

VIA E-MAIL

Date: September 30, 2022  
To: University of Victoria Students' Society Board of Directors  
From: Cruz Advisors (Martin Cruz, GSP, MPA & Brittany Lausen, BBA)  
RE: Governance Review & 2021 EDI Report

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Back in 2021, Nicole Lee Consulting completed an Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (“EDI”) Assessment for University of Victoria Students' Society (“UVSS”). Cruz Advisors is tasked to determine how to incorporate the findings of the UVSS EDI Assessment into the governance review, and into the proposed governance structure.

In order to complete the deliverable, Cruz Advisors completed a comparative analysis of the EDI Assessment and the Findings Report. This report contains the analysis of the two documents produced for the UVSS, and is a continuation of Findings Report that is intended to be used when drafting the recommendation to UVSS.

Note that this report does not contain any recommendations. This work outlines the analysis, which is intended to educate the Board of the current EDI issues with respect to the governance structure.

## **BACKGROUND**

Cruz Advisors is tasked to complete a full governance review of the UVSS. Upon the completion of the Findings Report,<sup>1</sup> Cruz Advisors reviewed the EDI Assessment Presentation prepared and presented by Nicole Lee Consulting. The review and analysis of the EDI Assessment Presentation is a critical step of this governance review. Cruz Advisors is responsible for determining how Nicole Lee Consulting's EDI Assessment review and recommendations can be incorporated into the governance review.

This report outlines a comparative analysis between the Findings Report and Nicole Lee Consulting's Equity Assessment of the UVSS.

## **ANALYSIS**

This part of the report is divided into three parts. The first part provides a brief introduction of the Equity Assessment.

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<sup>1</sup> Report submitted to UVSS Board dated August 31, 2022.

The second part provides an overview of comparative analysis.

The third part outlines the comparisons between the Findings Report and the Equity Assessment Presentation.

### *Part I: EDI Assessment*

Nicole Lee Consulting was tasked to conduct an EDI Assessment in 2021. As part of their assessment, they reviewed UVSS documents, conducted interviews and focus groups, and presented their findings and recommendations to UVSS' Board of Directors in December 2021.

The following topics surfaced during their interviews and focus group sessions: elections, quorum and meeting rules, funding and compensation, advocacy groups, excluded managers, culture, professionalism and training, Board of Directors, understanding inequity, representation, and the Martlet.

### *Part II: Comparative Analysis*

Comparative analysis is used to compare two or more different ideas “to gain a better understanding of the causal processes involved in the creation of an event, feature, or relationship.”<sup>2</sup> This type of analysis captures the ideas presented in both the Findings Report and the EDI Assessment. The intent is to outline the similarities between the two noted works to provide the UVSS a deeper understanding of the key issues pertaining to its governance structure. Furthermore, Cruz Advisors will utilize this report to provide recommendations to the Board as part of its review of UVSS' governance structure.

### *Part III: Comparisons*

There are a number of crossovers between the Findings Report and the EDI Assessment. It is important to note; however, that some of the contents of the EDI Assessment are based on behaviours of the individuals involved at the time the assessment was conducted. The information listed under this part of the report touches on the issues pertaining to UVSS' governance structure, not on behavioural issues.

This part of the report is structured based on how the EDI Assessment was presented to the Board in 2021.

#### A. Elections

Elections arose in the Findings Report as much as it did in the EDI Assessment. Both the Report and the Assessment noted that UVSS Elections rules and regulations are

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<sup>2</sup> Adiya, M. and A. W. Comparative Research. *Rural Development Institute, Brandon University*.  
<https://www.brandonu.ca/rdi/files/2017/07/RDI-Comparative-Research.pdf>

too strict. The Findings Report strongly agrees with this statement. The Findings Report states that the UVSS has strict election guidelines, particularly in the use of social media platforms. This prevents candidates from engaging with UVic students online, which leads to low-voter turnout.

