UPDATE
It has been a simultaneously busy and restful period since we last reported, with Diversity Week occurring, fully debriefing the campaign, and preparing for more upcoming events in March. In addition, talks of transition seem to be upon us! Both the Director and Assistant Director for Diversity Services 2016/2017 have been hired, and I am happy to announce that Ryan Deshpande and Lilian Obeng will fill these respective positions! I am incredibly confident that they will do a superb job in their roles, especially in discussions of the vision they have for the service.

SERVICE USAGE
Diversity Week – Given our campaign had 14 events running through the week, this was the largest amount of service usage we have experienced – with a wide range of attendance from event to event. One of the events with the largest turnout was the Kim Milan keynote speech, which had approximately 85 attendees. Our Atrium events were a little more difficult to estimate turnout for, which included the Multiculturalism Spoken Word, Capturing Intersectionality Photobooth, Indigenous Mental Health forum, Culturefest, Picturing Peace, and Art Display events. A notable Atrium event, however, was the Picturing Peace event that had a minimum of 100 students take a polaroid photo and pin it to the graffiti board. Our workshops and film festival had a range of 10-20 students attending each.

AbiliTEAS – We have consistently had turnout of 10-15 students per week, which given the size of the WGEN space, is quite significant!

Bridges – The space has been booked for four days a week up until the last day of classes, culminating in the Light Up the Night Coffeehouse!

Volunteer Training #2 – 16 out of our 20 volunteers were able to make it out our training update.

PAST EVENTS, PROJECTS & ACTIVITIES

AbiliTEAS
Once Term 2 began, we shifted the location of our weekly event to the WGEN office in MUSC 204. Since then, we have had consistent and committed turnout. This has been facilitated well by the usage of the Maccess and HMSC listserv. In conversations with Sophie, our Abilities Coordinator, turnout may have increased as a result of the type of space WGEN is – one that is visibly more private, with a separate room for peer support, and with accompanying peer support volunteers. We will re-evaluate the location at the end of term in conjunction with the Maccess Coordinator for the following year.

Bridges Café Artwork
Our Bridges Coordinator continued the call out for students to loan artwork to decorate the Bridges Space. This is a cool initiative that requires minimal work to facilitate a space that is further reflective of cultural identities and the presence of MSU Diversity Services. If you are interested in loaning artwork to the space, email bridges@msu.mcmaster.ca! Since putting this call out, we have had rotating artwork in Bridges biweekly, and over 30 students have put their artwork in the space.

Volunteer Training
We hosted an updated training session for our full team, taking a more in-depth and structural approach to race, racism and racialization. In addition, we ran a skill-teaching workshop that focused on building effective facilitation, as we recognized it was central to many of the events we have hosted. In debriefing the training with our exec team, we look towards further developing trainings to be smaller monthly skill developing moments within each committee, and getting volunteer input on other areas of knowledge they’d like to build on.

PACBIC Work – Presenting to University Bodies
An annual project that the Diversity Services Director takes on in their additional role as the Student Vice-Chair of the President’s Advisory Committee on Building an Inclusive Community (PACBIC) is helping create their Annual Report, and presenting this work to senior university administration through University Planning Committee (UPC), Senate, and the Board of Governors. Alongside the Chair, the incoming Chair for the following year, and the Staff Vice-Chair, we presented the report and specific priorities to UPC this past week. With support from Patrick Deane and the Provost, David Wilkinson, we were able to have a well-rounded discussion on issues of better layering mindfulness to issues of equity and inclusion throughout every level of the university, particularly around hiring and accountability. In the next week, we will be continuing with this discussion at both Senate and Board of Governors.

Anti-Oppression Training
We’ve continued to deliver Diversity and Inclusion training to those who request it – most recently, we have facilitated a workshop for Mac Breadbin volunteers. We have also agreed to facilitate further trainings for MSU Spark, the McMaster Science Society, and the Global Perspectives Learning Living Community in Edwards Hall.

Diversity Week
Our third annual Diversity Week was a massive success. Being the largest programming piece our service works towards annually, I was so glad to see the work of our entire team validated through event turnout, a wonderful depth of programming, and incredible and relevant dialogue continued on our campus. Diversity Week consisted of 14 distinct events – which is no small undertaking. After debriefing with our team, we took away a few things. The first, is that we decided to shift next year’s Diversity Week to fall on the second week of January. Our initial rationale for moving the campaign back a week was a result of having time for effective promotion of events, in addition to give more time to the team to plan out each event, however the reduced space we did have with the Soul Foods Fair in addition to Presidential events supported our change. We also will be suggesting for next year’s team to centralize programming into a smaller number of events within the week to maximize awareness of each individual event, while still presenting it through an intersectional lens.

I will go through a few of our highlights in this report:

Kim Milan
This year was the first time we had decided to go ahead with a non-pillar specific keynote speaker, and we chose Kim Milan. The event was held in TwelvEighty to great attendance, and a very positive response to her speech. Moving forward, we will continue to have a centralized keynote speaker, and move towards collaborating with partners to potentially find a bigger speaker in years to come.

