in positions of power in RSID also contributes to the continued internalized racism among its students. If no one who looks like you is a professor, the system subconsciously leads you to believe this is not something you can hope to achieve. *Thus, we need representation in positions of power along with curricular reform.*

4.3 Provide anti-racism and BIPOC inclusivity training to the RSID community on a bi-annual basis to establish and uphold an anti-racist standard at the School. Unfortunately, some BIPOC students have experienced microaggressions and negative interactions during their time at RSID. The process of improving the environment for racialized students can start with anti-racism and BIPOC inclusivity training for the current faculty members, staff and Course Union, at the very least. Training and continued education should be required on a bi-annual basis. Eventually, we would like to see anti-racism training, including anti-microaggression training, become a required module for all first year students at RSID, either as a mandatory one-credit course, or as a mandatory e-module required before the start of term. To address the need for sensitivity towards the use of preferred names, their proper pronunciation, and thoughtful and considerate treatment of all students, training modules will better equip faculty, staff, and students with the competencies to be held accountable for conducting themselves in a manner that provides a safe and inclusive space for all individuals of all cultural identities, recognize any inherent biases that they may hold, and unlearn ideas that contribute to personal bias (both overt and subtle). *We expect faculty, staff, and students to partake in training such as Unconscious Bias Training, Inclusivity Training, Sensitivity Training, Micro-Aggression Training, Anti-Racism Training, Anti-Complicity with White Supremacy Training, and Behavioural Training.*

A strong anti-racist mandate within the school supports the RSID community in abolishing favouritism and racial bias. Further, the actions and behaviour of our School must take into account the fact that some racial minority groups suffer from more severe racial biases than others. As an example, these mandates can be manifested within the School through more deliberate critiques of RSID student work, that are understanding of cultural differences that create social inequities among students, and treat them as opportunities to enrich learning instead of an obstacle to teaching. Transparent justification for these critiques can further aid in bringing any unconscious biases that are held by faculty members to the forefront so that faculty are able to acknowledge, learn from, and further act towards dismantling them. All of the above recommendations can lead to reducing cultural misunderstanding that emerges between students and professors, and promote more in-depth discourse between the two. Within critiques, we expect any suggestions from professors to be made towards improving the design of the project in question, rather than changing its focus entirely due to a lack of understanding. *When it comes to a subject with which the professor is unfamiliar, we expect them to support the student in a manner that does not diminish their cultural background. We hope to see professors provide a space for understanding design ideas which are based on different cultural backgrounds and any other ideas rooted in equity group representation.*

4.4 Acknowledge, support, and protect members of faculty, staff and students who promote justice for BIPOC communities. The truth is, some professors at RSID put themselves at risk by publicly upholding standards regarding social justice in design. Their efforts should be recognized. Certainly, students have appreciated and benefited from those initiatives, hence, we expect the administration to support, encourage, and protect these individuals. The RSID student body expects that these acts do not simply incentivize “openness”, rather giving credit to those who merit it. Diversity within the faculty and by extension, in how they drive their studios will facilitate learning to design for a wider array of demographics. There are students working towards learning and producing projects inspired by or produced for BIPOC. These efforts have felt like an uphill battle for many. Not only have they had to do their own additional extensive research but when they’ve requested guidance, there have been no available suggestions from instructors due to lack of experience.

Even worse, on many occasions, those projects have been discouraged and the concepts criticized due to lack of understanding.

We call on you to protect and stand with those within the RSID community that call for change and especially those who suffer from racism in any form, whether through subtle microaggressions, hidden biases, or overt acts. Many are afraid to be outspoken about these issues due to the potential that they will be disregarded, ignored, questioned, overlooked, and/or discriminated against (whether advertently or inadvertently). The systems in place within FCAD and RSID currently allow for underlying biases that result in adverse consequences to outspoken individuals. These adverse consequences can include the loss of a job/position, a lower quality of education, and unfair treatment. There is an inherent risk and a climate of fear which surrounds being an outspoken individual concerned for equity and concerned with improving our School and this should not be the case. *We hope that as a community, RSID can protect the safety and security of these individuals as well as their place within the community. For examples of faculty-level amendments that have been envisioned and promised by similar institutions, we ask that you reference the messages from the Deans of the Faculty of Architecture, Landscape and Design at the University of Toronto⁶, and the Faculty of Architecture and Planning at Dalhousie University⁷.*

4.4.1 Hire an external auditor to undertake a racism climate report for RSID and implement an anonymous racism incident report system by the Winter 2021 Semester. Having an external auditor to lead the development of an EDI report for the School can help maintain and keep accountability for faculty, staff and students. *We ask for RSID students to be included in the hiring process of this external auditor, as well as in the meetings following their audit.* This will facilitate the protection of students, staff and faculty who speak up for inclusivity and diversity. As well, the external auditor can support the School in responding to the need for a system to anonymously report racist incidents (both overt and covert). It is necessary for the RSID community to become a safe space for those who may not currently feel comfortable enough to speak on discriminatory issues out of fear of the repercussions to their careers and education.

