

Towards an inclusive UM - Actions Against Racism



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Why Actions Against Racism (AAR)?

UM aims to be an inclusive organization in which all students, regardless of their ethnic background, can feel safe and flourish. Even more, we welcome diverse backgrounds as we believe it is to the benefit of our employees, students and the whole organization to include different perspectives, ideas and visions in the community.

With the Black Lives Matter movement gaining increased global attention in spring 2020, also our own students, alumni and employees came forward to report on their lived experiences within our organization and called for more attention to racist behaviour of individuals and institutional structures that stand in the way of equitable development of our BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color) community members.

The low numbers of BIPOC students and academics coupled with the many experiences that we heard from within our organization and in the other Dutch universities through the network of Dutch Diversity Officers in Higher Education (LanDO) show that reflecting on racism within our institutions, understanding the bottlenecks and fostering anti-racist behaviour and structure is crucial if we take inclusion seriously and want to move towards equity.

Developing an action plan – approach and process

In **June 2020** the Executive Board asked the D&I Office to develop an action plan in order to take these necessary steps towards equity. We took multiple steps to investigate the current situation at UM and collect concrete ideas to move forward

During the **summer of 2020**, the D&I Office organized two focus groups with BIPOC students and staff, facilitated by two BIPOC UM colleagues and BIPOC student assistants. The approach to first start the discussion within the BIPOC community was deemed necessary, by our own students and staff, to offer a safe environment for our community members to share painful and upsetting experiences without the need to also take another persons' guilt into account or to be confronted with defence mechanisms. Because our students and staff members were confronted with often recognizable experiences of people from around the globe shared through the Black Lives Matter movement, the focus groups offered this space in a very emotionally draining time for our community members who were confronted with thinking about their own past, presence and future. The focus groups were well received as a space to share experiences and to think about specific areas UM needs to improve. We hereby left the scope of these measures open.

Based on the focus groups and other conversations during the summer, the D&I Office distilled a list of recommended actions. This list served as a basis for a follow-up conversation in **October 2020** with a group of UM representatives (among others: Faculty board members, SSC colleagues and student psychologists, confidential advisors, University Council members, study advisors, Student Reps). Both invited and after open registration. These diverse members of the UM community prioritized and discussed specific actions in more depth during this meeting. This time, the

discussions were led by the same facilitators of the focus groups, the members of the D&I office and we partnered with ECHO (Expertise Centre of Diversity Policy based in The Hague).

The result of this process was the formulation of three core objectives to create a more inclusive UM for BIPOC students and staff. The core objectives and concomitant recommendations were then discussed with the UM Diversity and Inclusivity Advisory Council in December 2020 and January 2021.

This document presents the results of this process. It first discusses the three objectives and then delves into concrete action recommendations per objective.

The AAR Objectives

While many concrete actions were mentioned during the AAR process, we can collate these actions under three overarching objectives:

- Creating an inclusive organizational culture in recruitment and retention for BIPOC staff and students
- De-colonizing the curriculum
- Improving access to and infrastructure of support processes for BIPOC staff and students

The objectives encompass 1) the environment in which we study and work, 2) what and how we study and work and 3) how those that experience discrimination can report and be supported to continue their work and study successfully. Each of these elements are crucial to be and become an inclusive organization and, as has become evident during our investigations, each of these elements deserves more attention in the fight against racism at UM. The report first gives more information and background for each objective before it continues to delve into concrete actions in the next chapter.

Creating an inclusive organizational culture in recruitment and retention for BIPOC staff and students is an important prerequisite for our students and staff to feel included and to therefore study and work sustainably at our institution. During our investigations into the UM community, an inclusive organizational culture here touches upon expectation management, transparency and support in recruitment, is about in how far students and colleagues feel represented in our UM population and decision making bodies all the way to the competencies of our managers in creating a safe environment in which people feel appreciated as a crucial part of the organization. This objective asks for a culture change in the environment in which we work and study; towards a culture that is able to welcome, value and nurture BIPOC staff and students.

