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For the 2021/2022 winter semester, I enrolled in *NGOs and Government Services* because I wanted to implement my learnings in a real-life workplace that gave me experience. I also wanted this opportunity to help me progress my understanding of new perspectives and how the work I did directly pertained to things I was passionate about. Ultimately, I was placed in the HRM's Diversity and Inclusion office which consisted of a very welcoming team that was excited to work with and teach me. The main scope of their work involved providing diversity training to HRM employees and formulating strategies for business units to adopt in advancing equality and representation within their workplaces. Additionally, as they do work with other NGOs and government agencies, they are also responsible for hosting engagement sessions pertaining to issues of gender diversity and racial diversity.

The Diversity and Inclusion office aims to challenge biases and assumptions that have perpetuated exclusionary practices within the public sphere of society. They also seek to give voices and recognition to those who have been excluded in representative positions where their voices can be heard. They aim to do this by educating the staff of the HRM and the general public through engagement sessions, live online workshops, and focus groups. The way I started the practicum was by starting the first few weeks with training sessions and online course completions to further my understanding of why the inner workings of the Diversity and Inclusion office are important. A few examples of the things I had to learn were an overview of what diversity and inclusion means as a whole (workshop), integrating Gender-Based-Analysis (GBA+) into our everyday lives and work (workshop), and completing a 6-module GBA+ course that grants you with a certificate.

In terms of the importance of diversity and inclusion, that training provides knowledge on how to avoid microaggressions, biases, and assumptions that contribute to the persistence of systemic discrimination. Furthermore, the foundation of Diversity and

Inclusion's work is about removing barriers that prevent marginalised communities from full participation in the larger community. Thus, it sheds emphasis on how in the present day and age, we must look at things from different angles, take more time to analyse situations, and be supportive as allies to help realising the full potential of increasing diversity and inclusion within institutional structures, services, and in representative roles. This has taught me that we must be aware of bias when it exists and if it is unconscious or not – meaning that we don't know we are being biased, but our exposure to experiences has shaped that bias. Acknowledging bias is important because it opens up more opportunities to properly absorb and share information and experiences between people and their communities. Removing bias can remove the feeling that many people have to adhere to in how they believe they are seen by others.

In terms of GBA+, it is an intersectional analytical process. It is used by multiple levels of government to assess how diverse groups of women, men and non-binary people may experience policies, programs, and initiatives differently. While it is often used with the intention of advancing gender equality, it has shown to be helpful in supporting municipal governments to understand and respond to the needs of residents with diverse identities beyond gender. Furthermore, GBA+ is a necessary tool to have as it provided me with the mechanisms to correct any biases I had with my own work, allowing my mind to be more open in considering the realisation of other ideas. Thus, GBA+ helps one learn about the unequal distribution of power and privilege in our society and its impacts on diverse people and their intersecting identity factors. Taking the online course as well helped me identify who could be left behind and who has been left behind due to the assumptions one is making. It also highlighted the importance of trying to ensure outcomes are equitable and that research is done where a diverse multitude of sources can contribute, not just a homogeneous 'type.'

The role I was given by the supervisor, Caroline Hemstock, was to ultimately assist her on any projects she needed while also gradually working on a project of my own. Initially, after I had completed the training, I helped Caroline research potential speakers that would be ideal for an Inclusive leadership Conference. What this entailed for me was just doing the online research of profiles, pages, adjoining organisational or institutional webpages, and scanning social media for any involvement pertaining to our desired speakers. Secondly, the Diversity and Inclusion office had me do a summary of 4 of their engagement sessions on what is needed for improvement within the HRM. These issues ranged from limited wheel-chair accessibility to wanting separate swim times for men and women in public pools to wanting bus lines to be extended. Ultimately, I compiled a table of what the major themes and suggestions were for those sessions, as well as what the suggested actions were to address the issues. They had me present my findings back to the co-organizers of the sessions over zoom. The third medium project I had was assisting in organising International Women's Day and their technical support while they live-streamed. I got to meet many inspiring women who are looking to continue to push the margins of what they can achieve in normalising the acceptance of gender and racial diversity. One of those women was Councillor Iona Stoddard which was a pleasure.