4.4.2 Hire an EDI (Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion) Coordinator for each School within FCAD. *We expect each of the Schools within FCAD to appoint one (1) EDI coordinator that is specific to that program alone.* The position should be appointed as a new addition to the existing Ryerson EDI hiring structure. Each coordinator should be experienced and trained in counselling BIPOC students and should identify as a BIPOC individual. As well, they should be knowledgeable in navigating areas and concerns including but not limited to the discrimination of: racial minority groups, 2SLGBTQIA+, disabled individuals and gender groups.

Who and how this representative is appointed within RSID, as well as how consultations between RSID community members might operate needs to be carefully determined in a collaborative effort between FCAD, RSID administration and in collaboration with the RSID Course Union. As outlined in the 2020 Ryerson Anti-Black Racism Campus Climate Report⁸, many Black students have reported discrimination by the very representatives they consult with about their experiences of racism on campus. We must work to ensure this is not the case with this proposed representative. They should act as a neutral third party and students should have the option of anonymity. The specificities and concerns of racial inequity can vary from one School within FCAD to another. Having one representative for all of

⁶ 06.23.20 – Addressing anti-Black racism in our community [\[link\]](#)

⁷ 8/21/2020: Message to the Faculty of Architecture and Planning from the Dean (Acting), Faculty of Architecture and Planning [\[link\]](#)

⁸ 2020 Anti-Black Racism Campus Climate Review [\[link\]](#)

FCAD to consult regarding issues of equity and inclusion is insufficient and this job requires the facilities of more than one individual person.

4.4.3 Audit existing crisis management resources (such as Human Rights Services and Ombudsperson) to assess their adequacy in addressing discrimination and racism. Develop a new process for handling reports of discrimination and racism, that students can easily access.

Racism can manifest itself in behaving disrespectfully and students have come forward to share that they have experienced overt racism in the form of rude gestures, racial profiling, discrimination, lack of social cultural awareness, and blatant disrespect. There is currently no adequate mechanism for students to report their experiences and transgressions. It is essential to create this process so that we have a mechanism that develops a feedback loop, where these reports are reviewed and assessed to understand how the social climate is developing for students. Within this mechanism, acknowledgement of racist incidents and solutions resulting in an actionable outcome is required to aid students who are at risk, in danger and/or negatively affected by such incidents.

4.5 Maintain transparency with and openly communicate with the RSID community regarding the selection criteria for awards and members of the advisory council. *BIPOC should be present and hold voting power in any and all discussion and decision making for the curriculum, operations, administration, and other RSID matters. Decisions that affect student life and the students' educational experience should be subject to scrutiny by as many members of different cultural groups as possible to ensure that each decision is made from a wide variety of perspectives to assist the success of students of all cultural identities.* The diversity of the advisory council at RSID right now is stilted⁹. Although this position is voluntary, these decisions for the school and its student body require more diversification with a minimum of 50% BIPOC on the advisory council.

Members of the faculty have the responsibility to be fair in the selection of candidates and winners. More importantly, the selection committees making these decisions must include BIPOC people and especially Black and Indigenous people and minorities who feel the brunt of racial injustice in our society. *Once there are enough BIPOC full time faculty members hired, we expect a minimum quorum of 50% BIPOC on the selection committee of all awards and scholarship decisions. In the interim, we ask for BIPOC students to be given the opportunity to assist with awards selection.* To negate any concern for conflicts of interest in appointing student voting members, these students would not be able to vote for awards applicable to their year.

4.6 Reach out to and highlight BIPOC professionals in our design networks. Establishing a strong network of BIPOC alumni and industry professionals for mentorships and hiring within the industry can provide BIPOC students with a reliable and realistic career trajectory. The network of the RSID community, as it currently operates, predominantly highlights firms led by White individuals and also has a disproportionately large number of male-led interior design practices in comparison to the demographic of its student body. This limited network results in only White students being afforded the opportunity to see themselves represented in esteemed positions in the industry.

