

PROJECT REPORT

The Effective Mentorship of Racialized Graduate Students (EMRGS)



THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

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Executive Summary

The Effective Mentorship of Racialized Graduate Students (EMRGS) initiative is a two-year project funded by the Anti-Racism Initiatives Fund and the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies. Inspired by a 2021 [op-ed](#) by graduate student Dwayne Tucker, the EMRGS focused on capturing the complexities, gaps, successes, and possibilities of mentoring racialised UBC students.

Over 90 students shared their mentorship experiences through surveys and focus groups. While most reported excellent or good experiences with their supervisors, some expressed concerns summarized by the following themes: microaggressions and racism on campus, including in relation to intersectional backgrounds; limited mentorship and a dearth of role models; feelings of social isolation and often a lack of sense of belonging and wellbeing; lack of acknowledgement and validation for their background and experiences; and a prevalence of Euro-centric teaching, curriculum, and ways of knowing.

The project culminated in a one-day forum where findings were shared and approaches to creating more intentional and effective supervision of racialized students were offered. The report draws on the comments and feedback of a constellation of graduate students, mentors, and experts to make nine recommendations to be considered by the UBC senior leadership, Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies, graduate programs and departments. Several align with other campus reports, particularly the [ARIE Task Force Report](#). These recommendations are not necessarily distinct; they have places of overlap and interconnection.

Recommendations

1. Acknowledge and counteract racism on campus

Experiences of microaggression and racism on campus were expressed by many students, who noted the many unconscious biases at work. Participants called for more conversations and awareness on campus for racialized student experiences. Therefore, our first recommendation is to acknowledge and amplify anti-racism awareness among current and potential supervisors and mentors, including clearly defining and addressing microaggressions.

2. Provide intentional supervision for racialized students

Intentional supervision is one where supervisors are aware of the important role they play in graduate students' success. It requires supervisors to be culturally sensitive, recognize and value racialised students' experiences, and provide appropriate support for these students. We also recommend that intentional and high-quality supervision of racialized students be acknowledged and rewarded at the university level, for instance, in the tenure and promotion process.

3. Develop and implement specific workshops and training for supervising racialized students and culturally sensitive mentoring

Given the first two recommendations for anti-racist awareness and the importance of intentional mentoring of racialized graduate students, it is vital to provide professional development for all current and potential mentors and supervisors. Therefore, we recommend creating additional or enhanced graduate supervision workshops building on current supervisory approaches, principles and materials. These workshops would be led by the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies in consultation and partnership with units across campus (e.g. the Equity and Inclusion Office, the Office of the Ombudsperson for Students, VP Offices, the President's Office, etc.) and other

faculties and academic programs, focusing on effective supervision of racialized students.

4. Provide additional mentorship for racialized students

Despite some students experiencing intentional and skilled mentorship from their formal supervisors, many also talked about the benefits of being mentored by other individuals. Therefore, we recommend that UBC consider providing structural support for racialized students to find additional experienced mentors beyond their supervisors across our campus and beyond, particularly racialized ones; and to create a community of excellent mentors where students and faculty can seek advice and support.

5. Increase the number of racialized faculty, staff, and students on campus

Students commented on the lack of racialized faculty, staff and students on campus. Subsequently, racialized students often feel tokenized into explaining their racialized backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives. We encourage continuing efforts to improve representation on campus, and recommend re-examining graduate admissions processes and addressing systemic biases and inequities to ensure greater representation on campus. In addition, racialized students often seek mentors open to new avenues of research based on their backgrounds and interests, and who can act as role models. As such, there must be appropriate support for racialized hires to ensure their capacity to supervise and mentor racialized students.

6. Create safe spaces that address feelings of social isolation and lack of belonging

Students expressed appreciation for those supervisors and mentors who acknowledged their racialized experiences and created safe and inclusive spaces where they felt supported and had a sense of belonging. They also appreciated supervisors' flexibility, compassion and clear indications of interest in students' success. Supervisors and mentors must be aware of their students' wellbeing and to provide safe and

inclusive spaces to express their experiences and concerns. This includes developing workshops that focus on the wellbeing of racialized graduate students and creating program-level community spaces for these students. It may also include mentioning counselling and other resources as needed.

7. Decolonize Eurocentric curricula and perspectives

The prevalence of Eurocentric and colonial ways of knowing and teaching in the curricula and the pressure to assimilate were noted. As such, supervisors must be cognizant of both racist/oppressive and anti-racist/anti-oppressive pedagogies and familiarize themselves with various documents offering a range of suggestions, such as the [Anti-Racism and Inclusive Excellence Recommendations for Teaching and Learning](#).

8. Increase funding opportunities for racialized students and create more equitable funding structures

The recommendation related to funding and resources for racialized graduate students includes three aspects: Increasing financial resources; creating and summarizing existing resources that are easily accessible from one place; and making clear the processes for seeking support when they are experiencing a conflict with their supervisor. In addition, the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies, graduate programs, and units should continue to pursue additional funding earmarked for IBPOC students and distribute funding in transparent and equitable ways that address discrepancies across groups.

9. Provide clear and safe resources and pathways for racialized graduate students and their supervisors

Students and faculty commented on the need for a repository of resources for racialized graduate students and well-defined guidelines for reporting problems or concerns with their supervisors or program. This recommendation is two-fold:

9a. Creating a readily accessible central repository of relevant resources that effectively support racialized graduate students and their supervisors. For racialized graduate students, these resources might include listings of specific funding opportunities, events and promotion of existing spaces for racialized students. For supervisors, these resources might include, but are not limited to, the promotion of enhanced supervision workshops, guidelines for effective supervision of graduate students in general, and newly created guidelines for intentional supervision of racialized graduate students.

9b. Develop clear mechanisms for students to safely seek support when experiencing conflict with their supervisor or other concerns related to their program. This includes clearly stating appropriate campus resources (e.g. GPS, the Equity and Inclusion Office, the graduate program, the Office of the Ombudsperson for Students) and how they work together to support graduate students.

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The Effective Mentorship of Racialized Graduate Students

Project Final Report

“*[My experience being a racialized student on this campus is] “Underwhelming in terms of Black engagement. Overwhelming in terms of the time and energy I need... to create a sense of community and belongingness (energy and time that comes at the expense of my graduate work). Sad in terms of the Eurocentric standards of being, speaking, moving, etc. that I feel pressured to emulate (to the expense of my natural embodiment of being). Scary because of the isolation and vulnerability I experience.”*

– UBC graduate student

Introduction

Inspired by an [op-ed](#) by graduate student Dwayne Tucker, this initiative, funded by the Anti-Racism Initiatives Fund and the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies, focused on the complexities, gaps and possibilities in the mentorship of racialized students at UBC by calling on a constellation of graduate students, mentors and experts to share their thoughts.

The purpose was to highlight effective mentorship to amplify the value of ethnic and racial diversity at the core of graduate education excellence. This project was led by graduate students Dwayne Tucker and Negar Khodarahmi with support from Theresa Rogers, professor and former Associate Dean, Faculty and Program Development, and staff Kelli Kadokawa from the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies, and Emi Sasagawa from Faculty of Arts. In this two-phase project, we first conducted a survey and later incorporated focus groups to further discuss the mentorship experiences of racialized students. The project culminated in a full day forum.

Prior to creating the survey and conducting focus groups, we became familiar with the work of Anti-Racism and Inclusive Excellence at UBC (ARIE) and a project led by Dr. Annette Henry, UBC Professor of Education, on the success and wellbeing of Black graduate students in the Faculty of Education. The survey, focus groups, and one-on-one interviews confirmed that many racialized students have experienced challenges in their graduate student careers, including microaggressions, isolation and feeling underrepresented in their programs. Additionally, students shared positive experiences in situations where mentors and supervisors advocated for and supported them through difficult circumstances, noting how important this was for them to be able to progress further in their program.

Phase two of the project involved hosting a forum on June 24, 2022 at St. John's College on the effective mentorship of racialized graduate students, with approximately 60 attendees. The forum included panels and interactive sessions with students, a presentation on our survey and focus group findings, and offered opportunities for participants to provide feedback and share in discussion. At the forum, we were able to engage with topics that highlighted the value and current state of racial diversity in graduate school, as well as key challenges such as communication barriers, unconscious biases, lack of representation, and power differentials.

This initiative made space for racialized graduate students at UBC to have their voices heard, and their experiences acknowledged by and shared with UBC administration, faculty and beyond, with the aim of enhancing racialized graduate experiences at UBC.

Goals

The initiative highlighted four goals: 1) to create safe spaces and an open exchange on mentorship needs based on race and ethnicity, 2) to take a stand and amplify the value of ethnic/racial diversity at the core of graduate education, 3) to challenge existing

UBC Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies

barriers to a safer, more respectful, and equitable learning sphere for racialized graduate students, 4) to support the Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies' strategy which aims to enhance the quality of graduate student supervision.

