

Wellbeing x Equity Podcast Series

Improving IBPOC Wellbeing at UBC

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Land Acknowledgement

This work was produced on the unceded and stolen territories of the x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam), s^kwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and selílwitlh (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations. I acknowledge my responsibility as a settler who was born, raised, and currently resides on these territories to persistently participate in acts of decolonization and solidarity led by Indigenous peoples.

Indigenous concepts of wellbeing have existed since time immemorial and cannot be separated from the land. Despite the persistence of settler-colonial genocide, Indigenous wellbeing and worldviews actively exist today through powerful resistance by these communities. It is essential that the work produced for the Wellbeing x Equity Podcast Series embed meaningful engagement with, and learning from, the Indigenous peoples whose land UBC's three campuses occupy, specifically x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam), s^kwxwú7mesh (Squamish), selílwitlh (Tsleil-Waututh), and Syilx Okanagan Nations.

Introduction

The Wellbeing x Equity Podcast Series project was imagined by Indigenous, Black, and people of colour (IBPOC) communities at the University of British Columbia (UBC).

Vision

To improve the individual and collective wellbeing of Indigenous, Black, and people of colour faculty and staff at the University of British Columbia.

Mission

To create a podcast which amplifies and connects the voices of Indigenous, Black, and people of colour faculty and staff at the University of British Columbia to share experiences, foster social connections, improve IBPOC solidarity, and advance a community of support.

Background

The Equity & Inclusion Office in partnership with UBC Wellbeing identified a mutual need to support Indigenous, Black, and people of colour communities in relation to workplace and community wellbeing at the University of British Columbia. The development of a podcast series to amplify IBPOC voices is an attempt to address challenges, successes, and questions around wellbeing for IBPOC faculty and staff at UBC.

This project is based in the collaborative visions of the Equity & Inclusion Office's IBPOC Connections¹ group as well as the interdepartmental Wellbeing Strategic Team². Their collective goals include:

1. Fostering dialogue and engagement within the UBC community to deepen understanding and capacity for action toward a more equitable and inclusive community;
2. Amplifying voices of equity-seeking community members by highlighting IBPOC research and equity-enhancing research, as well as honouring community organizing;
3. Strengthening collective impact by bringing community members, units, departments, and faculties engaged in justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion efforts together to collaborate on the development of social connection through a podcast series.
4. Developing resources and contributing to research narratives that prioritize health and wellbeing of those that have been historically, persistently, or systemically marginalized.

¹ University of British Columbia. (2021). IBPOC Connections: Staff & Faculty. <https://equity.ubc.ca/ibpoc-connections/>

² University of British Columbia. (2019). Wellbeing Strategic Framework. <https://wellbeing.ubc.ca/framework>.

This podcast is a project that seeks to support the meeting of targets outlined in the UBC Wellbeing Strategic Framework; Building an Inclusive UBC: An Inclusion Action Plan; as well as UBC's Focus on People 2025 Catalyst 1: *I am part of a diverse, safe, inclusive, and vibrant workplace.*

Position Statement

I am a second-year graduate student pursuing a Masters of Community and Regional Planning, focused on Indigenous Community Planning. I have a Bachelor of Arts in Gender, Race, Sexuality and Social Justice, as well as a Certificate in Nonprofit Management. My positionality intersects through my identity as a queer, mixed race South Asian and white ciswoman living as a settler on the unceded and stolen territories of the x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam), sk̓w̓x̓wú7mesh (Squamish), and sel̓ílwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations. I am committed to intersectional antiracist feminism grounded in decolonization and relationships of solidarity across IBPOC communities.

Research Approach

Research for this project included primary and secondary research with the intent to provide the groundwork and framework for the Wellbeing x Equity Podcast Series.

Secondary Research

Initial research was done through the collection of content and resources relevant to the creation of a podcast series focusing on IBPOC wellbeing at an academic institution. I constructed a literature review focusing on antiracism, equity, diversity, and inclusion work at academic institutions. Then I collected and reviewed the UBC strategies, frameworks, plans, and initiatives relevant to wellbeing, antiracism, equity, diversity, and inclusion work. Finally, I compiled a content bank of podcasts that were seeking to meet similar goals around equity and wellbeing.

Primary Research

Interviews were conducted with Indigenous, Black, and people of colour faculty and staff UBC. Participants were provided with guiding questions³ prior to their interview. They were also encouraged to share anything outside of the guiding questions that they felt was important to the project. Additionally, participants were given time to ask me questions about myself, the research process, and the project. The interviews were conducted in a one-on-one format over video call. All information collected from these interviews has been anonymized.

³ Appendix A.

Necessary Additional Research

It is important to note that while systemic power is disproportionate across the faculty community at UBC, the disparity along the spectrum of power for staff is significantly wider. The initial community engagement work done in this podcast does not adequately reflect the diversity of UBC staff experiences. Next steps for this project need to prioritize the voices of UBC staff working in the service and custodial sectors, as well as staff who were not able to conduct their work duties from home during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Summary

The research highlighted four overarching themes relating to IBPOC wellbeing at UBC. These themes will be expanded upon and woven throughout the entirety of the podcast series.