Unfortunately, many students are faced with the challenge of considering whether they will be subject to unfair treatment, bias, or prejudice due to their race when applying for jobs and networking within the industry. Hair coverings that are obvious cultural identifiers, for example, are obligatory items to be worn to practice and respect cultural custom but may present barriers to BIPOC students entering the workforce. We expect the School's network connections to be expanded to BIPOC professionals to represent these racialized groups that are currently not celebrated nor treated with the same respect as their White counterparts, despite being

⁹RSID Faculty [\[link\]](#) and RSID Staff [\[link\]](#)

equally qualified and participating members of our industry. It is human nature to connect and relate to those that we have shared experiences with and BIPOC students should be presented with opportunities to connect with industry professionals who have experienced the hardships of navigating the design industry that stem from these cultural barriers and biases. The BIPOC community at RSID deserves to be connected to industry professionals that represent their culture and their concerns. Further, promoting BIPOC designers in the industry at RSID would validate and normalize the expression of these cultures (and cultural identifiers, including but not limited to hair coverings, or natural hair texture) and send the message to emerging designers that their culture is not an obstacle to their professional success. The promotion of those resources should be available for students to use and reference. For example, the group BAIDA (Black Architects and Interior Designers Association) should be referenced to increase event attendance and awareness and included in RSID events, including but not limited to Careers Night.

Inviting BIPOC with an emphasis on BIPOC lecturers should be mandatory, encouraged and enforced by the School. The representation and knowledge of BIPOC educators and designers is integral to the success of our design education, just as student attendance to lectures, both curricular and extra-curricular, is so critical to our success as students within RSID. We are asking for an ecosystem that supports BIPOC students by having the School reach out to such individuals and firms in our industry that also fosters anti-racist education for all students. To assist, we have linked to People of Craft, an online directory that highlights such individuals, their work and provides their contact information¹⁰. Another helpful resource is the crowdsourced BIPOC Studios List¹¹. *We expect BIPOC speakers (including but not limited to those who wear cultural identifiers) to represent at least 50% of course guest lecturers (i.e. IRN lectures), Lunch and Learn speakers, RSID Lecture Series, IRP portfolio reviews, Careers Night guests, etc. to educate and speak about their lived personal experience in design.*

RSID's Careers Night event is a great opportunity for networking, but guests have been limited in diversity in the past. *We expect at least one (1) BIPOC guest on each panel. Lunch and Learns have also rarely featured BIPOC persons and we expect 50% of presenters speaking at them to be BIPOC.* Please see item 5.3 for links and resources that can provide support for this action item.

4.7 Provide adequate access to tools and financial supports. This includes the recognition of how race relations work in the world outside of RSID. Many BIPOC individuals who would have become contributing designers have been limited from pursuing higher education in these areas as a result of their limited access to finances, tools, and support. Recognize also that the financial and experiential disparities that exist create obstacles for some students to navigate in the world and inside RSID that others do not experience. It is important that underprivileged individuals are provided with the same opportunities as those who are more privileged. Within the admissions process, this includes the recognition that some applicants may be underprivileged and the acknowledgment that they are just as deserving as others. This includes fair access for existing students to the tools and supplies they require to successfully learn (in person and online).

In addition to the already-expensive tuition that is required to study within any post-secondary institution, studio fees, books, printing fees of panels mandatory for final presentation critiques, model supplies, woodshop supplies, laser cutter or 3D printing fees, makes apparent the financial access that is required to attend and succeed in the RSID program. Although student government grants may alleviate this financial burden, this comes with its own slew of accessibility concerns regarding eligibility and any loans or grants are often insufficient. These additional costs make the RSID program inaccessible as an option of higher education for an entire demographic of individuals who experience difficulty affording the bare minimum resources required

¹⁰ People of Craft [\[link\]](#)

¹¹ BIPOC Studios Google Sheet [\[link\]](#)

to study at a post-secondary institution. This perpetuates the upper, middle-class, White bias apparent in the field and the system currently in place within the School. For the School to practice and behave in a more diverse manner, we ask for you to actively promote and make accessible funding opportunities for underprivileged racial minorities. *We expect the integration of outreach programs to connect to primary and secondary schools so that children who aspire to pursue post-secondary studies in Interior Design at RSID are informed of the possibilities, programs, and scholarships that are available to aid in their educational pursuits.*