Phase 1: Survey and Focus Groups

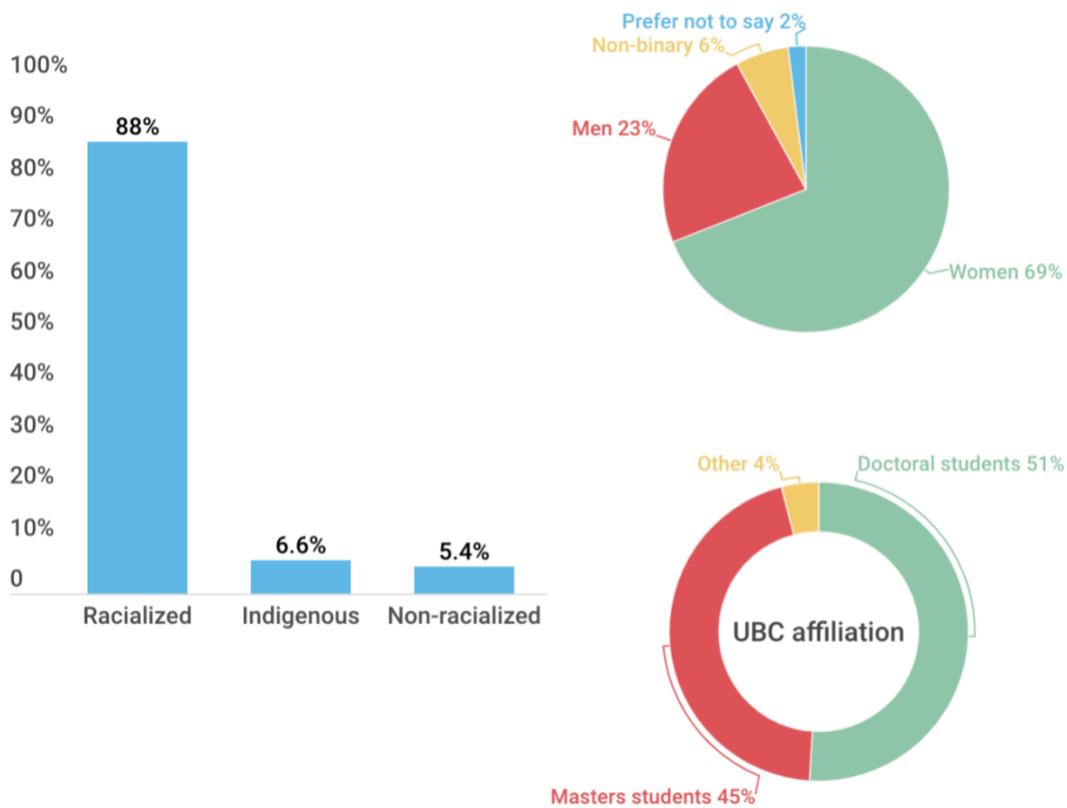
The EMRGS Survey

Project Challenges

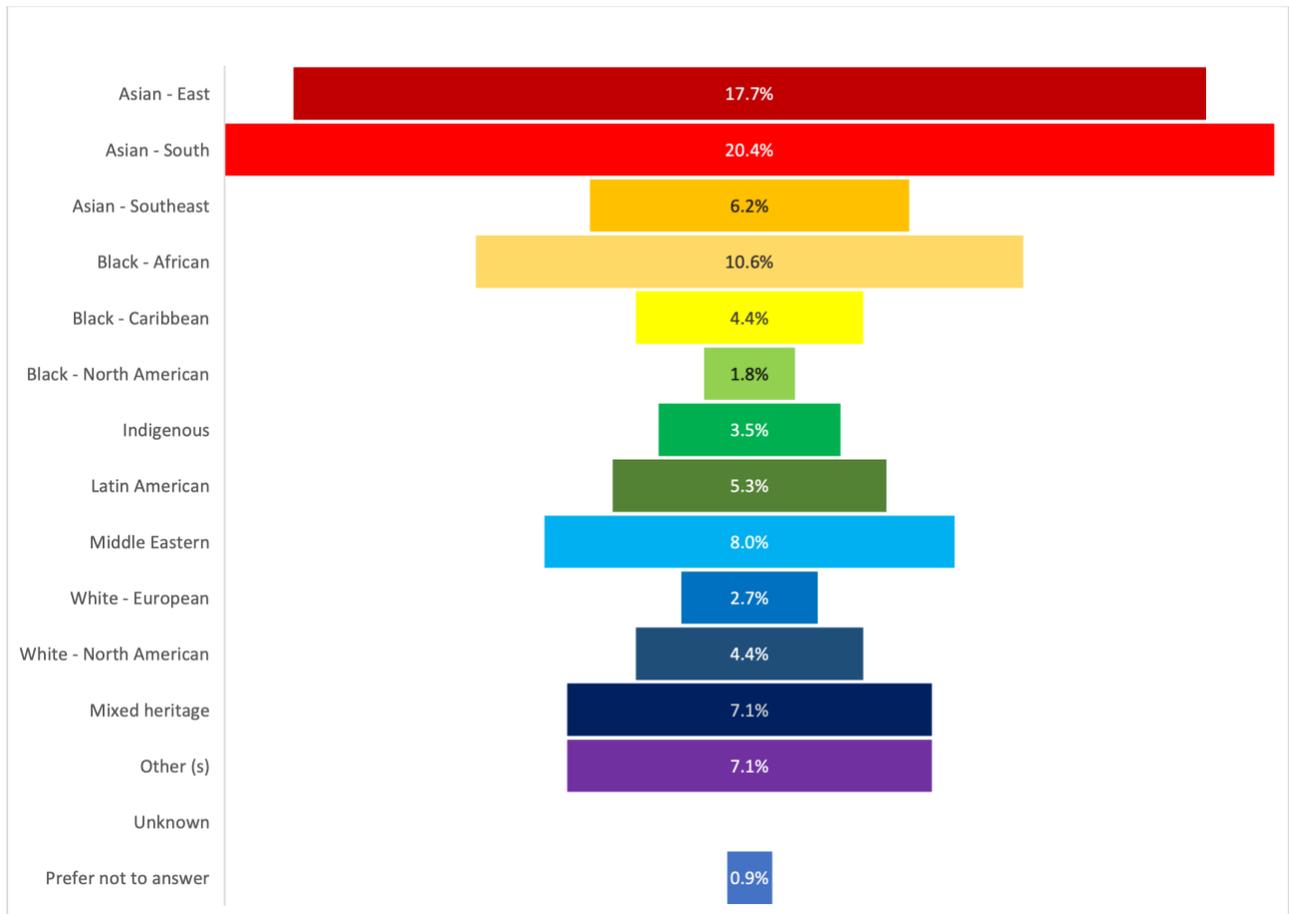
There were several challenges that should be acknowledged in our data collection process as they often expanded on the experiences of racialized students. For example, though low voluntary participation is a common challenge with survey data collection, when we asked graduate students to elaborate on why this might be, students expressed hesitation in participation for fear of lack of anonymity, that is, concern that their responses might not actually be confidential. This related to the power differential they felt between their department, faculty, the university and its graduate students. Additionally, during our data collection, there was a noticeable lack of participation by Black graduate students. This was somewhat remedied by targeting the population directly by advertising our survey through student organizations such as the Black Student Caucus, through our team's personal connections with the group. It must be acknowledged that without this personal connection, we likely would not have been able to improve the representation of our sample group. Furthermore, in our one-on-one interviews and focus groups, students revealed that they often do not consider themselves 'racialized', and our recruitment blurbs may have been overlooked. Students explained that a majority of international graduate students are not 'racialized' until they arrive in Canada. That is, when in their homelands, they were often a part of the majority and were not subject to the process of racialization that is prevalent in UBC and Vancouver. Nevertheless, graduate students who were familiar with these terms and racial issues still grappled with the ideas of their identity being tied to race and the concept of 'being raced' (more on this in our findings).

Survey Demographics

Ninety-one UBC graduate students participated in our survey. Sixty-nine percent of respondents identified as women, 23% as men, 6% as non-binary, and 2% chose not to disclose. Eighty-eight percent of respondents identified as racialized, 6.6% identified as Indigenous, and 5.4% identified as non-racialized. Fifty-one percent of respondents were doctoral students, 45% master's students, and 4% other, including alumni.



Racial identities



as excellent, followed by 20% as good, 10% neutral, 7% fair and 9% as poor. Regarding overall quality of communication with their supervisor, an increase in the poor category was observed (12%), and a dip in excellent (41%) as more students reported good (33%). The remaining reported 11% neutral and 4% fair in quality of communication between them and their supervisor(s). Overall, the majority still felt that their supervisor/advisor has enhanced their research or career (71%), while 15% said they had not and 13% chose not to disclose.

Mentors

Note: The survey included a definition of supervisor and mentor as different but noted that this could be the same person. This definition read as follows:

*“Your **supervisor or academic advisor** is the faculty member that supervises your thesis and program process, helps you reach scholastic potential, and chairs your Supervisory Committee (if applicable). A **mentor** is an individual that supports your learning and helps you develop your professional and personal potential. Mentoring relationships can be formal, informal, long-term or one-time connections. This can be the same person as your formal faculty supervisor or academic advisor or it can be someone else. You will have a chance to indicate this in the next sections.”*

Students were then able to select whether they had mentors by this definition. Of the 78 respondents that continued the survey, 49% said they had mentors, while 51% said they did not. Of those 38 students that indicated having a mentor, half (19) reported that this mentor was in fact their formal academic supervisor. Seven of these students indicated having mentors in addition to their formal academic supervisor. They reported these mentors provided a range of support, including advocating in difficult situations, offering

physical space for their work, empathizing with their experiences as racialized students, and helping them navigate discrimination.

Key Themes

Eight overarching themes were found across the data collected. The following themes were derived from students' self-described experiences at UBC which included difficult, complex, and positive experiences: 1) Experiences of microaggression and racism, 2) A lack of mentorship, role models and representation, 3) Social isolation and a lack of sense of belonging, 4) A lack of acknowledgement and validation for racialized student experiences, 5) The domination of Euro-centric teaching, curriculum and thinking, 6) Personal well-being in graduate school, 7) The complex intersectional experiences of graduate students, and 8) The positive experiences and examples of mentorship and supervision. Student experiences demonstrating each theme are shared as quotes below. Note that many of these themes overlap in various ways.

1) Lack of mentorship, role models, representation

Perhaps the most prevalent theme throughout the survey, lack of representation in UBC departments, was the single most reported issue. The topic of representation was brought up throughout the sharing of their graduate experiences across all questions in our survey, often interwoven with the topics of isolation, belonging, support received, and the lack of mentorship and role models:

"...I feel I don't get same support as other students"

"I have been excluded by mentors who preferred other ethnic races."

“Surrounded by majority White peers and instructors who I feel I need to explain my experiences and perspectives to when I can’t relate to them. What do I say to my instructor when they ask me why my parents never taught me how to ski or snowboard? First generation parents couldn’t focus on sports or hobbies when they were trying to establish a life in a new country. I feel majorly misunderstood or cast aside when I can’t relate to White experiences, and assimilation seems like the only way to make connections.”