See concrete actions in the table Objective 1 on page 6 divided into “Recruitment of students”, “Recruitment of staff” and “Retaining BIPOC students and staff”.

Decolonizing the curriculum¹ describes a process of

- reflecting on our history as a knowledge institution and becoming aware of contextual perspectives and assumptions.
- unlearning certain perspectives and assumptions this history has installed in our teaching processes, skills and content.

Decolonizing the curriculum or university does **not** mean to abolish our canon or abolish all established competencies or processes. Instead, it asks for a continuous interrogation of our established assumptions and broadening of our perspectives. These can be e.g. historical but also epistemological. Examples of decolonizing the curriculum could be opening up our reading list to non-white, non-European authors. This is a means to broadening the horizons of one's discipline, to acknowledge the existence of relevant scholarship outside our context and to reflect upon the homogeneity of 'legitimate' creators of knowledge.

Decolonizing the curriculum could also mean the rethinking of the applicability of what is learned or developed. For example, our own students have observed that the applications of Artificial Intelligence (AI) they learn at UM are mostly relevant for European markets, not for their native markets outside of Europe. With such a narrow approach to the use of AI, we close off parts of the world as potential labour markets for our students and make it thus impossible for some to return to their home or be mobile beyond the borders of a Western, European context.

Decolonizing also asks for understanding the role of your discipline in past and present processes of Othering; in the processes of constructing and upholding differences. While this might be more obvious for some disciplines as e.g. biology, medicine and public health (see recent numbers of likelihood to be at risk of hospitalization or death when from a minority group), such a critical reflection of colonial structures can stretch from property law, over history to psychology.

It is important to note that decolonizing the curriculum is an intellectual process of unlearning and relearning historical and contemporary colonial structures in academia and that this process can look very different in diverse disciplinary contexts. A continuous discourse between lecturers, programme directors and students of how and what we learn is essential in this process. Global Citizenship Education can play a crucial part in this respect as it opens up the space to think about the situatedness of our knowledge institution in the world in terms of Intended Learning Outcomes of content and skills courses, teacher development and social responsibility.

See concrete actions table Objective 2 on page 9 divided into "In the classroom", "Outside the classroom" and "Competencies".

The third crucial objective to foster an inclusive UM is **improving access to and infrastructure of support processes for BIPOC staff and students**. The research into our own organization has shown two main problems:

- the lack of knowledge among students and staff of existing support structures
- and for those that came forward, lacking familiarity of the specific experiences related to racial discrimination on behalf of our support staff. This feeling was communicated by those seeking support as well as by those offering support.

¹ For more information on the topic read Bhambra, G., Nsamenang, K., & Gebrial, D. (Eds.). (2018). *Decolonizing the University*. London: Pluto Press.

Communication surrounding support is often dispersed, it is not clear where one can turn to with what problem and also not what one can expect from the support service that is offered. This lack of information and transparency is experienced as discouraging to come forward at all.

Moreover, those community members that have come forward addressing individual racist behaviour or systematic hurdles feel like they are not understood. A common experience reported in the focus groups was that supporting staff does not understand racist experiences or the impact these experiences have on mental health and therefore sustainable employability or study success. Students and staff feel they have to explain over and over again why something is racist, simply because there is no common understanding of what qualifies as racist behaviour. In the contact with support structures, community members also report that their experiences have been downplayed and that they are asked to 'react like a Dutch person would'. During our follow up discussions, conversations between affected students and staff and supporting staff revealed that also supporting staff wishes to be better equipped to deal with the specifics of racial discrimination more aptly. As an international institution that prides itself on its diversity, we have to make sure that vulnerable and minority groups we invite into our university also get the support they need in order to work and study safely and sustainably.

