



**UNIVERSITY OF
SASKATCHEWAN
Law Students' Association**

College of Law
Law Students' Association
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LSA STATEMENT ON INDIGNEOUS EXAM ACCOMODATIONS ISSUE (OPEN LETTER)

Hello everyone,

This letter is in acknowledgement and response to the letter posted by ILSA yesterday. I would like to thank Jodi and the ILSA executive for their open letter and for unequivocally denouncing racism within the College. The LSA adds its voice to and stands firmly with ILSA on that front, denouncing racism in all its forms. Initially, before I get into anything, let me first say: I truly and wholeheartedly apologize. I really regret the way I handled the complaints against Indigenous accommodations when they were brought forward to me. Floating the idea of a 'survey' to sample wider student opinion of these complaints was hurtful and shortsighted. Primarily, it was wrong because it would have provided an avenue for Anti-Indigenous sentiment and discrimination to fester at the College, something I should have flagged the minute those complaints were brought forward. Secondly, I made this 'survey' suggestion at the general meeting without the consultation of the executive team, including the VP of Indigenous Affairs, which was a mistake. I will also say that, taking it upon myself to have conversations with the LSA's VP of Indigenous Affairs without informing the LSA executive was also bad judgement on my part. I really believe that had I consulted the executive team in time, the outcome could have been overall much better. We have already been seeing negative and racist rhetoric against Indigenous students and curriculum this year take place and the fact that I mishandled these complaints, despite my intentions, added to the rhetoric. In order for everyone to move forward, it is important that I own up to and take accountability for my shortcomings and ignorance on these issues. In the time I have left as President, I commit to making sure the LSA, starting with myself, regains the trust of many and becomes a strong ally to our Indigenous peers. This includes a personal commitment to educate myself more on these issues, well beyond my time at the College. My commitments also extend to overseeing structural enhancements to the LSA as an organization, as well as a more unified LSA/ILSA/ARTFC approach when having conversations with the College. The *LSA General meeting on February 8* has been recorded for reference. In it, I hope you find a more detailed explanation of the events that unfolded and actions the LSA is taking in response.

Over the past couple of weeks, myself and the rest of the Executive team have been working to come up with a concrete action plan to ensure this situation never occurs again. This plan includes:

- **LSA Constitutional Amendments:** The current LSA Constitution structure is not compatible with handling matters that are sensitive in nature. As it is currently structured, it is incumbent on Council to determine what the official LSA stance on certain complaints by discussing them in a public forum, regardless of sensitivity. From this experience, it is evident that this approach can be harmful and should be re-examined. The LSA has created a 'Working Group' consisting of five executives, including myself, that is tasked with aligning the LSA Constitution in a way that is mindful of racial and cultural sensitivities. It is our hope that these changes will not strictly apply to one position, but rather involve a holistic approach that spreads to the intricacies of every position on Council. On this specific issue, we are especially grateful that the ARTFC has, and continues to take, an advising role along the way.

- **Diverse Social Programming:** The LSA, as an organization, has been a social lifeline for the College for a long time. I am proud that as a group, we have navigated the COVID-19 health guidelines successfully to ensure that this continues. Law school can be difficult, and the LSA's primary role is and continues to be improving the student experience and creating lifelong social bonds. However, our friendliness and openness should be felt by *everyone*. It is important to recognize that, with increasing diversity within the College student body, the LSA should adapt with the times and offer social programming that reflects our diversity. This does not mean, in any way, that we should scrap our current programming and let go of the events many of us cherish. But rather, it is a balancing act where we celebrate our widely appreciated events while being mindful and making room to celebrate our cultural and racial diversities. This means showing our love, respect, and inclusion for all our members by having events that cater to everybody. Despite the little time we have left as a Council, we have already been brainstorming events that are more multicultural and family-friendly, ones that are mindful of cultural sensitivities and traditions.

- **Unified Voice to the College:** The LSA commits to increasing pressure on the College to enhance supports for students generally, and BIPOC students specifically. When I relayed to the College that these exam accommodations complaints exist, I was informed that this issue 'flares up' every few years, but there remains no adequate plan to address why it does. Until this day, there has been no equity training provided, no director for Indigenous Services appointed, no counsellor available in the College who can provide Anti-Racism education, and no understanding from faculty why exams have generally become longer recently. These are all underlying issues that cause such 'flare ups'. As a result, unfortunately the College is not addressing these complaints in a way that ensures they dissipate, and I fear that they will not. Tackling racism means that the College should act on its responsibility to educate and fill the institutional gap that lets ignorance and wrong

assumptions remain unchecked and in turn, offloads handling these sensitive matters to student organizations. At the end of the day, these organizations are full time law students who are not experienced in addressing such complaints in the way they should be. If anything, this situation clearly shows that I am not. The College has the resources and power to effectively address discrimination. There is no better time to do so, particularly in light of the openly racist viewpoints being made in Kwayeskastasowin. I have chatted with the ILSA President and both Co-Chairs of the ARTFC, and we agreed to have a four-way meeting with the Dean in hopes of signaling just how serious this issue has become.

- **Anti-Racism training for LSA executive members:** The LSA has been in touch with the College to provide a contact who is trained in providing Anti-Racism education. It is our understanding that some members in the College are undergoing yearlong Anti-Racism training, and the LSA believes that student leaders, as individuals who are in positions of power and in constant contact with the student body, should be afforded similar training as well. The Anti-Racism contact in the College may also be instrumental in our work to amend our constitution into making it more inclusive.

I am also happy to accept ILSA's invitation to the talking circle. I will be present to learn and listen. I truly hope that it can provide some much-needed healing and reconciliation. To anyone who needs to hear this today, particularly my Indigenous peers, I respect you, I love you, and I will work hard in the time I have left to make sure your voice is very well heard. I am especially grateful for the conversations I have had with our VP of Indigenous Affairs, both Co-Chairs of the ARTFC, and general LSA/ILSA members over the past couple of weeks in order to find ways to move forward and use this incident as a catalyst for better and longer lasting change.

As my presidency began, I promised renewed relationships between the LSA and ILSA, one that is based on mutual respect and more collaboration. In light of what happened, this promise will be the cornerstone of the energy and time I have left to ensure something better comes out of this situation. Moving forward, and with everyone's help, I would like to focus on turning these ambitious action plans into reality, and in a way truly leaving the LSA and the wider student body in a more resilient and inclusive position than the one I find myself in right now. More importantly, hopefully these goals will make the LSA a more welcoming home for all students in the months and years to come.

Kindest regards,

Karim Ismail

President, Law Students' Association

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