University, and specifically FCAD funding, should be allocated and redirected to ensure that those who may be underprivileged are able to, not only continue their studies but also excel despite difficulties in affording expensive equipment or supplies that are integral to the completion of their studies. A lack of financial stability should not stand in the way of educational freedom. Neither should those that suffer from unique circumstances be refused adequate and considerate accommodation. It is insufficient and unrealistic for eligibility for academic appeals provided by Ryerson University to be limited to only medical and compassionate grounds¹². Academic accommodation should be extended to external responsibilities that are essential to the student's basic living needs such as caretaking, commuting, or employment, but ultimately leave them less time than their peers to dedicate towards projects. Students must be able to fulfill basic living needs before they are able to meet School requirements. Learning within RSID should be conducted not for equality, but equity. It is not enough to provide the same facilities and resources to every individual student, it is expected that each student is provided with the resources and accommodations specific to facilitating their own success.

Section 5: Conclusion

These above action items reflect what we, the Ryerson School of Interior Design Course Union (RSID CU) and its attending student body, believe are standards for diversity and inclusivity within academia that are reasonable and long overdue. Meeting the expectations outlined above would help RSID to uphold a standard of equity that acknowledges and gives back what is due to BIPOC, specifically Black and Indigenous groups, who have put in the efforts and energy to express their experiences and represent their culture through design. Canada prides itself on being a multicultural and diverse country that celebrates its cultural differences. The School should not limit itself to Eurocentric design and ideals and should acknowledge and study, too, the design contributions and strong influence of African, Indigenous, Islamic, South American, Asian, and all other cultural identities.

In addition to systemic reform being necessary for the inclusion, safety, and representation of the BIPOC community within RSID as a School in itself, we ask that you realize the urgency of this systemic reform and the anti-racism efforts that we are advocating for. We ask for a new system that extends beyond the actions proposed in the 2020 Anti-Black Racism Campus Climate Review published by Ryerson University¹³ and in specific, supports RSID in its steps toward embodying leadership in diversity and inclusivity in academia in the same way as it presently leads in design innovation.

Section 6: Acknowledgments

We would like to acknowledge that this open letter builds upon the work of other student associations¹⁴. We, the RSID student body, resonate and empathize with the ideas expressed by the students that authored these

¹² Ryerson Office of the Ombudsperson: Academic Appeals [\[link\]](#)

¹³ 2020 Anti-Black Racism Campus Climate Review [\[link\]](#)

¹⁴ University of Toronto's John H. Daniels Faculty of Architecture, Landscape, & Design [\[link\]](#), Harvard Graduate School of Design [\[link\]](#) and Yale School of Architecture [\[link\]](#)

open letters and were compelled to scrutinize and re-evaluate the education systems that we participate in ourselves.

7.1 Action Items Checklist

7.1.1 Long Term Three-Year Plan

As per RSID's scheduled revisit of the CIDA Accreditation Decision in 2023.¹⁵

We need representation in positions of power. We need curricular reform.

- We expect 50% of academic partnerships between Ryerson and international universities within the FCAD Exchange Program and any other international abroad opportunities to include destinations and countries outside of the Western world or with non-Western diasporic communities.*
- We expect to be taught about the rich history of African, East Asian, Indigenous, Islamic, South American, Southeast Asian and more diverse cultural histories of design by those that are experts in these fields as members of these racialized groups themselves.*
- As a goal for the future, we hope for a percentage of 50% of RSID educators and faculty to be BIPOC individuals which includes RFA and CUPE hires as well as staff. In addition, we hope to extend the goal to encompass the entirety of FCAD and its nine (9) schools, their roster of professors and hiring practices.*
- There is an inherent risk and a climate of fear which surrounds being an outspoken individual concerned for equity and concerned with improving our School and this should not be the case. We hope that as a community, RSID can protect the safety and security of these individuals as well as their place within the community.*
- Once there are enough BIPOC full-time faculty members hired, we expect a minimum quorum of 50% BIPOC on the selection committee of all awards and scholarship decisions. In the interim, we ask for BIPOC students to be given the opportunity to assist with awards selection. To negate any concern for conflicts of interest in appointing student voting members, these students would not be able to vote for awards applicable to their year.*
- We expect the integration of outreach programs to connect to primary and secondary schools so that children who aspire to pursue post-secondary studies in Interior Design at RSID are informed of the possibilities, programs, and scholarships that are available to aid in their educational pursuits.*
- University, and specifically FCAD funding, should be allocated and redirected to ensure that those who may be underprivileged are able to, not only continue their studies but also excel despite difficulties in affording expensive equipment or supplies that are integral to the completion of their studies.*