“Sometimes I feel as though I am tokenized as I am one of two Indigenous graduate students in my program. I wish there was more representation of people of my ethnic background in my program.”

“There are very few Black students in my department. There are no Black faculty in the department and very few in the faculty. This does not even reflect demographic data/stats in BC or Canada. Representation matters and seeing others follow a path you would like to pursue is important.”

“I think the underrepresentation of Asians in my program/department and having no racialized mentors and faculty members to look up to made it difficult to picture myself as excelling in the field of education. This also contributed to my lack of belonging to UBC in general.”

“[My] program is not a place where I feel represented. During my time there have been two Indigenous professors who have come and gone. There is no content in my program representative of Indigenous culture beyond what me and another Indigenous student brought. There is openness to what we bring, but it should not be on us as students to bring this content into the program, and to pay for the privilege.”

“It is notable in Peter A Allard Law School that black students are very few and can be visibly counted. Representation of Black students is still wanting.”

“We certainly are not represented in the faculty of Social Work.”

“There is a lack of representation within the faculty, and I also feel like this is present in the research being done and what is valued or supported.”

“As our experiences shape us, sometimes no matter how non-racialized (for lack of a better word) faculty and staff try to support us, some things are still missing. It would be great to have more BIPOC faculty members, people who look like you, probably struggled with similar things you struggled or are currently struggling with to look up to.”

2) Microaggressions and racism

When we asked graduate students to share their experiences at UBC, most instances of the negative experiences involved microaggressions and racism on campus. Students explicitly shared their encounters with microaggressions and racism, ranging across the spaces of UBC, as well as the complexity of these experiences:

“I’ve personally experienced and/or witnessed others experience the following: microaggressions, insults, slurs, lack of mentorship, harassment, bullying, unfair work.”

“Racism might not be loud, but I can feel it in the small actions. Overall, I’m coping with it.”

“I think the experience can often be lonely and you can feel 'othered' quite quickly. Often being the only woman of colour in a room is disconcerting

because you know you'll have to 'gate-keep' even when you don't want to. There are various microaggressions to make you feel like you don't belong. It's not pleasant to say the least."

"Sometimes I feel like my opinions are ignored in a group setting for no good reason, however, when someone else says the same thing without an accent - it seems to have an impact on the course of discussions. Many interviewers often urge you to prove that you have a connection to the city, which may not exist for all candidates and comes off as distasteful when you have already established that you are new to the country and an immigrant."

"I have definitely experienced microaggressions from peers and faculty, there's a lack of representation of women of colour in Forestry, and I'm often aware of how different I look in comparison to my peers and faculty. I've had multiple white men as supervisors and I've been hired/accepted based on my credentials and academic merit, but I often can't help but wonder if the fact that I'm a woman of colour plays a role in my selection, i.e. it's a 'good look' for white men to supervise and train minority scientists."

"Yes, I have felt repercussions from the whiteness of my department. The overrepresentation of white faculty and students is predominantly felt in the classroom, rather than in social, individual mentorship, or general campus life. This has mostly looked like microaggressions in the classroom. As a white passing student, I have felt little racial aggression directed towards myself but have witnessed it countless times with other radicalized students. This negatively affects my own investment and feelings of safety in the program."

“Yes. In the past, the faculty members mentioned my accent, English, behaviour, and that was a very harmful, traumatic experience. I think they use such microaggression to build an abusive relationship with students.”

“I definitely experienced microaggression from my lab mates. No one wanted to help train me, one postdoc literally said she didn’t know why my supervisor told me she would train me. The second flat out refused then spread rumours about me that I was lazy. A third thought I wouldn’t make it because of my family responsibilities. It’s very lonely to not have any black professors in my field and very few students. I’ve often felt that black issues are played down at UBC but Asian and Indigenous issues gets them an entire center on campus—lots of funding and things move quickly. There’s nothing wrong with us and I’m sick and tired of being treated thus. It’s a double whammy for Black people, if you don’t succeed it’s because you’re Black, if you do succeed it’s because you’re Black and you got special diversity privileges. You can’t win. Most Black students have to have therapy just to finish a normal degree program. That’s insane.”

“Yes. Microaggressions from people who make me feel that I did not earn the right to be in Canada and should be 'thankful' that I was given the opportunity. I worked hard to be here and instead, I have my struggles and efforts reduced to an act of generosity based on my skin colour or the assumptions and perception that African [people] live off charity of white people.”

3) Social isolation and lack of sense of belonging

Though social isolation and finding a sense of belonging is a commonly expressed experience in graduate school, the graduate students participating in our survey often connected these experiences of isolation to the lack of representation in their programs and few pathways to connect with others of the same background:

“I often felt that the presence of racialized role models and mentors was lacking (i.e. having East Asians as faculty members to look up to). Perhaps there also could have been more course content written by racialized authors as well. In these ways, I felt that the sense of belonging was lacking.”

“I sometimes feel discarded or ignored by other peoples like Canadians, internationals are more welcoming and empathic.”

“I have decided that the MA will be the end of my academic career and I feel most barriers I face in making friends and connections is based on this decision rather than around identity (race, gender, etc.).”

“I recently moved from Toronto to Vancouver and have been feeling isolated due to the lack of diversity both on and off campus. There have been resources and supports available to assist with the transition, but none of these resources have connected me with other racialized students or have addressed any of the specific concerns/barriers I face as an ethnic minority.”

“Under-representation in the student population as well as faculty at the program level made me feel isolated, out of place, misunderstood, and lonely. Poor communication with my former supervisor (I changed teams) whom I felt was uncomfortable with me because I am Black. Felt unheard as a minority and an international in my program. [It] constantly reminded [me] “I was less than” from a systemic level.”

4) Lack of acknowledgement and validation for racialized student experiences

In our survey, we explicitly asked students whether they felt their supervisors acknowledged their experiences as racialized graduate students at UBC. The majority of student responses (55%) answered yes, with many feeling validated for sharing their experiences with their supervisor and lab groups. Some pointed out that this was particularly due to their supervisor themselves identifying as a person of color or their work/area of expertise related to topics of racial inequity.

“My supervisor is open to me talking about my experience as a racialized person as I integrate it into my research. She often asks for my perspective or opinions regarding things to do with racialized populations, and she brings up events that she thinks I would be interested in.”

“Yes, my supervisor's area of expertise relates to whiteness in nursing, so she has done a lot of the 'work' and we can just take off from there. I am not having to teach her things about my experience.”

However, for the remaining student responses, students reported these experiences were never acknowledged nor where these topics discussed, with a few reporting they were “not sure”:

“We never talked about my experience as a racialized experience. We talked about how I lacked a sense of belonging, but not how the underrepresentation of Asians contributed to that feeling.”

“Race has never been acknowledged or talked about since I started my program. I struggle internally about racial differences but don't feel like there is an environment at UBC to discuss it openly.”

“I am not sure. I think they try, but it can be challenging if the trying is not a genuine attempt to understand, or when it is merely seen as a label and not something that actually involves everyone - that it is relational.”

Additionally, some students speculated that the reason for this lack of acknowledgment was because their supervisor was unaware or oblivious to the issues racialized students face:

“I think this may stem from a place of oblivion where my supervisor isn't fully aware of the social issues and injustices that minorities are up against in academia.”

“Barely, he is not interested to be involved in this situation.”

Lastly, when we asked this same question about their mentors and their acknowledgment of racialized experiences, more students responded yes, that they did engage in these conversations:

“Yes, my mentor was very open to these types of conversations and we had like-minded approaches/opinions on topics of racial inequity.”

“Yes, we've talked about it a lot and did research.”

“Yes, but this is because most of the mentors are either racialized or have worked with me on projects pertaining to equity.”

“Yes, it is central to many of our conversations.”

5) Euro-centric teaching, curriculum, and thinking

When speaking to their negative experiences, some graduate students connected their challenges to the rigidity of the Euro-centric, colonial ways of teaching and thinking

that dominates UBCs academic spaces and most curricula. Some felt this was another form of discrimination they faced, as assimilation was required to continue navigating through their spaces:

“I feel like there is a type of student that is typically successful here and that if I do not assimilate to that standard I will be dropped from the program. The way to be successful here is very orthogonal to what my experience with being successful has been in the past. It has definitely made it challenging but I do not have any option if I want to stay in this program.”

“Race is made prominent, both in a way that I feel more vulnerable and more empowered. The most challenging part is not the day-to-day, but the embedded knowledge paradigm being an Anglo-Saxon, colonized way of knowing and being.”

“The courses almost solely use white perspectives (especially in the theories and practices we drew from), there is little consideration for Indigenous, Black, and Asian ways of knowing and living... or even reflection on why other theories are not brought up. In addition, I was taught to think and write in a depersonalized manner (i.e., researchers are objective and distant from research objects), but fundamentally goes against my values that we must bring our whole selves into our work.”

“I feel like the course material is still lacking diversity. Certain professors care more about racial diversity and decolonization than others, and it is quite inconsistent.”

“I have to deal with the lack of cultural diversity knowledge and experience from the professors because in their colonial point of view and ignorance, for example, they don't know how my origin country is called and they think the

name is the same that a Canadian province and they corrected me the name of my own country. This is just one clear example of racial ignorance, where professors and staff think they have to "illuminate" the racial "other" poor students."

6) Addressing personal wellbeing

Though the focus of the survey was to learn more about the experiences of racialized students, to gain an accurate picture of these experiences, we asked students about the expectations and roles of supervisors and mentors. In addition, we asked respondents what types of support they received from their supervisors and mentors and who initiated this support. Students reported that though personal wellbeing was not a responsibility of their supervisor or mentor, second to degree and career support (including meeting their program requirements to complete their degrees), supervisors and mentors often connected with them to check in on personal well being. Though the vast majority of students spoke about regular "well being check-ins", unfortunately, only few elaborated on what this looked like:

"During the period of political instability in my home country, I struggled to focus on my research. My supervisors were supportive of me taking time off my research to attend to my family's needs while I was not in the country. I appreciated the fact that they encouraged me to have guilt-free time off to support my family. My co-supervisor also encouraged me to talk to another racialized grad student from a similar background to share her experiences and how she managed to continue with her research in an emotionally distressing time."