Furthermore, people who experience specific types of discrimination are less inclined to use general support structures but rather seek support of friends or other trusted community members. As a result, a lot of support is resting on the shoulder of BIPOC students and staff who have established informal mentoring structures, regular meetings and their own focus groups. Our students, teachers, researchers and other community member take over these tasks because they understand how crucial it is to support those who experience racism if we want them to feel heard, safe and we want them to be able to continue their study or work. In the future, it is essential that this work is firstly recognized as crucial organizational citizenship but also that it has to rest more on the shoulders of professionals which a specific understanding of racist discrimination.

See concrete actions page 11 table Objective 3 divided in "Access" and "Support processes"

In order to achieve these rather broad perspectives, our investigations revealed an array of possible concrete actions. In the following section, this document offers a non-exhaustive list of action recommendations per objective.

Concrete Actions Overview

In this section you can find concrete action recommendations in order to achieve the three set objectives to fight racism at UM. The actions vary in scope, time to implement and where to embed them in the organizational structure. The overview takes these differences into consideration and attempts to indicate which organizational unit should take the lead in further developing and/or implementing each action.

Objective 1: Creating an inclusive organizational culture with focus on recruitment and retention for BIPOC staff and students

SUBJECT	ACTION
Recruitment BIPOC Students	Evaluation with students to understand the obstacles for minority students in recruitment and admission processes
	When numbers are available, give an authentic and realistic overview of the UM population. For example, numbers of non-EU students: UM, Maastricht and Limburg are international, but not diverse in all aspects (yet). Find a balance between depicting diversity and managing expectations
	What are our ambitions and vision as a university in relation to racism and welcoming BIPOC staff (from NL, EU and non-EU)
	How do we address potential concerns (of identification) in recruitment processes
	Enable recruitment ambassadors to give an authentic portrayal of university
	Central and/or de-central peer student for incoming students (to get them ready for the transition to come here)
	<u>Highlight UM networks (e.g Afro Caribbean Maastricht University Students, Moslem Students Associations, etc) and add Contact details mentors of the Caribbean/ Dutch Antilles</u>
	Look at best practices elsewhere: SOAS London, Sussex
	Make INKOM more inclusive and inform participants about support structures
	Welcome newsletter (information on support structures)
Faculty introduction (information on support structures + setting expectations)	

Recruitment BIPOC staff	Write inclusive vacancy texts
	Hire more BIPOC staff. Target numbers? EU/non-EU?
	Highlight secondary employment benefits and relevant staff networks
	checkmyvacancy@maastrichtuniversity.nl
	Mention relevant networks in vacancy texts, during interviews and yearly talks
	Offer workshop to selection committees to appreciate and aim for diverse talent with focus on intersectionality (with adaptations per discipline/service/faculty)
	Talk actively to KCIS to investigate the perceived 'burden' to relocate (visas, daycares, etc)
	D&I visibility information market for new employees (UM Cares and D&I orgs if applicable for staff)
Retaining BIPOC students and staff	Mandatory anti-bias and bystanderism/allyship training (in UTQ, CPD and staff trainings)
	Inclusive leadership skills part of our overall leadership expectations
	Inclusive competencies for all tutors/student advisors/UM psychologists
	Social media policy to mitigate trolling/bashing
	Reward and Recognition of organizational citizenship in form of informal mentoring/supporting BIPOC students and staff

	<p>Appoint more diverse staff relevant roles (teaching, teaching management and decision making roles) as these are crucial for personal and professional development and thus career advancement within UM. At the same time, they also function as role models and (informal) mentors to BIPOC students</p>
	<p>Study into the leaky pipeline for BIPOC students and staff</p>
	<p>Include inclusive management competencies in annual appraisals and promotions</p>
	<p>Empowerment training for BIPOC community members</p>
	<p>Positive incentives for inclusive management at UM manager of the year award</p>
	<p>Create an alumni network for BIPOC community members to address issues like access to the labour market, selection procedures and facilitate networking and community building</p>
	<p>Increase BIPOC representation in D&I Office</p>