7.1.2 Short Term Expectations: One-Year Plan

¹⁵ CIDA Summary of Accreditation Decision, Ryerson University [\[link\]](#)

- ❑ *We expect at least 50% of guest critics invited to RSID reviews to be either BIPOC individuals, or professionals that are knowledgeable and educated in non-Eurocentric design but ideally both.*
- ❑ *We request that these BIPOC and non-Eurocentric design trained individuals be adequately compensated through an honorarium to ensure that they are not being tokenized and that unfair workloads are not put on them to carry the load of diversity education.*
- ❑ *We expect 50% of course material within mandatory courses to address design that does not conform to a Euro-centric perspective and informs students of the full context of the influence of topics including but not limited to slavery and colonialism which has facilitated the building of these works as well as the history and design made by Black people before, during, after slavery and colonialism.*
- ❑ *Readings and precedents in each course must contain at least 25% authors and designers from marginalized communities. In re addressing the anti-Black racism on campus, at least one reading and precedent in each course must be from a Black scholar or designer. We ask that you reference the Decentering Whiteness in Design History Resources List for examples of work to include that would accurately represent the contributions of Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian, and other designers and scholars of colour.¹⁶*
- ❑ *We request that at least one of the interviewed candidates for all future RFA and CUPE hires be a BIPOC educator.*
- ❑ *We expect within RSID, at least one (1) tenure-track RFA and two (2) new BIPOC CUPE professors to begin teaching by the start of the **Winter 2021 Semester**, or the process for a new BIPOC tenure-track RFA to begin. This comes out of our need to ultimately see one (1) section for each year of IRN and IRD courses respectively to be taught by a professor of colour.*
- ❑ *We expect faculty, staff, and students to partake in training such as Unconscious Bias Training, Inclusivity Training, Sensitivity Training, Micro-Aggression Training, Anti-Racism Training, Anti-Complicity with White Supremacy Training, and Behavioural Training.*
- ❑ *When it comes to a subject with which the professor is unfamiliar, we expect them to support the student in a manner that does not diminish their cultural background. We hope to see professors provide a space for understanding design ideas which are based on different cultural backgrounds and any other ideas rooted in equity group representation.*
- ❑ *Hire an external auditor to undertake a racism climate report for RSID and implement an anonymous racism incident report system by **the Winter 2021 Semester**. We ask for RSID students to be included in the hiring process of this external auditor, as well as in the meetings following their audit.*
- ❑ *We expect each of the Schools within FCAD to appoint one (1) EDI coordinator that is specific to that program alone. Who and how this representative is appointed within RSID, as well as*

¹⁶ Decentering Whiteness in Design History Resources [\[link\]](#)

how consultations between RSID community members might operate needs to be carefully determined in a collaborative effort between FCAD, RSID administration and in collaboration with the RSID Course Union.

- ❑ *Audit existing crisis management resources (such as Human Rights Services and Ombudsperson) to assess their adequacy in addressing discrimination and racism. Develop a new process for handling reports of discrimination and racism, that students can easily access. Within this mechanism, acknowledgement of racist incidents and solutions resulting in an actionable outcome is required to aid students who are at risk, in danger and/or negatively affected by such incidents.*
- ❑ *We expect BIPOC speakers (including but not limited to those who wear cultural identifiers) to represent at least 50% of course guest lecturers (i.e. IRN lectures), Lunch and Learn speakers, RSID Lecture Series, IRP portfolio reviews, careers night guests, etc. to educate and speak about their lived personal experience in design.*
- ❑ *We expect at least one (1) BIPOC guest on each panel. Lunch and Learns have also rarely featured BIPOC persons and we expect 50% of presenters speaking at them to be BIPOC. Please see item 5.3 for links and resources that can provide support for this action item.*
- ❑ *Academic accommodation should be extended to external responsibilities that are essential to the student's basic living needs such as caretaking, commuting, or employment, but ultimately leave them less time than their peers to dedicate towards projects. Students must be able to fulfill basic living needs before they are able to meet School requirements.*