“Frequent check-ins for my mental wellbeing, immense and consistent encouragement and support, flexibility and compassion. I could not have dreamt of a lovelier supervisor.”

“My supervisor has often reached out with well-being checks. She often asks how I am doing regarding stress, moving, and recommends things to do outside of academics.”

[on the topic of types of support received]

“...personal wellbeing (Sometimes, this can get awkward)”

“In terms of research, she is incredibly supportive. In terms of emotional/mental support, far less so. It's a very professional relationship where I don't feel super comfortable talking about personal issues (unless it is interfering with my work)”

As illustrated by the few instances above, addressing personal wellbeing was important to the role of a supervisor and mentor.

7) Intersectional experiences

We recognize that a student's experience can be multifaceted, as race or ethnic background is only one part of their identity. In fact, the following student's comment illustrates the way that many identities can intersect when facing the challenges as a member of multiple equity-seeking groups:

“I have experienced some microaggressions specifically aimed at being a woman of colour, and also a Muslim woman in science. Additionally, multiple people have made and continue to make comments about my religion and how it does not belong in science. While assuming that I am not religious

because I am doing a PhD in science, multiple people have told me that having a religion makes you "stupid" and people who believe in religion have no scientific logic. I'd like to think that I have changed their minds by being open about my religious beliefs and demonstrating my skill in logical thinking and science, but I believe many of these people still hold prejudices against racialized Muslims, and women of colour in general."

8) Positive experiences

Lastly, though a significant number of stories shared illustrated many of the challenges faced by racialized students at UBC, graduate students also shared many overwhelmingly positive experiences with their supervisors and mentors at UBC. As illustrated below, positive experiences occurred when students felt their supervisors and/or mentors were able to advocate, listen and empathize, as well as provide support in resources, time and giving space:

"The advisor I have is very approachable and I can ask her almost anything and I can tell her anything and that's what makes her special she has created a foundation where I can trust her which makes it easy for me to tell her what (sic) my academic needs are and also my personal needs."

On the topic of whether their supervisor met their expectations:

"Above and beyond! I have never had such an outstanding and understanding supervisor. I assumed, as most other students have complained, that grad school supervisors overload you with work and don't take the time to actually encourage the LEARNING process, only the doing process. My supervisor

advocates for the importance of learning and enjoying what you do, and challenging yourself to grow as an academic and a human.”

“My supervisor is beyond my expectations. She is a very caring person and professor. A rare combination of being super professional and having a big heart.”

“Yes. She has exceeded my expectations as a supervisor/boss and as a role model. She is very intentional and thoughtful about how she treats her students and provides us all with a balance of support and letting us work independently. She also modifies her mentorship/teaching methods to fit each student individually. She is excellent at making sure she meets (and helps us meet) all our academic and program requirements and responsibilities.”

“My supervisor has been an excellent support academically and personally. When I reached out to my supervisor regarding my mental health, she showed me immense support and sent me a list of resources available, including an external counsellor.”

“YES, actually, she is going above and beyond. She just really wants me to be successful and clearly believes in my research/vision...and that hasn't been very common in my academic experience so it's been wonderful to have this level of support.”

Furthermore, positive experiences also involved peer support, finding supportive communities and finding representation at UBC:

“In general, I've had a good experience because I think I've been able to find communities at UBC that are supportive (linked to the nature of my study which revolved around social justice)”

“The UBC Law School faculty have provided me with great support to the extent I don’t feel different from the rest of the students.”

“My experience has been balanced as I have met and engaged with many students from my home country, while also gaining international exposure through interactions with people with diverse backgrounds.”

“My program has hired many new radicalized faculty within the past few years. This has tremendously affected my experience by allowing me to develop a strong support system on campus.”

“Having a committee of racialised professors has undeniably helped me to feel more comfortable in my department as they consistently listen and support me and other racialised students in our department.”

The eight themes illustrated above provided us with an overall picture of the experiences of racialized graduate students at UBC. Though our team was happy to receive predominantly overwhelmingly positive feedback about supervisory and mentorship relationships at UBC, the challenges, negative experiences, and roadblocks shared by other students do raise concern. We hoped to expand on the survey findings in our focus groups held in April of 2022. We aimed to engage in conversations with current graduate students at UBC about their experiences and their supervisory and mentor relationships, as well as their recommendations and insight on what effective mentorship looks like. These conversations are summarized in the next section.

Focus groups and one-on-one interviews

Challenges

As with our survey data collection, there were some challenges in engaging with the racialized graduate student community when we sought out to conduct focus groups to elaborate on our survey findings. In particular, we were unsuccessful in getting much in-person participation, though we made several dates available. Our Zoom focus groups were most popular. We offered one-on-one interviews to those who were interested but not able to make it to the focus groups.

We were later told at the forum by students that the same hesitancy in disclosing their experiences in the survey was likely felt when choosing whether to engage with us in focus groups. We may have benefitted from doing more work to assure students that focus groups were being run by two graduate students (Negar Khodarahmi and Dwayne Tucker), and that no UBC faculty, administration or staff would be present. Additionally, we faced the same lack of participation from the smaller racialized groups at UBC that we did in the survey. Lastly, we were told to consider that the timing of the focus groups (April 2022) may have been a particularly busy peak time for students who are finishing up their Winter Term 2 courses, projects, and teaching.

Key Findings

Nine students participated in follow up focus groups and one-on-one interviews. In addition to expanding on our survey findings, these focus groups and one-on-ones aimed to lend space to more in-depth experiences in general and mentorship experiences in particular as racialized graduate students. Please note that we cannot express verbatim everything discussed; however, the following paragraphs capture the key findings of our discussions.

All groups and interviews began with an open exercise by asking: *What does the term 'racialization' or 'being racialized' mean to you?* In our largest focus group of six students,



discussion on this prompt led us to conclude that while we all identified as racialized students and have had the experience of ‘being raced’, the term “racialization” was complex and difficult at times to identify with. Participants then shared racism they had experienced on campus, corroborating findings from our survey that many students experienced tokenism and microaggressions in their programs at UBC. One student mentioned the use of tokenism and the fallacy of grouping all BPOC (Black and People of Color) students together, and the responsibility put on students of color to speak up and participate more in certain spaces, e.g. departmental EDI workshops. Another student spoke to the exclusion she experienced in her program, being perceived as less experienced and less competent than her peers in academic spaces such as her lab group. One student reported a “fear of asking ‘dumb’ questions”, a hesitancy she felt due to fear of judgment and further exclusion from her academic peers both professionally and personally (i.e. a social gap). Students also noted the lack of peer-to-peer support in their lab or supervisory groups. One student mentioned the importance of the racial make-up of your lab or supervisory group in creating safe and supportive spaces for racialized students.

It was immediately clear that these focus groups had created a safe space for participants to share the UBC experiences that cast doubt on the quality of graduate work and undermined their confidence. They expressed that white students seemed to be more informed about available resources and that a higher investment was made in white students over Black students. Additionally, they felt that white students, particularly those from Canada, were treated better, more pleasantly and with more respect. Students felt these experiences were connected to the domination of the Euro-centric curriculum at UBC, and the perception Eurocentrism was superior to other ways of knowing. Lastly, students shared the burden on racialized students to address these issues in their departments themselves. For example, attending the regular EDI and anti-racism workshops their departments had held and being asked to voice their thoughts and

engage more often than fellow students or faculty that did not identify as racialized. One student felt there was no accountability in making sure all faculty and students were engaging with these topics beyond these workshops, “nobody is doing the work”. This eventually led students to stop attending these workshops as the burden on racialized students to take the lead was not their responsibility.

On the topic of mentorship, interviewers aimed to guide the group through an open discussion while also prompting participants with some follow up questions developed to address some of the survey findings to set the context (See Appendix II for our Focus Group Question Guide). For example: *‘In our survey, we found that the majority of participants did not have a mentor outside of their assigned research supervisor or academic advisor. Why do you think that is?’*

Participants spoke to this question the most. They spoke to the difficulties of approaching and finding mentors at UBC. The group acknowledged how approaching mentors and networking was not only laden with cultural understandings but a learned skill in which they had little experience before entering graduate school. Another reason students noted that finding and building mentorship relationships was difficult was the underrepresentation of Black and People of Color at all levels in the university (e.g. student peers, faculty, and administrative staff). Furthermore, they unanimously believed UBC’s evaluation and reward system was flawed with respect to engendering good teaching and mentorship. Students noted that the UBC evaluation system (e.g. the promotion and tenure system) focused on the research-heavy, frequently published faculty, rather than on the teaching and mentorship of students. In their words, students believed there was little or no incentive for good mentors and teaching, as publications were more positively rewarded (i.e. received research grants). One student felt this extended to their lab and working groups. They believed there was sometimes little

incentive for peer support, effective communication, and management skills when supervisors did not encourage nor exhibit these traits themselves.

An additional challenge in building their mentorship relationships with their supervisors was recognizing the boundaries that were appropriate between a graduate student and supervisor. Often students felt this line was blurred, and power imbalances caused significant discomfort in maintaining a good relationship with their supervisors. One student noted that as a senior student, they had been one of their supervisor's first graduate students, and over five years this relationship grew to be more personal than the relationships the supervisor had with newer students. Another student spoke to the apprehension another faculty member felt when the student approached them for guidance when their own supervisor was not available. This faculty member's reason was that they didn't want to "step on any toes" by providing any guidance that should be coming from the supervising faculty member and urged the student to contact their supervisor instead. This indicated another set of boundaries that may be invisible to students but understood by faculty in departments to avoid conflict. However, this left the student with no hope of getting support from other faculty when mentorship may not be effective or available from their assigned supervisor. Money and funding were other points of tension that undermined supervisory relationships.

