

Hi,

Thanks for the opportunity to focus on the very important questions set out in your survey about DEII. It was a very good exercise in self-reflection and personal assessment. I welcomed the chance to respond to these questions at some length. I know the deadline is not until mid-September, but I finished it early, so thought to send it along right away.

Best,

Tom Harrison,

PEC Council Candidate '22,

Athol Ward.

1. What does diversity, equity, inclusion and indigeneity mean to you?

My training and experience in law leads me to first consider this question from a legal perspective; for me DEII includes the prohibited grounds of discrimination set out in our *Charter*, and protected under other rights regimes like Ontario's *Code*. But my background and experiences have led me to a much wider appreciation of these terms.

As a white male born in Canada, I grew up in a working-class household, the grandson of immigrant settlers, and in one of the most diverse cultural communities in Canada (Scarborough). My experiences there, and in my early work as a tutor inside Kingston Penitentiary, as a Child and Youth Worker with Young Offenders, and later a teacher of 'at-risk' youth, reinforced my understanding of diversity in its widest possible sense. For me DEII includes not only the formal legal grounds, but a wide range of additional contexts that includes, amongst others, social and economic class, things like neuro-diversity, learning ability and mental health.

For the last twenty years I've focused on the broader subject of 'access to justice' in terms of the capacity of people to enter into the legal system for the opportunity to advance and defend their legal rights. However, I've always acted with a view to this larger perspective of EDII in mind – the legal system is just one small part of a broader system of social justice that I actively support.

- 2. What have you done personally or professionally to develop your own understanding of anti-racism?**
- 3. What DEII, anti-oppression and/or cultural competence training have you received and how will you apply what you learned as a councilor/trustee?**

My personal and professional journeys to understand anti-racism, diversity and oppression, have been intertwined and mutually informing. For example, as a volunteer tutor with Frontier College inside Kingston Penitentiary, or as a teacher inside a detention centre for Young Offenders, I strove to understand how fundamental systems like education or justice could fail the individual members of some groups more than others.

Working in several Toronto area high schools in the 1990s, I mentored numerous youth, some who faced individual racial and systemic discrimination, or other related and intersectional challenges. Organizationally, this included helping to design and lead initiatives to assist equity-seeking groups, including those who faced racial discrimination, sought gender equity, and or faced discrimination as part of their LGBTQ2SI identity. As part of my voluntary extracurricular work, I regularly participated in staff and student workshops and retreats addressing these issues. The focus on equity, diversity and inclusion was also a substantial part of the independent school program for at-risk youth, 'Bridges', which I was hired to design and implement for the East York District School Board, from 1996 to 1998.

My involvement in these issues in teaching, and support more generally for a wide range of progressive causes, led to a focus on rights and sparked my interest in pursuing law to fight for a more just society. Since then, I've continued to improve my own understanding of this issue. My privilege and good luck has given me many opportunities. I've always regarded public service in its widest sense as an obligation, so have always tried to pay my good fortune forward.

Following my call to the Bar, this has involved things like mentoring new lawyers and crafting cultural competence training for law students. In particular I took a special interest in learning about indigeneity, sparked in part by my work to support one of Canada's first indigenous judges, Harry LaForme, who I served as an articling student.

A milestone in my legal career was to support him as a law clerk, along with the other two judges of the Ontario judicial panel that made the first decision in Canada legalizing same-sex marriage in 2002. My work to deepen my appreciation of indigeneity underpinned my role as a senior lawyer to later advise, in my role as policy Counsel with the provincial Attorney General, in the establishment of a federal body adjudicating indigenous claims called the Specific Claims Tribunal.

As a lawyer, I again took up education more formally, teaching the mandatory professionalism course for law students at Queen's University as an adjunct Assistant Professor from 2010 to 2018. In my design and delivery of the course, I incorporated cultural competence proficiencies holistically, and later had the chance to provide my experience with this approach to inform the Federation of Law

Societies of Canada's discussion about including these topics in its national competencies for lawyers.

During my time in graduate school, I also participated as a Director of the Canadian Association of Legal Ethics (CALE) from 2012 to 2017, which promotes studies in this area. In fact, much of my graduate scholarship in law (Ph.D., 2016) seeks to centre diverse narratives, including those of racialized lawyers, and litigants, and others who have faced oppression in Canadian law, the legal profession, and who have been otherwise overlooked by legal histories.

As a scholar I co-wrote and published with Canadian Scholars a handbook in 2019, that examines negotiation in criminal law, and includes one substantial chapter setting out how to negotiate effectively while acting culturally competent and another on employing indigenous approaches to restorative justice. For the last decade or so, mandatory Continuing Legal Education for lawyers has also included a professionalism component. In Ontario, I have been a vocal advocate with our regulator, the Law Society, to publicly support mandatory education that includes EDI training in Ontario and across Canada – which I personally undertake now annually. For example, in 2021 I took a 2 hour CLE course in “EDI for Indigenous Persons”. A lifelong learner I also completed the University of Alberta certificate course in “Indigenous Canada” last year in my spare time.

My recent personal anti-racism activities include attending the ‘Black Lives Matter’ demonstration in Picton in 2020 and supporting local groups that engage in anti-racism efforts. Whenever possible, I try to take both formal and informal opportunities to learn more. For example, I am currently undertaking a personal project to learn to speak some Mohawk, I am working on a non-fiction creative project that examines certain obscure aspects of Black and Indigenous history in PEC, and I attended the County Museums 2022 seminar on enslavement in Prince Edward County.

4. How will you work to ensure that every resident in our community is included? How will you work to ensure that every student and staff member is included?

As a Councilor I will incorporate an DEII perspective into all my activities. An example of this occurred during my work recently on a municipal committee, focused on Boardwalk development in Picton's harbour. I proposed to include local indigenous stakeholders in this process, amongst others, which was taken up by the municipality. The consultation gave the committee substantial and specific feedback which it was able to incorporate into its recommendations to Council.

I've already had a chance to see how *ad hoc* the local municipal consultation process can be. As a member of the Historical Advisory committee over the last

term I put forward a recommendation to examine and adopt more inclusive and organized best practices in that area - for example, to have a framework for indigenous consultation in development. I think this is an exercise that could be more generalized, to develop a more consultative framework to fairly give everyone throughout PEC a chance to reasonably have their say.

As a Councilor I can also see a wide range of opportunities to develop additional approaches that will promote DEII, such as supporting a formal municipal anti-racism policy. Another promising idea I've heard is to more finely target the municipal tax breaks for new farmers, to further encourage BIPOC ownership in the agricultural sector.

I've been trained and have acted as an advocate for individuals and with equity seeking groups for years. One thing I've realized is that in speaking out to represent, it is the important to first listen to those seeking to be heard. I think I've practiced and honed this receptive capacity well and I'm looking forward to hearing about other innovative and new approaches to municipal practice and policy, that will better ensure diverse voices are heard in an inclusive dialogue across our whole community.

Thanks for the chance to address these important questions.

Sincerely,

Thomas Harrison.