For my term-wide project that I gradually worked on during my time there, I completed an environmental scan on how men can be allies in advancing gender equality. As the only white, cisgender male on the Diversity and Inclusion team, it was interesting to explore how men contribute to and have contributed to this lack of diversity and representation. I started by exploring why men have trouble getting involved in opportunities to advance equality. I came to find that men are historically apathetic, ignorant, and fearful in regards to advancing equality. This is important because it made me think about my own experiences as a male. When I thought about it, I realised I have grown up around this

toxicity my whole life within my high-school circle, sports teams, and university life. Sadly, there are instances where a young man might feel left out or excluded because he doesn't adhere to the dominant male narrative that doesn't consider the elements of other identities, cultures, and genders. Many young men don't believe that gender equality is critical or critical to them, as gender equality "doesn't involve them." However, it does, because realising gender equality adheres directly to how men can change their behaviours, assumptions, and biases, that perpetuate continuous disrespect, misogyny, and discrimination. Thus, in a broad context, the proper engagement and opportunity for interaction where men can aim to escape the restriction to the realisation that the patriarchal narrative has been imposed on them is critical. Therefore, engagement comes with conversing, providing workshops that engage in topics on gender diversity men may not be used to discussing, and educating men within those communities about the status they hold and the systematic barriers that women and gender-diverse people have to face daily. Once you are informed, then you can put that into practice by advancing initiatives as an ally and contributing to the provision of safe spaces within the social environments one resides in. Many men just don't get involved, but increasing safe spaces, and creating collaborative allyships with other organisations will allow for more inclusionary efforts that educate and involve the men who constitute our communities and workspaces. For example, the HRM's *YMCA* created its *Gender-Based Violence Project* in September 2017. An important part of this project is the education of male youth who are new to Canada about how to identify and prevent gender-based violence. The goal of this was to remove the stigma around conversations that young men typically do not have and to share experiences and perceptions. Ultimately, the project helped shape their mindset with an understanding that gender-based violence can be prevented through education and an ability to identify and prevent it. An important theme of this project, however, was the 'male script' or narrative that comes with certain restrictions

and expectations that can diminish the importance of recognizing gender diversity and equality in their own eyes. Thus, I believe the more opportunities that normalise the involvement of men in projects that advance equality, breaking down barriers and assumptions, can help improve that move away from the dominant narrative of the past. In theory, creating these opportunities at a large frequency can help contribute but what is needed in the HRM are more groups of men sharing the same values, actively advancing projects, and advocating online and offline for the realisation that men can help achieve progress as an ally. The men's support groups that do exist in Halifax mainly pertain to men battling mental health, recovering from addiction, and preventing danger within their community. Therefore, the more men's groups whose foundational practice is advocating and battling for equality, the more likely it is that the conditions improve within the HRM.

What I liked the most about this placement is that the employees of the Diversity and Inclusion office were very easy-going with me, super supportive of my learnings, and let me know when I was doing well. It was a little nerve-wracking at first as I did the majority of this practicum online and it did create a delay in how fast things got done due to not having direct communication with an office. Additionally, there was uncertainty at times about what my task at the time entailed. However, Caroline was really good with communication and always gave me an answer within an appropriate amount of time.

I learned that I was not as aware of my own assumptions to the extent I should be, the degree to which other men don't realise their own assumptions, and how strategies are formulated in regards to bringing institutional improvements. Additionally, sharing, understanding, and abstaining from the use of microaggressions – which are the result of biases – can also contribute to the realisation. I ultimately just learned how issues impact different segments of society differently due to historical, social, and political circumstances. Thus, it creates the need for the realisation of gender and racial diversity to the extent that it

is normalised. It gave me proper work-experience and a good idea of what I am capable of in terms of analysing, researching, and presenting within the real world. It gave me insight I am glad to have and have already noticed myself naturally implementing my learnings into how I am aware of my own assumptions and how I can properly recognize and include people to the extent that I wasn't before. It is quite manageable and intriguing! Good luck to the next candidate at the Diversity and Inclusion Office!