When speaking about positive experiences, students highlighted instances where mentors were able to advocate, listen, empathize, providing spaces to reflect, and express their experiences. For example, allowing time in group lab meetings to address concerns with inclusion and diversity. Additionally, they were able to provide support in resources and time. Participants agreed that these strong relationships were essential to their success in completing their graduate schoolwork. Though never perfect, when challenges were faced head on, students were able to alleviate a great deal of stress and uncertainty when they felt heard and received guidance that advanced their graduate career goals.

To wrap up our focus groups, we asked participants to share: *What does a good supervisor or mentor look like?* They felt this may be different for each student. However, keeping a good balance between professional and personal was essential. One student felt supervisors need to acknowledge the value of their graduate students' work and its impact in propelling faculty in their own careers. Many spoke of the need for effective communication skills and sufficient spaces created for students to feel comfortable to share. This includes acknowledging the power disparities that exist and affect supervisory and mentor relationships. Most importantly, students felt seeking mentors outside of UBC at other universities is necessary, as representation may be better in their various research fields outside of UBC and/or Canada. For this reason, they felt mentorship should be extended to include others outside the assigned supervisor, since the university's focus on bettering representation here at UBC will take time to produce tangible results.

Phase 2: Forum on Mentorship of Racialized Graduate Students

On June 24, 2022, the EMRGS team, with support from G+PS, hosted an in-person forum at St. John's College, which was also live streamed via Zoom, and focused on mentorship of racialized graduate students. Of the nearly 60 attendees, 27 were current graduate students, 16 faculty and 15 staff.

The forum featured opening remarks by project leader Dwayne Tucker and Susan Porter, Dean of the Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies, and two keynote speakers. The first keynote was delivered by Dr. Handel Wright, Senior Advisor to the President on Anti-Racism and Inclusive Excellence and Professor in the Department of Educational Studies in the Faculty of Education. Our second speaker was Dr. Sam Kenston, PhD student in Public Health, and current Graduate Student Society (GSS) President.

Dr. Wright covered a range of topics, referencing UBC's Anti-Racism and Inclusive Excellence (ARIE) task force; these topics included the importance of diversifying the student body at UBC as well as the faculty, the role of a sense of belonging, enabling infrastructure for addressing anti-Black racism and culture change, and the importance of establishing clear policies for ways to address conflict.

Dr. Kenston quoted author K. Odede who wrote "Talent is universal, but opportunity is not." In terms of graduate students, he pointed out that a racialized student must be "twice as good, work extra hard, publish in high impact journals, and get As in all coursework to be considered a great student," while less is generally expected of non-racialized students. He also noted, in his role as President of the Graduate Student Society, that numerous complaints, enquiries about resources on the UBC campus, or requests for help are received on a daily basis, mainly from international and racialized students.

In response to these conditions, Dr. Kenston underscored the importance of mentorship for racialized students within and beyond the supervisory relationship, arguing that multiple mentors can broaden knowledge and bring a variety of strengths. Effective mentorship of racialized students, he noted, includes an open and non-judgmental environment free of fear of being victimized or reprimanded. Echoing Dwayne Tucker, he argued that this kind of mentorship must be “intentional”, in terms of recruitment and support, creating an atmosphere where students can feel comfortable to speak up, and have their experiences and knowledge recognized and valued.

The forum also included a short presentation of project findings so far. The data collected was shared with a focus on the eight overarching themes found during the data analysis.

Following the keynote speakers and a presentation on project findings, a panel discussion included current UBC graduate students Dwayne Tucker, Katherine Cao, and Tebogo Leepile, and faculty members Dr. Bathseba Opini and Dr. Bhushan Gopaluni. The panel session was moderated by EMRGS team member and graduate student, Negar Khodarahmi. The panelists spoke primarily to the eight themes presented and shared additional thoughts on effective mentorship in general. They were able to illuminate the perspectives of both faculty and students in their experiences at UBC.

Faculty panelists spoke to the importance of well-being and proper acknowledgment of racialized student experiences. Student panelists echoed these calls to action with their own calls for centering intentionality in building mentorship relationships in the university, the importance of representation, and the need for the UBC community to address isolation caused by this underrepresentation of people, culture, and non-Eurocentric ways of being and knowing. Panelists also shared their own negative experiences of racism and microaggression in university spaces, the positive moves that were made in response by school leadership and faculty. Overall, they reinforced the experiences shared in our survey and focus groups.

An interactive group discussion with forum participants took place following lunch (both in person and online) and materials were provided for each group to engage with topics that highlighted the value and current state of racial diversity in graduate school, as well as key challenges such as communication barriers, unconscious biases, and power differentials. Participants were asked to share their own experiences and were asked to work together to share experiences and insights on one of the eight themes presented as well as solutions, recommendations, or suggestions for how to address these issues (which are reflected in our own recommendations below). Of note, forum participants were also able to share experiences that positively exemplified mentorship and supervision. Finally, groups were invited to participate in a “gallery walk” in order to see what other groups had been working on. The discussion materials can be found in Appendix III.

Forum Feedback

Following the forum, a voluntary evaluation form was sent to participants to gain feedback on the day’s events. The EMRGS team hoped that we could improve upon our forum structure and share this with similar projects that are undertaken in the future. The majority of this feedback was from graduate students (56%), while the remaining respondents identified as administrative staff (28%) and faculty (16%). Below is a summary of this feedback based on the questions asked.

To learn more about what we could improve upon, we asked: *Was there something you wished was addressed but wasn't?* The majority of responses to this question asked for more concrete examples and resources for faculty in their recruitment and support of diverse graduate students. For example, one respondent wished we had discussed current safe spaces for people having challenges with their supervisor. Another asked for more specific tips and plans for improving support—perhaps a document that is

developed and implemented in graduate programs on these topics. Some participants also mentioned they would have liked more time to go into more depth on certain topics, for example, the power dynamics at play in student-supervisor relationships. Others mentioned having calls to action, workshops provided to faculty and students, detailed plans for improving support for racialized students. Most importantly, one respondent here mentioned this about the survey in their conversations throughout the day:

“I wanted to add with regards to the survey that a few of us were nervous sharing our real experiences in the online survey. We discussed how we started it and then closed it because the idea of being identified while being honest about our experiences puts the graduate student at a lot of risk.”

This response was echoed in our in-person conversations at the forum as well, and helped to confirm and elaborate on our struggle to achieve a good response rate in our survey and focus group recruitment. Graduate students simply do not feel safe engaging in these topics with their program. As one student remarked:

“I was curious about the confidentiality of the survey itself. I assume the results will not be shared with faculty members, but having to input your program can cause some people to hesitate to fill it out honestly as sometimes there are very few people of colour in a particular program, it can be quite risky to speak out about racist remarks or microaggressions.”

In addition to asking about improvements, we asked: *What were one or two of the most compelling ideas for you?* Respondents touched on a variety of the subjects that were addressed throughout the day, but most notably, the conversations around the roles and expectations of mentors and supervisors, and whether these two were one and the same, or two different roles. Other topics that resonated with respondents were

representation, personal well being and intentionality in our work to support racialized students. One respondent's comments touched on almost all these notes:

“The idea of intentionality resonated with me, although it made me wonder what institutional resources (such as funding for students from diverse backgrounds) would be made available to enable mentors and supervisors to be intentional to the fullest extent possible. I also thought about the distinction between supervisor and mentor, which is an important point but also one that requires formal institutional structures and oversight to ensure that racialized and/or women faculty members (who are often untenured and in positions of less power in the academic environment) will not be disproportionately burdened with mentorship responsibilities while faculty members from non-minority or more privileged backgrounds can focus their valuable work time on research and supervision (i.e., outsourcing the social and emotional labor of mentorship to their minority and women colleagues). I was also very interested to hear about positive experiences among graduate students, which can illuminate what mentorship approaches are effective.”

Lastly, we asked our feedback respondents whether any of these ideas would inform their work, practice or mentor/mentee relationships going forward. We were happy to receive an overwhelming amount of ‘yes’ responses (78%) to this question with the remaining indicating ‘maybe’ (22%). To elaborate on this, we also asked: *If yes or maybe, can you provide examples?* Here are a few of their answers:

“I will probably start working on decentralizing Eurocentric focus on my research and when I guest lecture.”

“I realize that I do need to communicate to my supervisor more about my expectations and her expectations in mentorship.”

“I plan to spend more time talking to my more recent students (who entered UBC during the pandemic) about their professional development and career plans. Although this is something I talk to them about regularly, I was inspired today to think about different ways of having that conversation.”

“Meeting someone at their unique point of need and knowing that microaggression can come in the most subtle and unconscious forms.”

“Being intentional about fostering community in the lab.”

“I work in critical race theory so this is very helpful for my research. But more than that, it was kind of beautiful to have a place where you feel validated as a woman of colour graduate student. That you are not crazy for thinking about and feeling the microaggressions. That someone cares and that there are people who make us feel safe.”

Conclusion

We initiated this project to explore the complexities, gaps and possibilities in the mentorship of racialized students at UBC. We called on a constellation of graduate students, mentors and experts to share their thoughts in a survey and focus groups, followed by a one-day forum. We found eight key themes across the survey data; namely that racialized students experience:

- Microaggressions and racism on campus, including in relation to intersectional backgrounds;
- A lack of mentorship as well as a dearth of role models;
- Feelings of social isolation and often a lack of sense of belonging and wellbeing;
- A lack of acknowledgement and validation for their background and experiences and found a prevalence of Euro-centric teaching, curriculum, and ways of knowing.

Some students also commented on positive experiences, such as having supervisors and/or mentors who were able to advocate for them, listen and empathize, individualize their approaches, and provide resources, time and space. Many of these same themes were echoed during conversations at the focus groups and at the forum.

At the forum, we were able to hear from experienced faculty and student colleagues who offered not only their own stories, but also a range of ideas for improving how we mentor racialized students on campus. Based on these findings, we offer nine recommendations that call for various systemic approaches to better supporting the supervision and mentorship of racialized students.

Recommendations

Based on all of the above findings and stories, we have developed nine recommendations. Some of these recommendations can be taken up by the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies and/or by graduate programs and departments. Others are more general recommendations, several of which align with other campus reports, particularly the [ARIE Task Force Report](#). These recommendations are not necessarily distinct; they have places of overlap and interconnection.

