

Tuesday, September 8, 2020

Dear STFX Administration and Campus Community,

We are writing as members of the Committee for Aboriginal and Black Student Success (CABSS) at STFX – a committee composed of people committed to helping Aboriginal and Black students succeed at X that is chaired by campus based, African Nova Scotian community based, and Mi'kmaq community based members. Our committee was deeply disturbed by the STFX administration's communication last week regarding the RCMP on campus.

Notification of the presence of RCMP on campus doing random spot checks on students who are in self-isolation was communicated in a way that reflected no sensitivity towards the stress of the pandemic on students, particularly on Black students and Indigenous students, who have had to deal with various issues such as anti-Black racism and racial profiling by police and who have lost family members to police brutality.

However, it also represents a potentially dangerous situation for students of color on campus. Given the track record of the RCMP racially profiling, there is significant potential for a random spot check to escalate into a use of force situation. It represents real physical, emotional, and mental dangers to StFX students, faculty and staff.

Our position is this:

- We are against RCMP presence on campus and against RCMP conducting random spot checks on students in self-isolation campus

We request the following actions be taken:

- Student life provide clarification to the StFX as to what directive was issued, and by whom, to institute this practice
- Student life explain to the StFX community why this practice was celebrated as "positive" news given the Black Live Matter movement and the RCMP involved deaths of members of Atlantic Indigenous communities
- That the administration explain to the StFX community why the Human Rights and Equity Advisor was not consulted before announcing this directive or putting this directive into practice
- In the event that RCMP must be allowed to conduct random spot checks on students in self-isolation to comply with the Provincial Health Authority, that clear guidelines for RCMP and StFX Security interactions with students, particularly students who are Black, Indigenous, Persons of Colour, and those with unique mental health experiences, be established and explained to the StFX community, so that it is known what steps will be taken to ensure student safety and protection of their human rights when undergoing a random spot check.
- Make clear what STFX is doing to prevent harm in pursuing Public health orders such as this, given that Public health initiatives are notorious for safeguarding the public health at the expense of individuals.
- That a record of race-based data be gathered and published on the random spot checks and their outcomes.
- While CABSS acknowledges the partial apology sent this morning, we request that the administration more fully publicly apologize to the StFX community in general, and particularly to our colleagues and students for the insensitive approach used in this instance, and for the way in which this parallels other past incidents of insensitivity by STFX administration towards Black and Indigenous members of our campus community. We also request that the administration further describe what measures it will put in place to ensure this type failure to

consider the consequences on Black and Indigenous students does not happen again. CABSS has provided countless hours of effort in making the administration of STFX aware of the ways in which this campus needs to change to make it safe and successful for Black and Indigenous students, and yet it feels as if this work has been for nothing. This is not good enough.

We, the campus based members of CABSS will join other academics in Canada who are planning to pause their regular teaching and administrative duties on September 9 and 10 to participate in activities and actions to protest racism and police violence. Inspired by the actions of professional athletes and the #ScholarStrike campaign in the United States, academic staff will be standing in solidarity with protest movements fighting for social and racial justice in Canada and around the world. We are doing this because we do not see, after more than 2 decades of CABSS work with STFX, that there is real change happening here. If it were, this response to the RCMP random spot checks on students in self-isolation, and the appalling way it was communicated would not have been possible.

Sincerely,

Committee for Aboriginal and Black Student Success