System-wide, senior administrative levels of the University of British Columbia do not well reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of the university, the surrounding populations of either campus, or the stated aims of the institution—a present circumstance of long historic standing. UBC also lacks reliable institutional data on diversity in leadership and no readily available library of best practices at comparable institutions.

The Race and Leadership Working Group, after considerable discussion, is putting forward the recommendations outlined below. These recommendations are directed primarily at the Office of Equity and Inclusion, which we identify as the Office that is best positioned to carry them forward for implementation by the UBC executive and the relevant units under their direction. While it is important for the Office to develop a better base of information in the areas of these recommendations, this first set of recommendations are measures that can be implemented without delay, and are particularly urgent in the context of the university’s current work to fill senior leadership positions. Though other recommendations may well follow, the clear measures described here will immediately improve the prospects for attracting and retaining a more diverse leadership.

1. Inclusion of Diversity Criteria in Position Descriptions

The conceptual and legal basis for all hiring begins with position descriptions. Position descriptions define the competencies required for the position and subsequently define the scope of issues candidates volunteer in their materials, the questions that can be asked of them in interviews, and the factors that can be included in their evaluation and comparison. If the university wishes to improve the diversity of its senior leadership, it is imperative that positions be defined and described to reflect this intention.

Institutions frequently rely on diversity tag lines in descriptions and advertisements. While these statements indicate a general concern for diversity in hiring practices, they do little to define the competencies that hiring more diverse leadership might bring. In addition, while encouraging applicant diversity, membership in a particular group or affiliation with a category of identity does not guarantee that the addition of such competencies will be the result of a process.

The inclusion of language in the body of the position description specifying candidates’ ability to add to the diversity of perspectives in the senior leadership and proven ability to work with a very diverse community of faculty, staff, and students will provide the opening for candidates to talk about their qualifications and experiences and for those to be included in their evaluation and selection.

2. Attention to Diversity Concerns in the Selection and Instruction of Search Firms

Searches for most senior positions are closed processes that rely heavily on search firms. If diversity in hiring is an objective, it is, of course, necessary that the search firm be given
very clear instructions reflecting that priority. It is equally important that search firms be chosen who have demonstrated capability to locate and evaluate diverse candidates. Though neither of these has always been the case in prior UBC searches, there is clear evidence that practices are, at least in some cases, changing. Consistency in institutional practice is key to further progress.

3. Attention to Diversity Concerns in the Structure and Practice of Search Committees

It is increasingly the case that search committees are constituted with some attention to diversity of membership. It is not always clear, however, that membership alone results in a process that adequately addresses diversity. For many years faculty and staff from underrepresented groups across North America have reported that their inclusion in many processes has been nominal, or, worse yet, tokenized. Substantial inequalities in position and power and/or nominal numerical representation may inhibit the expression or consideration of diversity concerns. Very conscious and deliberate measures must be taken by committee chairs to assure that input is encouraged and fully considered, and that processes are as free from the possibility of retaliation as possible.

Development of Information Resources

The Office of Equity and Inclusion should work with senior leadership and other units (e.g., PAIRS) to develop clear longitudinal data on diversity and underrepresentation at all levels of institutional leadership. If normal statistical methods are inadequate to yield functional information, other forms of information gathering should be developed. In particular, qualitative research about the experience of those in leadership positions from underrepresented groups, and from faculty and staff about their experiences in working with a less diverse leadership would also be valuable.

In addition, information from other institutions should be gathered, either because it provides grounds for comparison or because it provides information about the methods, success, and failure of initiatives to diversify leadership. That information will be very valuable for further institutional planning.

An immediate objective is to bring Professor Malinda Smith (U Alberta) to campus to share her extensive research in the area of research into diversity and leadership issues at U15 Canadian universities. Professor Smith should have an extended working session with the R&L Working Group, followed by a more concentrated meeting with senior leadership, and, if possible a less formal public event.

While the measures described here are by no means exhaustive, they can be readily developed and implemented and will provide an immediate improvement in the circumstances for future hiring and future action.