1. Acknowledge and counteract racism on campus

Many students as well as staff and faculty participants at the forum discussed experiencing microaggressions and racism on campus, arguing that there are many unconscious biases at work. Participants called for more conversations and awareness on campus for racialized student experiences.

Therefore, in an effort to acknowledge and counteract racism on campus, our first recommendation is to continue to raise anti-racism awareness among current and potential supervisors and mentors. This includes defining and disarming microaggressions.

2. Provide intentional supervision for racialized students

In response to the many issues raised in this project, students, staff and faculty talked about the importance of “intentional” supervision of racialized students – a concept that was initially articulated by project lead Dwayne Tucker and reiterated by Dr. Sam Kenston, one of our keynote speakers at the forum.

Intentional supervision of racialized students is culturally sensitive and includes both a recognition and valuing of the experiences of our racialized students and appropriate

support for these students in a variety of ways, such as listening/being attentive to their voices, stories, concerns and wellbeing, and being inclusive in group settings, in research projects, and in offering an array of opportunities. In addition, it asks for open lines of communication to discuss experiences, interests and needs, as well as potential barriers, and to provide support in navigating the UBC system.

Therefore, our second recommendation is twofold: for all supervisors of graduate students to be intentional in these ways as they mentor racialized students, and that intentional and high-quality supervision of racialized students be acknowledged and rewarded, for instance, in the tenure and promotion process as well as in other ways.

3. Develop and implement specific workshops and training for supervising racialized students and culturally sensitive mentoring

Given the first two recommendations for anti-racist awareness and the importance of intentional mentoring of racialized graduate students, it is crucial to provide professional development for all current and potential mentors and supervisors. These workshops might include experienced and skilled mentors as well as the sharing of key principles and practices of mentoring racialized graduate students.

Therefore, our third recommendation is to create additional or enhanced workshops for supervisors, building on current supervisory approaches, principles and materials. These workshops would be led by the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies in consultation and partnership with units across campus (e.g. the Equity and Inclusion Office, the Office of the Ombudsperson for Students, VP Offices, the President's Office, etc.) as well as other faculties and academic programs, focusing on effective supervision of racialized students.

4. Provide additional mentorship for racialized students

Intentional and skilled mentoring and support might come from supervisors and, indeed, many students in this project commented on the mentorship provided by their supervisors, but many also talked about the important mentorship they received from other individuals. UBC might consider providing structural support for racialized students to find mentors beyond their supervisors, particularly racialized mentors.

Therefore, our fourth recommendation is to cultivate and support these additional experienced mentors across our campus and beyond, and also to create a community of excellent mentors where students and faculty can seek advice and support.

5. Increase the number of racialized faculty, staff and students on campus

Students in this project commented on the lack of racialized faculty, staff and students on campus. As a result, racialized students often feel they are tokenized or called upon to explain their backgrounds, experiences and perspectives. The University, together with faculties, must re-examine graduate admissions processes and address systemic biases and inequities in order to ensure greater representation on campus and build a sense of community.

Connected to recommendation four, our fifth recommendation is for the University to continue efforts to recruit, hire and admit more IBPOC faculty members, staff, and students. Racialized students often seek mentors who will be open to new avenues of research based on their backgrounds and interests, and who can act as role models. For this recommendation to be sustainable and scalable, UBC must provide appropriate support for racialized hires to ensure their capacity to supervise and mentor racialized students.

6. Create safe spaces that address feelings of social isolation and lack of belonging

Students in this project appreciated those supervisors and mentors who acknowledged their experiences and situations and who created safe and inclusive spaces where they felt supported and a sense of belonging. They also appreciated flexibility, compassion and clear indications by supervisors that they wanted students to be successful. Examples included professors who acknowledged their experiences, checked-in on how students were doing, and were able to provide resources for those who were struggling. And finally, students mentioned the need for clear mechanisms for reporting any concerns.

Therefore, our sixth recommendation is to encourage all supervisors and mentors to be aware of their students' wellbeing and to provide safe and inclusive spaces to express their experiences and concerns. This includes developing workshops that focus on the well-being of racialized graduate students, as well as creating program-level community spaces for these students. It may also include mentioning counseling and other resources as needed.

7. Decolonize Eurocentric curricula and perspectives

Many students commented on the prevalence of Eurocentric and colonial ways of knowing and teaching in curricula across campus and the pressure to assimilate. For instance, many of the readings shared are written by White authors, perspectives and examples shared are often colonial, and assignments, activities standards are often not inclusive.

Therefore, the seventh recommendation is for supervisors to be cognizant of both racist/oppressive and anti-racist/anti-oppressive pedagogies, and to familiarize themselves with various documents that offer a range of suggestions, such as the [Anti-Racism and Inclusive Excellence Recommendations for Teaching and Learning](#).

8. Increase funding opportunities for racialized students and create more equitable funding structures

The recommendation related to funding and resources for racialized graduate students includes three aspects: Increasing financial resources, creating and summarizing existing resources that are easily accessible from one place, and making clear the processes for seeking support when they are experiencing a conflict with their supervisor.

The Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies, as well as graduate programs and units, should continue to pursue additional funding earmarked for IBPOC students and distribute funding in ways that are transparent and equitable and that address any discrepancies across groups.

9. Provide clear and safe resources and pathways for racialized graduate students and their supervisors

Students and faculty commented on the need for a repository of resources for racialized graduate students, as well as well-defined guidelines for reporting problems or concerns with their supervisors or program.

Our ninth, and last, recommendation is therefore two-fold:

9a. We recommend the creation of an easily accessible central repository of resources that effectively support both racialized graduate students and their supervisors. For racialized graduate students, these resources might include listings of specific funding opportunities, events and promotion of existing spaces for racialized students. For supervisors, these resources might include, but are not limited to, promotion of enhanced supervision workshops, guidelines for effective supervision of graduate

students in general, and newly created guidelines for intentional supervision of racialized graduate students.

9b. Develop and provide clear guidelines and mechanisms for students to safely seek support when they are experiencing conflict with their supervisor or other concerns and issues related to their program. This includes clearly defining and identifying appropriate campus resources (e.g. Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies, the Equity and Inclusion Office, the graduate program, the Office of the Ombudsperson for Students) and how they work together to support graduate students.

Acknowledgements

The EMRGS team would like to acknowledge the generous funding support received from the Anti-Racism Initiative Fund and Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (G+PS), without which this initiative would not have been possible.

We have immense appreciation and respect for the graduate students who shared their lived experiences and perspectives, even when it may not have felt safe to do so. Your honesty is a valuable contribution towards improving the UBC experience for racialized graduate students.

The forum would not have been as compelling or engaging without our amazing keynote speakers, Dr. Sam Kenston and Dr. Handel Wright, and panelists, Katherine Cao, Tebogo Leepile, Bhushan Gopaluni and Bathseba Opini. There were many thoughtful takeaways from your profound insight, thank you. We would also like to recognize St. John's College and Henry Yu for welcoming us and providing a fitting space to host the forum.

The EMRGS graduate student leaders would like to highlight the staff coordinators who were the driving force behind this project: Kelli Kadokawa, Theresa Rogers and Emi Sasagawa. The EMRGS staff coordinators would like to shine a bright light on the graduate students who effectively and passionately led and nurtured this initiative, Dwayne Tucker and Negar Khodarahmi. It was an honour to share this space for this important work.

And finally, we would like to acknowledge all the people who are actively engaged in this discussion on the importance of effective mentorship of racialized students, asking questions, mentoring with intentionality, and affecting change, and all the racialized students who deserve to be seen, heard, and included.

Appendices

Appendix I - Qualtrics Survey

Effective Mentorship of Racialized Graduate Students

Inspired by an [op-ed](#) by graduate student, Dwayne Tucker, this initiative focuses on the complexities and gaps in the mentorship of racialized students at UBC by calling on a constellation of graduate students, mentors and experts. Our purpose is to highlight effective mentorship to amplify the value of ethnic/racial diversity at the core of graduate education excellence. We are conducting a survey and focus groups on the experiences of racialized students. This will be followed by a forum (planned for Spring 2022) that will address mentorship reflections from students and participating mentors, the value and current state of racial diversity in graduate school, as well as key challenges such as communication barriers, unconscious biases, and power differentials.

Study Procedures and Confidentiality: You will be asked to complete an online survey that includes questions about your background and your education, practice, and impact. **This survey will take about 12 minutes to complete, however, you may pause and come back to the survey using the same link at any time to finish and submit your responses.** This online survey used, Qualtrics, is hosted by UBC, in Canada and is compliant with BC's privacy act (FIPPA). The data collected is anonymous. Access to the information gathered throughout the study will be limited to those directly involved in this project. Your participation in this survey is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to answer any question or withdraw from the study without any negative consequences. However, please note that once you have submitted the survey you will no longer be able to withdraw as each survey is anonymous and there will be no way to identify your survey to exclude it.

At the end of the survey, you will be asked if you would like to participate in follow up, in-person focus groups where you may expand on your experiences. A separate page will open up for your contact information so as not to link your survey answers to your contact information. Participation, again, is entirely voluntary and you can opt out at any time. There will be a separate consent process if you decide to take part in a follow up focus group.

Additionally, at the end of the survey you will have the option to **enter into a prize draw for one of two UBC Food Services \$50 Gift cards!**

This initiative will allow racialized graduate students at UBC to have their voices heard, and their experiences acknowledged and shared with UBC administration, faculty and beyond in an attempt to enhance racialized graduate experiences at UBC. Our goal is to contribute toward a safe, respectful, and more equitable learning sphere for racialized graduate students, and to amplify awareness of these values as part of the university's goal to attract, expand and retain a diverse and thriving community

Disclaimer: Some of the questions contained in this survey can be of a personal nature and pertain to sensitive topics for some.

Contact Information: If you have any questions or concerns about this survey please contact **Negar Khodarahmi (negark@ubc.student.ca)**.