Perspectives on Peace Collaboration
We hosted ‘Picturing Peace’ in the MUSC Atrium in collaboration with Teddy Saull and the Perspectives on Peace initiative, where students would take two polaroid pictures, with one being pinned to a large cardboard graffiti-painted poster stating ‘Peace Matters’, and they would have the opportunity to write what peace meant to them on this board. Around 100 students left behind a polaroid picture, and many students were able to engage in conversations around peace. The board is currently hanging in the hallway of the President, and has been received quite well by him!

Pillar-specific events
Each of our pillar coordinators hosted one or two events that carried an intersectional lens – from an accessible movie marathon to a spoken word event. Positive feedback came from each of these events, and I am very proud of our Pillar Coordinators for completely taking the lead on these events with their committees.

Workshops
Two workshops were hosted by Nashwa Khan and Anushay Irfan Khan around the topics of race, feminism, and faith. Both workshops generated very intimate and well-supported conversation, and we look forward to being able to host them again throughout the following year.
UPCOMING EVENTS, PROJECTS & ACTIVITIES

AbiliTEAS - Weekly
We will be continuing AbiliTEAS on as per usual, with tea provided and important conversation being facilitated.

MacTalks Event – Between the Lines: How Race and Mental Illness Intersect – March 3rd
As part of the MacTalks campaign, our Multiculturalism campaign will be hosting an event that explores stigmas attached to mental illness, and the distinctly racialized dimensions that are associated with it. Our committee has been working very hard to create a space that centers the voices of black, Indigenous, and other people of colour – through land acknowledgements, setting well outlined and explicit ground rules that highlight an intersectional space, and acknowledging trigger warnings. We will have volunteers trained in peer support available, and facilitators with lived experiences in these topics. The event will happen from 4pm-6pm in the SWELL.

When Faith and Science Collide – March 15th
This event touches on the interplay between faith and science, and aims to facilitate greater interfaith dialogue about how these two realms can reconcile with one another. We have invited Dr. Philippa Carter, a religious studies professor, and Dr. David Brock, a chemistry professor, to both deliver a brief presentation, and facilitate the conversation.

Friendship 1D03 – March 16th
Hosted through the Abilities pillar, the event aims to reduce the stigma surrounding disabilities through conversation, and to help foster an open and understanding community. The event is structured as a speed-friending event that allows those who might still feel awkward discussing disability and accessibility to speak with people with relevant knowledge and lived experience both about disability and about other topics in a casual, fun setting, while helping people find friends in a supportive, understanding community.

Planning for the Future of Diversity Services
Once both Ryan and Lilian were hired, we met to discuss the responsibilities and specific tasks of the roles we outlined in the memo submitted to Executive Board in the past term. Since then, we have created job descriptions for our new executive team, and will be bringing them forward to the next meeting to be passed. We should be able to have a team by mid-April, and transition in the new roles well!

Resource Building - Ongoing
We have begun the process of developing a short- and long-term plan for what we want our resource hub to look like, including the creation of a timeline. Maha, our Promotions Coordinator, will be working towards the short-term goal of creating an introductory resource to share with students by April – the details of the format are currently being worked out. We will also be beginning to write a detailed memo to include in our transition report regarding how we see the resource hub developing.

BUDGET

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VOLUNTEERS
Our team has shown on a continual basis that they are incredibly motivated and resilient. Diversity Week was certainly a difficult time for many of our volunteers, as they poured massive amounts of energy into the service while maintaining other commitments. Given the amount of sheer time every member of our team poured into the week-long campaign, it has taken a considerable while for our service to rest and continue in our regular rhythm through the month of February. In conversations with our team, I think we will move towards increasing the amount of one-on-one check ins and volunteer appreciation we host immediately following the week, and again at the end of January. Being able to schedule a type of mid-year check-in following Diversity Week or at the end of January may be a very valuable thing to structurally carry forward, as it can ensure all volunteers feel connected to the service.

CURRENT CHALLENGES
An ongoing challenge we have had in our service is maintaining a continuous and strong connection to MISCA through our Indigenous Affairs Liaisons, and ensuring our service effectively represents Indigenous students. This challenge has primarily risen through the significant turnover we have experienced in the role to date, and continue to face. We do think it is important to still maintain the role as a connection to MISCA, but once we open applications for the position in the upcoming year – as it will still be maintained – we do hope by setting expectations around the role earlier, we can generate campaigns through our service, rather than solely supporting the work MISCA does.

Some of the challenges we did experience in February seemed to center around the fatigue that came post-Diversity Week. Although as a team we did set dates for events to occur in February, two of these events did get pushed back into March as a result of the time our team did need to take to recover from how busy January was. To mediate this from a planning standpoint, hosting Diversity Week slightly earlier will ease this, in addition to managing expectations around the magnitude of any potential event we can host in February – and talking that through with the team to increase their awareness of this potential outcome.

SUCCESSES
As mentioned earlier in this report, many of our successes stem from the amazing team of volunteers we have – leading to strong campaigns like Diversity Week, in addition to the other work we do. At this point in the year, it is pretty amazing to see the well-defined niche our service takes up, and the campus-wide awareness we have been able to raise. Being contacted about opportunities to get involved regularly, and increasing requests for facilitation of Diversity and Inclusion training, further supports the visibility we have gained throughout the past year. I’m very excited to see how our service continues to grow.

OTHER
Looking forward to your questions!