Objective 2: Decolonizing the Curriculum

SUBJECT	ACTIONS
In the Classroom	De-colonization should be part of UTQ portfolio
	Include inclusive competencies in student evaluations of teachers to create a safe space in classroom
	Ask students for specific decolonizing feedback on courses
	Encourage teaching staff to use the current online format of teaching to introduce more diverse speakers and perspectives as threshold is lower for people to agree to a lecture if they don't have to travel (to widen our perspectives but also to present UM as potential employer)
Outside of the Classroom	De-colonization should be part of (re)accreditation on national level
	Highlight teaching staff and students that are working on decolonization as examples and to get the conversation going (and give time/room/credits for this)
	Make a yearly collection of 'de-colonizing my discipline' reading list with non-white authors suggested by students and staff
	Train UB employees to help students/staff find BIPOC authors and viewpoints across disciplines
	Offer specific collection on de-decolonizing curriculum/university
Competencies	Define what decolonization and racism means for UM as a starting point for efforts, define milestones (while making sure it is a process)
	Key players in faculties need to be trained and supported to de-colonize (Directors of Studies, Faculty Boards, education policy makers, etc)

	Develop a de-colonizing toolkit per faculty (D&I Grant)
	EDLAB/D&I Office workshop series with own staff members and students who are de-colonizing (also part of UTQ and CPD)
	Inclusive competencies for teachers/group leaders to facilitate a safe space (include regular evaluation moments). Including inclusion/atmosphere in course evaluations gives

Objective 3: Improving access to and infrastructure of support processes for BIPOC staff and students

SUBJECT	ACTIONS
Access	Internal and external communication needs to become clearer where to seek help for what problem (including outside of UM)
	Review and update existing regulations and procedures related to complains and inappropriate behavior to be inclusive for BIPOC experiences
	Include clear definitions of what qualifies as inappropriate behavior
	Make a flowchart to show different complaint procedures available, what the steps are, how long they take and what kind of outcome(s) to expect
Support processes	All staff that offers support should be trained on topics of cultural differences, racism and discrimination on how to effectively support BIPOC and not putting the solutions on the victims
	Preferably BIPOC representation among UM Psychologists and confidential advisors
	Offer peer support for BIPOC by BIPOC on regular basis
	Have an open office hour of a BIPOC confidential advisor (maybe outsourced?) once per week/two weeks

Internal Communication is Key

If we want the *Action Against Racism* process to yield sustainable results that are sufficiently anchored in our organization, we have to make sure that it becomes clear that fighting racism is a community effort. When working on individual actions in many different units, there is the risk that while few people become very familiar and immersed in the subject matter, the larger part of UM is not actively occupied with anti-racism. There could thus be growing gap of how a small group of people defines racism and sees the urgency to address individual as well as institutional racism. As a result, there might be extra hurdles to developing measures and implementation might be very difficult and hard to sustain.

Since we do not want this to happen, *Action Against Racism* needs a clear communication plan that is transparent and open towards our community. This will involve communication about a UM definition of racism and racist discrimination, regular updates on relevant events and also highlighting the development and implementation of specific actions to fight racism. It is crucial that such a plan takes shape as part of the process, not afterwards, so that we can prevent the forming of a gap and instead informing and hopefully drawing staff and students into this community effort.

Monitoring implementation and execution

The above mentioned actions vary from 'low hanging fruits' to medium and long term organizational change, differ in the resources necessary to realize the actions and will have to be tackled by diverse organizational units, often in cooperation. That means that the process of *Action Against Racism* at UM will be spread across the organization and many actions will first have to be developed further (including budget estimates) in relevant units before they can be implemented.

We propose that the D&I Office takes a coordinating function in the monitoring of development, implementation and execution of *Actions Against Racism* at UM. The D&I Office will discuss the action plan with relevant units in detail and give these units, when necessary in cooperation with others, the task of developing a clear plan on how the realization of the objectives could and should look like in their respective unit. In the following, we will collate these smaller plans, including budgets, into a larger document to be presented to the Executive Board.

If the Executive Board approves and when necessary facilitates the next steps, the D&I Office will work closely with representatives of the participating units to monitor the progress of the concrete plans and to communicate internally and externally about the latest developments.