It is assumed that by completing and submitting this survey, you are consenting to participate in this survey.

1. What gender do you identify as? (Man, woman, two-spirit, non-binary, other, prefer not to say)
2. Do you identify as Indigenous? (yes, no, prefer not to say)
3. Do you consider yourself a "racialized" student? (yes, no)
4. Which of the following best describes your racial identity? Please select all that apply.
(Asian – East (e.g. Chinese, Japanese, Korean), Asian – South (e.g. Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan), Asian – Southeast (e.g. Malaysian, Filipino, Vietnamese), Black – African

(Ghanaian, Kenyan, Somali), Black – Caribbean (Barbadian, Jamaican), Black – North American (e.g. Canadian, American), Indigenous (within North America), Latin America (e.g. Argentinian, Chilean, Salvadoran), Middle Eastern (e.g. Egyptian, Iranian, Lebanese), White – European (e.g. English, Italian, Portuguese, Russian), White – North American (e.g. Canadian, American), Mixed heritage (e.g. Black – African & White – North American), Other, Unknown, prefer not to answer)

5. What is your current status at UBC? (master's, doctoral, other)
6. What program are you enrolled in at UBC? Please type a keyword in the text field and pick one of the suggested programs from the list.
7. Please indicate whether your program is thesis/dissertation-based, course-based, other.
8. How would you describe your experiences as a racialized graduate student at UBC?
9. Do you feel that you have experienced challenges or roadblocks related to being a racialized graduate student? (E.g. Experienced microaggressions, lack of mentorship, don't feel represented in your program/department, etc.)
10. The next sections will be asking questions regarding your experiences with your supervisor(s)/academic advisor(s) and/or mentor(s).

*Your **supervisor or academic advisor** is the faculty member that supervises your thesis and program process, helps you reach scholastic potential, and chairs your Supervisory Committee (if applicable).*

*A **mentor** is an individual that supports your learning and helps you develop your professional and personal potential. Mentoring relationships can be formal, informal, long-term or one-time connections. This can be the same person as your formal faculty supervisor or academic advisor or it can be someone else. You will have a chance to indicate this in the next sections.*

Supervisor/Advisor Experiences

The following questions are regarding your experiences with your supervisor/academic advisor. Your supervisor or academic advisor is the faculty member that supervises your thesis and program process, helps you reach scholastic potential, and chairs your Supervisory Committee (if applicable).

11. Do you have any formal faculty supervisors/advisors? (yes, no)
12. How long have you been working with your supervisor(s)/advisor(s)? (0-2 years, 3-4 years, 5+ years)
13. How were you originally matched with this supervisor(s)/advisor(s)? Please select all that apply. (I chose my supervisor(s)/advisor(s), I was assigned by supervisor(s)/advisor(s), I was chosen by my supervisor(s)/advisor(s), unsure, other, prefer not to say)
14. How would you describe your experiences with your supervisor(s)/advisor(s) at UBC? (Excellent, good, neutral, fair, poor)
15. How do you feel about the overall quality of the support you currently receive from your supervisor(s)/advisor(s)?
16. For what types of situations do you approach your supervisor(s)/advisor(s)? (E.g. class assignments, program requirements and progress, examinations, financial matters, personal wellbeing, etc.).
17. What types of support have been initiated by your supervisor(s)/advisor(s)? (E.g. wellbeing check-ins, degree and career support, academic subject knowledge, presence of a role model, etc.).
18. How do you feel about the quality of communication between you and your supervisor(s)/advisor(s)? (Excellent, good, neutral, fair, poor)
19. Do you feel your supervisor(s)/advisor(s) are meeting your expectations of their role and responsibilities to you? Why or why not?

20. Do you feel your supervisor(s)/advisor(s) have enhanced your research or career? (yes, no, prefer not to say)
21. Do you feel your supervisor(s)/advisor(s) have acknowledged and or recognized your experience as a racialized graduate student?
22. Can you share a scenario or situation that reflects your experience as a racialized graduate student in which your supervisor(s)/advisor(s) were supportive, or in which you would have appreciated more support? (E.g. advocated for you in difficult circumstances, helped when you faced systemic challenges, etc.).

Mentor Experiences

The following questions are regarding your experiences with your mentor(s).

A mentor is an individual that supports your learning and helps you develop your professional and personal potential. Mentoring relationships can be formal, informal, long-term or one-time connections. This can include your formal faculty supervisor or academic advisor.

23. Do you have any mentors? (yes, no)
24. Is (one of) your mentor(s) also the supervisor you indicated in the previous section? (yes, no)
25. You have indicated that one of your mentors is also your supervisor. Do you have any other mentors you'd like to share about? (yes, no)
26. How did you originally connect with your mentor(s)? Describe their role.
27. How long have you been working with your mentor(s)? (0-2 years, 3-4 years, 5+ years)
28. How would you describe your experiences with your mentor(s) at UBC? (Excellent, good, neutral, fair, poor)
29. How do you feel about the overall quality of the mentoring you currently receive from your mentor(s)? (Excellent, good, neutral, fair, poor)

30. For what types of situations do you approach your mentor(s)? (E.g. class assignments, program requirements and progress, examinations, financial matters, personal wellbeing, etc.).
31. What types of support have been initiated by your mentor(s)? (E.g. wellbeing check-ins, degree and career support, academic subject knowledge, presence of a role model, etc.)
32. How do you feel about the quality of communication between you and your mentor(s)? (Excellent, good, neutral, fair, poor)
33. Do you feel your mentor(s) is/are meeting your expectations of their role? Why or why not?
34. Do you feel your mentor(s) has/have enhanced your research or career? (yes, no, prefer not to say)
35. Do you feel your mentor(s) has/have acknowledged and recognized your experience as a racialized graduate student?
36. Can you share a scenario or situation that reflects your experience as a racialized graduate student in which your mentor was supportive, or in which you would have appreciated more support? (E.g. advocated for you in difficult circumstances, helped when you faced systemic challenges, etc.).

Appendix II - Focus Group Questions & Materials

Icebreaker: What does the term 'racialization' or 'being racialized' mean to you?

Definition: "The concept of racialization refers to the processes by which a group of people is defined by their "race." Processes of racialization begin by attributing racial meaning to people's identity and, in particular, as they relate to social structures and institutional systems, such as housing, employment, and education. In societies in which "White" people have economic, political, and social power, processes of racialization have emerged from the creation of a hierarchy in social structures and systems based on "race." The visible effects of processes of racialization are the racial inequalities embedded within social structures and systems." - U of Winnipeg

1. Topic: Racism, what it looks like on our campus and university spaces off campus.
 - a. In our survey, 96% students shared a variety of different experiences they've had on campus with regards to discrimination and racism that affected their mentorship experiences. What have your experiences been like?
 - b. Many positive experiences were also shared in our survey, especially when a mentor was able to advocate and support students faced with a difficult situation. Does anyone have any of those types of experiences to share?
2. Topic: A good mentor
 - a. What does a good mentor look like? What qualities does a good mentor have? What actions do they take?
 - b. Prompts if needed: Does your supervisor or mentor acknowledge your experiences as a racialized student? What kinds of things have they done to support you that have left an impression on you? Share stories about situations that you got support, did not get support.
 - c. In our survey, we found that the majority of participants did not have a mentor outside of their assigned research supervisor or academic advisor. Why do you think that is?
 - d. What if any recommendations or suggestions would you have with regards to mentorship of racialized students at UBC?
3. Topic: "Doing academia", being able to discuss these topics
 - a. Are there spaces created or existing for you, as a racialized student, to speak to these topics of mentorship, the racialized experience, [whatever comes up in question 1-2] in your program?
 - b. Some students mentioned that there is a heavy pressure to assimilate to "doing academia" a certain way, e.g. "the Western way". Do you feel academia looks different for BPOC students?
 - c. Students in our survey mentioned that it was often easier to speak and research these topics when their own supervisors and mentors also researched and

advocated for BPOC students in their work or are BPOC themselves. Has this been true for any of you here?

- d. What if any recommendations or suggestions would you have for BPOC students studying at UBC?
4. Topic: Supervisors/Mentors & advocacy
 - a. In our survey, the majority of students said they received supervisor initiated supports like academic subject knowledge, degree and career support, as well as “wellbeing check ins”. If you received such support, what did these wellbeing check-ins look like for you? What kinds of things were discussed at the wellbeing check ins?
 - b. Other students of course mentioned they were uncomfortable in discussing personal topics (beyond their studies) with their supervisors, why do you think that might be?
 - c. Do you think you would be more comfortable speaking to a mentor that is not your assigned supervisor? Why or why not?
 - d. Extra Q if time allows: Has anyone here been a mentor or mentee in the past? What was that experience like for you? What did you take away from that experience?
 - e. Recommendations/suggestions?
 5. Topic: What does representation look like at a university?
 - a. In our survey, students mentioned a lack of representation on campus, for example in faculty/students and some of their curriculum. What do you feel needs to be done to increase representation?
 - b. Are there other areas that lack representation that we haven’t talked about?
 6. What does an inclusive campus look like, especially for racialized grad students?
 - a. Prompts: What kinds of things help you to feel comfortable on campus? What kinds of things help you to feel included and acknowledged in campus spaces?
 - b. What has helped? And if you could, what would you change?
 - c. Specific ways to support (Student recommendations)

Appendix III - Notes on Forum Themes Groups

Themes

Theme 1: Microaggressions & Racism	
Online Zoom and Table 1	
Your experiences	Examples of things you've done to address this
<p>Supervisor does not necessarily need to be a mentor, his role is academic supervision.</p> <p>Representation does matter - faculty and students.</p> <p>Labour required of people who represent diversity – outsized.</p> <p>When you come to UBC and don't see people like you – how do you provide mentorship for them?</p> <p>As a non-racialized faculty I have a White mentor who has educated himself.</p>	<p>Mentorship – found a Black female mentor in U.S. (zoom interactions). She understood, could relate, checked on mental health and related it to academics</p> <p>Initiated Speaker series – Where are the Black people? Connected to Black Faculty.</p> <p>How might we re-allocate resources.</p> <p>Not mentees role to educate. Just ask how they are doing. More faculty members need to show they understand the culture, climate, etc. Not an expert but I understand. Sharing the burden.</p>