The EDI Assessment states that the Elections are contentious and toxic. On the other hand, the Findings Report stated that some election rules were never enforced, unless the action was blatant. Contentious and toxic could be a result of poor enforcement and a general understanding of expectations. It is important to understand that an election is considered a competition so some level of contentiousness between candidates may arise; however, it is the Chief Returning Officer's (or Elections Officer's) responsibility to address reports of contentious behaviour and enforce the rules and expectations of each candidate. For instance, it is expected that candidates behave in a manner that is appropriate and embody the values of the organization they want to represent.

#### B. Quorum and Meeting Rules

According to the EDI Assessment, "quorum came up related to how advocacy group funds are allocated and disbursed." Quorum, in this sense, pertains to the threshold required in order for a decision to be considered whether it be during a meeting or through voting (for example, a referendum).

From a governance perspective, the logical recommendation would be to change the threshold within the Bylaw. However, there is also a threshold required to change the requirements within the Bylaw. This could be tricky if not communicated properly to the students the rationale and research to the change. While there is validity in the responses collected for the EDI Assessment, there is also an overall lack of trust and when analyzed against the Findings Report, it is in alignment with the finding that students are generally unaware of the UVSS and what it does. This unawareness enables gaps to be filled with assumptions that are sometimes misleading or contorts the truth about what the UVSS is and what it does.

#### C. Funding and Compensation: Advocacy Groups

No comparison can be deducted regarding the Findings Report and the Funding Compensation: Advocacy Groups.

Funding for advocacy groups is a service provided by the UVSS (without the UVSS, advocacy groups will not have any funding and cannot collect student fees) and is not part of the governance structure.

#### D. Funding and Compensation: Advocacy Groups Representatives

According to the EDI Assessment, advocacy groups representatives need two things: better compensation, and a clearer/better support system, especially given how much work they perform beyond the obligatory two board-related meetings/month.

This is an interesting statement, and when compared to the Findings Report, funding and compensation did not come up, but rather a question of their existence within the Board. The respondents asked why Advocacy Group Representatives have voting privileges, similar to a Director-at-Large (“DAL”), when they are not elected similar to a DAL. Is it also fair to impose the same expectation on the Advocacy Group Representatives when they have additional responsibilities based on their advocacy group’s set of documents? Their work outside of the Board is far more hands-on with their constituents and this could lead to resentment in that some do more work than others.

A thought to consider is whether advocacy groups need to be a part of the Board as voting members.

#### E. Funding and Compensation: Overall

Similar to Letter C above, no comparison can be deducted between the EDI Assessment and the Findings Report pertaining to Funding and Compensation: Overall. The topic of compensation for the DALs and Lead Directors may potentially surface during the environmental scan stage of the governance review.

#### F. Advocacy Groups

Most of the contents under this section of the EDI Assessment are behavioural and operational, except for the first statement. The EDI Assessment states that there is a feeling of disconnect between Board of Directors and Advocacy Groups. When compared to the Findings Report, the same results surfaced similar to Letter D, which circles back to funding and compensation of Advocacy Group Representatives themselves who serve on the Board. The disconnect could be a direct result of the uncertainty on what an Advocacy Group Representative’s role is on the Board.

#### G. Excluded Managers

Similar to Advocacy Groups, the contents under this section of the EDI Assessment are mostly behavioural and operational. The EDI Assessment states that there is not a lot of accountability or rules that relate to Human Resources, and not a lot of clarity on who to go to for support. The Findings Report, on the other hand, states that the Board is unsure of what the Excluded Manager’s roles are. The roles are unclear, and the Board is unsure of who to go to for support. This is consistent between the EDI Assessment and the Findings Report.

#### H. Professionalism and Training

The EDI Assessment outlines that Directors (DALs and Leads), Advocacy Group Representatives, and Coordinators are expected to operate professionally with no foundation or understanding of what that means and what is clearly expected of them.

When compared to the Findings Report, it can be said that this is a result of non-governance related topics covered during Board training. The Board, which is mostly composed of young student leaders who have zero or minimal Board experience, are provided training that does not provide them an understanding of their role and what is expected of them.