Power and Intersectionality

The strongest and most central theme was the persistence of systemic power. Both the primary and secondary research make clear that the intersectionality of one's experience directly impacts one's ability to participate in workplace and community wellbeing. A key example of this relates to international recruitment. While UBC boasts high numbers of international recruitment, the institution has failed to prepare its service providers to support non-Western ways of being – including wellbeing. Another common example was concern that the voices of service and custodial staff are not being heard at UBC and that these folks are even less likely to access wellbeing services and programs. Power has everything to do with access to wellbeing.

Relationships

Another important theme was of mentorship and representation. Interview participants expressed a gratitude for IBPOC mentors and felt proud of their own roles as mentors to other IBPOC faculty, staff, and students. There was an expression of longing for more opportunities to mentor and be mentored in ways that avoid the weight of educating and confronting white folks. Some interview participants were excited about IBPOC representation in positions of power within the institution, while others were not. Either way, this poses representation as meaningful to understanding IBPOC wellbeing at UBC.

Universalizing Whiteness

The third theme focused on the way that the concept of wellbeing has been framed as universal. The primary and secondary research demonstrated that IBPOC staff and faculty felt like wellbeing initiatives were not neutral, but were in fact white. Interview participants expressed skepticism about participating in wellbeing initiatives because of this. They also highlighted the overrepresentation of whiteness at decision making tables as cause for concern.

Mental Health

The final and most consistent theme was the negative impacts of racism on mental health. With the heightened awareness around anti-Black, anti-Indigenous, and anti-Asian racism in 2020/2021, IBPOC faculty and staff have experienced an increase in the already disproportionate extraction of their emotional and intellectual labour from white folks and the institution itself. IBPOC faculty and staff are recruited into anti-racism initiatives and equity committees, but are not given the safety, space, or power to make meaningful change. Racism was identified as a direct impact on IBPOC faculty and staff mental health and subsequently their wellbeing.

Next Steps

The next steps in this project focus on the creation and sharing of the Wellbeing x Equity Podcast Series⁴. Below are three key steps that will need to be taken to complete the project.

Production

The production of the podcast series will require outreach to the UBC community to hire hosts and invite guests, followed by the process of recording, editing, and finalizing episodes.

Marketing & Communications

Communications for the podcast series will involve solidifying a virtual home for the podcast, pre-release marketing, and marketing in between episode drops.

Community Building & Accountability

Community building linked to the podcast may include a listening launch event; the creation of accessible mechanisms for collecting, reviewing, and implementing feedback and ideas; as well as opportunities for relationship building and solidarity work for IBPOC communities.

Additionally, one of the greatest strengths of podcasts is the ability to respond in a timely fashion to current events and public discourse. Work completed thus far may or may not remain relevant as production of the Wellbeing x Equity Podcast Series moves forward. The project will need to be dynamic throughout the production and communication phases to maximize community relevance and increase the potential for community building.

⁴ Appendix B.

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Appendix A - Guiding Questions for Interviews

Personal Questions

What is your positionality and anything else you would like to share about your identity?

What is your role at UBC? Both professionally and any other community roles?

What is your experience at UBC regarding 'wellbeing' and IBPOC identity? Both firsthand and as a witness.

Wellbeing Questions

What are some challenges or threats to IBPOC wellbeing at UBC?

What are some successes or opportunities for generating IBPOC wellbeing at UBC?

What are the main differences between Staff and Faculty contexts regarding IBPOC wellbeing at UBC?

Podcast Questions

What topics would you like to see covered in our podcast series?

Who would you like to hear from in our podcast series? Both prominent voices and marginalized voices.

What are your ideas to ensure the IBPOC community feels a sense of ownership over the podcast series?

Are you aware of any historical/ongoing barriers, pitfalls, or dynamics that we should be aware of in pursuing this project?

Appendix B - Podcast Series Outline

Episodes

1. Wellbeing: focusing on Indigenous wellbeing, centring whiteness in wellbeing, and laying the groundwork for understanding the challenges and successes of IBPOC wellbeing
2. Health: focusing on mental health and its intersection with racism
3. Safety: focusing on campus security and the intersectional experiences of IBPOC communities
4. Identity: focusing on representation, belonging, community building, and social connection
5. Space: focusing on Indigenous land, as well as spaces of wellbeing on campus
6. Equity: focusing on the emotional and intellectual labour extracted from IBPOC faculty and staff

Framework

This podcast is composed of a collection of episodes which can be engaged with meaningfully in parts or the sum of its parts. While distinct topics will be addressed with each of the episodes, themes of wellbeing and community will be woven throughout the entirety of the podcast series.

The episodes will be structured into a framework with three phases. First, the episodes will ground the listener in the high-level strategies and initiatives being undertaken by UBC to address the given topic. This grounding will be done by the host with support from 'experts' in order that the listener understand the context as it relates to UBC. The second phase of the episode will be a deep dive into the stories of Indigenous, Black, and people of colour at UBC as they relate to wellbeing. This phase will focus on the successes, challenges, and questions related to improving IBPOC wellbeing at UBC. The third phase will work to conclude on critical hope. The host will summarize the key take-aways and offer opportunities for further learning, connection making, direct action, joy making, and anything else that may support the improvement of IBPOC wellbeing.