<p>Unconscious bias</p> <p>Addressing with students without acknowledging others</p> <p>Instructors chose a reading with racist stereotypes in it.</p>	<p>Re-evaluated the applicant list</p> <p>Instructure re-evaluated the reading</p>
<p>Other comments:</p>	

Theme 2: Lack of Mentorship, role models, representation

Table 2

Your experiences	Examples of things you've done to address this
<p>Mentor assumed low performer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assumed didn't contribute to group work-failed assignment - Had to prove myself/not supported <p>Feel like continuously put on low side of bell curve</p> <p>Imposter syndrome</p> <p>Survived by personal supporters/services</p> <p>Feeling of isolation- only Black, had to work twice as hard to be 'seen'</p> <p>Felt racism underlied lack of follow up for counselling/mental health</p> <p>Challenges in dealing with prejudices around background, to interact + work with others</p> <p>Feel lost, confused, anxious- cultural change, no guidance</p>	<p>Training program for mentorship</p> <p>Criteria for promotion/tenure</p> <p>Students should be made aware they can change supervisors/supported by program</p> <p>Diversifying faculty</p> <p>Peer mentors- among cohorts/organized by grad students or program</p> <p>Use community.grad.ubc.ca</p> <p>Forums like this one- what next? If I do it again - hear perspectives from audience - faculty and students</p> <p>A way to hear experiences of students who changed supervisors- successfully and unsuccessfully</p> <p>Faculty profiles - think about tick-box for willing to be mentor</p>
<p>Other comments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Program identify mentors, set up sessions ~once/term 	

Theme 3: Lack of belonging and social isolation Table 3	
Your experiences	Examples of things you've done to address this
<p>Different training & different goals</p> <p>Pop culture references that don't apply to everyone</p> <p>Denigration of another race or cultures - Music/art/celebration</p> <p>Poor representation of racialized groups in Syllabi/curriculum</p>	<p>Everyone is responsible for ensuring that everyone else feels engaged</p> <p>Potluck approach- sharing cultures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Potluck instead of drinks - Being sensitive to diff. financial situations - Don't make assumptions <p>Having an assigned 'Buddy' to welcome them and orient them to lab/new city/new country</p> <p>Diversifying curriculum</p> <p>Being intentional about <u>inclusion</u></p> <p>Brochure with summary of resources for racialized students & international students</p> <p><u>Intentional about = dissemination of information</u></p>
<p>Other comments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Regular check-ins; reach out rather than waiting to hear more ● Calendar of sig. dates 	

Theme 4: Lack of acknowledgement, validation for racialized student experiences	
Table 4	
Your experiences	Examples of things you've done to address this
<p>Needing to support & congratulate yourself</p> <p>Being met with silence or inaction</p> <p>Effort does not always produce the same outcome</p> <p>Not being heard or being belittled for your questions. Being misunderstood</p>	<p>Possible solution:</p> <p>Better communication between students & supervisor on what students need</p> <p>Getting to know each other more personally</p> <p>Culturally sensitive mentoring</p> <p>More specific training for mentorship skills</p>
<p>Other comments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Re: Funding and scholarships: discrepancy in who is allowed to apply for what funding. 	

Theme 5: Euro-centric teaching, curriculum, and thinking Online Zoom and Table 5	
Your experiences	Examples of things you've done to address this
<p>Not using inclusive examples for practical examples in class</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ex. using hockey <p>Only being asked for your opinion at the end and not in the process</p> <p>Euro-centric thinking that forgets we have a different background.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - For example, in a study/class where people are asked to describe their personal bedroom as a part of an 	<p>Disciplinary changes. Driven by meetings where issues come up. Versus individual faculty members.</p> <p>Eurocentric view detrimental in research (and assessment...)</p> <p>Anti-racist caucus meetings monthly. (LLED)</p> <p>How to develop anti-racist perspectives.</p> <p>Overcoming Eurocentric syllabus. Developed toolkit.</p> <p>Looking for examples that merge cultures e.g. Western culture and Indigenous people</p> <p>Include views and perspectives of under represented people in curriculum</p> <p>Including the power of narratives and symbolisms</p> <p>Inviting guest speakers to EDI groups to classes and making your students' studies</p>

<p>exercise; it leaves out students who have never had a personal bedroom until university</p> <p>Streamlined way of thinking</p>	<p>take EDI bias into consideration</p> <p>In designing teaching systems, include this diversity from the beginning into the process and not just at the end. The process is more important than the goal</p> <p>Include several schools of thoughts in a field such that students are exposed to other areas of thinking outside the Euro-centric environments</p>
<p>Other comments:</p>	

Theme 6: Addressing personal well being	
Table 6	
Your experiences	Examples of things you've done to address this
Students facing burnout	(Faculty/Staff more intention to create diverse cohorts
Stress (during exams, research)	(Faculty/Staff) early alert and increased supports students
Barriers to communication	Increasing awareness regarding resources ^
Lack of motivation	(Faculty/staff) office hours *Accessibility*
Finances	Identify the root causes to barriers
Isolation	Dedicate time and resources to resolve issues (not just lip service)
Identity (race, religion, gender, sex. Orientation, status)	Inclusivity training with faculty/staff
Culture shock	Mentorship sessions between faculty and students for TAs (applicable to many relationships)
Expectations from transition (ugrad to grad)	Faculty of Medicine peer mentorship program (1-year) (compensation?)
Other comments:	

Theme 7: Intersectional Experiences	
Table 7	
Your experiences	Examples of things you've done to address this
<p>Curriculum assumed background of individuals was Eurocentric</p> <p>Being the only Black person in the programme and traversing the subtleties of discrimination/ vs bias</p> <p>Not taking your experiences into account</p> <p>NOT OVERT (MOs + things)</p>	<p>Speaking out</p> <p>Discussion with relevant individuals</p> <p>Having sharing spaces</p>
<p>Other comments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Recognizing the differences and acknowledges and finding ways to help (eg. pre-assessments for classes) ● Workshops, outreach programs at different levels 	

Theme 8: Positive experiences Table 8	
Your experiences	Examples of things you've done to address this
Peer support from senior students Informal support from unexpected places Connection through desperation Supervisor shows <u>ME</u> off Supervisor helps me connect with other potential mentors	Official supervisors + mentors should be examples of ideal mentors to student mentors Improve diversity Professional pipeline to create more opportunities for informal mentorship of racialized students Shows validation Realises gaps in potential/capabilities. + Cares enough to identify other relevant resources/mentors
Other comments:	

Goals

Goal 1: Safe spaces Online Zoom and Table 1	
Experiences	Ways to address this
Recruit/appoint designated graduate advisor	Check in with students Creating a space for reaching out. Say if not doing well. Space where students feel supported. Have an open conversation early on about styles, approach - not all students and faculty want to check in on wellbeing. Training for faculty Setting expectation for faculty
Other comments: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lessen the burden on racialized graduate students 	

<p>Goal 2: Take a stand</p> <p>Zoom Online, Table 3 and Table 4</p>	
Experiences	Ways to address this
<p>Taking a stand often comes with unacknowledged emotional labour or risk</p>	<p>Student interactions can be tricky. University may not be responsive in addressing toxic behaviour of supervisors.</p> <p>Ways to mediate in difficult situations observed between supervisors and students. How to address problems early on. Issue of collegial relationships.</p> <p>Celebrating different experiences and sharing culture</p> <p>Team building that allows people to share experiences/backgrounds (Share a photo from your phone)</p> <p>Promoting multiple mentorship modes</p> <p>Tapping existing resources</p> <p>More systematic support of grad student well being (Not up to supervisor)</p> <p>Faculty sharing how they have succeeded in recruiting and supporting diverse students</p> <p>Training for supervisors regarding mentoring, supervision to consider individualised situations</p> <p>Larger decolonization work</p>

Other comments/goals:

- More forums to problem solve these issues
- Mandated training for faculty in these issues. Those who need the information most, won't get it.

Goal 3: Challenge barriers Zoom Online, Table 5, and Table 6	
Experiences	Ways to address this
<p>Ineffective lab group dynamic</p> <p>Getting left out of informal group/peer settings being the only racialized student of a particular descent</p> <p>Disconnect in the department</p> <p>Onus on students from groups to resolve their own issues, often without resources</p> <p>Leadership being predominately white, cis-gender, heteronormative</p> <p>Barriers to realising personal goals as opposed to prescribed ones</p> <p>Opportunities to raise issues, more formalised, change driven channels</p> <p>Application process not equitable</p> <p>Funding for international and EDI groups</p>	<p>Create affinity groups of supportive faculty mentors who can be mobilized in contexts of admissions of underrepresented students. Where a student (or faculty member) can seek support. Related to faculty hiring and representation. Can be institutional level.</p> <p>Supervisors should create spaces for peer mentorship</p> <p>Think globally and act locally. Have groups in departments before or simultaneously with university-wide groups.</p> <p>More equitable funding structures that recognize research goals and topics</p> <p>More inclusive hiring practices and less precarious employment</p> <p>Better channels and formalized structures for students to redress issues (Forums, committees, focus groups, town halls, etc.) ← Must be well addressed and supported</p> <p>Institutional review of admission practices</p>
Other comments/goals:	

<p>- Did you even do it this year? Last year?</p>	
<p>Other comments/goals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Enhance uptake of resources	

Appendix IV - Budget

This project was funded by the UBC Anti-Racism Initiative Fund (ARIF) and Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (G+PS). We received \$5000 in ARIF funding and \$3750 in G+PS departmental funding giving us a total budget of \$8750. The breakdown includes:

- Phase 1 (Focus groups and planning)
 - Grad student support, \$1682.54
 - Focus group catering & participation, \$137.56
- Phase 2 (The Forum at St. John's College)
 - Honorariums, \$750
 - Catering, 2567.46
 - Grad student support, \$3365.17