#### I. Culture: Hiring, Staff, Issues, and Corrective Action

Minimal conclusions can be drawn from these four topics above pertaining to Culture. Note that hiring, staffing, issues, and corrective action are operational matters. It is also critical that information pertaining to these matters are held under strict confidentiality to protect the individuals involved and organization from potential legal risk. At the end of the day, the Board should only be concerned over the employment of the Excluded Managers, and no individual subordinate to them.

When it comes to hiring, the EDI Assessment states that hiring committees take up a lot of time. It is unclear whether a hiring committee exists for every position. When analyzed along with the information from the Findings Report, one of the key issues is whether a committee is necessary to hire for certain positions. This goes back to the topic of committees and their mandates and purpose. Thoughts to consider: Is the position reporting to the Board? If so, consider involving a Lead. However, at the end of the deliberation process, the Manager who the position reports to shall make the final decision.

Contents listed in the EDI Assessment pertaining to issues and corrective action are heavily in alignment with the lack of accountability section of the Findings Report. The organization has taken a reactionary approach when dealing with issues, as opposed to dealing with them proactively.

#### J. Board of Directors: Baseline Knowledge

Baseline knowledge is critical to the success of a Board member, and the Board as a whole, and should be addressed immediately. It is important to provide Directors, whether a Lead or a DAL, the education and the resources required to lead the organization over the course of the year. This is also correlated with the Finding Report pertaining to uncertainty over governance and what it entails.

#### K. Board of Directors: Realities

Pertaining to Realities, the EDI Assessment states that “sometimes [L]ead [D]irectors don’t see eye-to-eye and need adjudication.” This is in alignment with the Findings Report in that folks within the UVSS lack the ability to deal with workplace conflict in a healthy manner. This affects governance decision-making and the morale of the Board. It is imperative that the Leads, as the line between governance and operations and the representing body for the UVSS, lead by example.

#### L. Board of Directors: Terms

When it comes to Terms, the Board has a decision to make based on the recommendations presented to them at the end of the governance review. While the contents listed in the EDI Assessment are great in theory, it must be analyzed carefully and strategically. For instance, while having a staggered Board be beneficial, would the UVSS be able to retain future Board members for two years? No direct correlation can be drawn out between the EDI Assessment and the Findings Report at this time.

#### M. Board of Directors: Transitions

Transition and training go hand-in-hand. Transition is a critical piece of an incoming Director's training. Analysis on this section is similar to Letter H. Professionalism and Training.

#### N. Board of Directors: Upholding DEI

Contents pertaining to Upholding DEI are more behavioural, and no correlation can be made from a governance perspective. No direct analysis can be drawn between the EDI Assessment and the Findings Report.

#### O. Understanding Inequity

While there is some inequity within the Board as outlined in the Findings Report, the inequity outlined in the EDI Assessment is again, behavioural.

Under the Findings Report, respondents noted that it is unclear what the Leads are responsible for and why DALs "report" to the Leads. This creates a divide and inequity between the two groups. Furthermore, the uncertainty behind the role of Advocacy Representative Directors adds on to this divide and inequity.

#### P. Representation

Again, the contents of this section under the EDI Assessment are behavioural as opposed to the governance structure itself. No analysis can be pulled between the EDI Assessment and the Findings Report.

#### Q. The Martlet

The Martlet, as the student media, is responsible for covering stories and actions that come out of the Board and the UVSS, in general. As such, it is important to recognize the need to develop a relationship with Martlet journalists. No analysis can be pulled between EDI Assessment and the Findings Report pertaining to the Martlet.

## **CONCLUSION**

The EDI Assessment completed by Nicole Lee Consulting provided a comprehensive overview of the current EDI needs of the UVSS. There are some similarities between the EDI Assessment and Cruz Advisors' Findings Report. These have been captured in this report.

While some of the issues Nicole Lee Consulting identified are governance related, most are behaviour-based. This is based on the individuals occupying the positions within the UVSS and the relationship with the general student population. The UVSS can pivot and update its governance structure to fix some of the issues flagged within the EDI Assessment, but ultimately, UVSS will have to determine new ways to address behaviours within the organization and the relationship with its members.

The next phase of the project will include a comprehensive environmental scan of other student organizations across the country, leading to the final phase which will translate all research and findings to recommendations for the UVSS.