

An Open Letter in Support of BSW 4th Year Students and Various Social Work Students at UBC Regarding the Request to Action by UBC

September 19, 2022

To Whom It May Concern,

As a group of UBC Social Justice Institute students, we oppose the UBC Broadcast that observes the National Day of Mourning and support the calls to action proposed by the BWS students in the school of Social Work. The open letter was published on September 16th, 2022 in response to the Broadcast and in it, it outlines the violence the British Monarchy has enacted on Indigenous communities upon Turtle Island.

While UBC's Broadcast aligns with the Canadian Government Observance of the "National Day of Mourning," it exhibits the tension the institution holds between upholding colonial systems as well as honoring the Musqueam (x^wməθk^wəyəm) people, whose unceded and stolen land UBC is situated upon. Mourning a member of the monarchy without mentioning or acknowledging the violence and dispossession that colonialism has had and continues to have in the lives of First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities across Canada goes against the principles of reconciliation UBC claims to want to work under.

We bring attention to the content UBC has outlined on page 9 of the Indigenous Strategic Plan of the traumas caused during the residential "school" era. When reviewing the ISP, the realization of how the plan operates for UBC is one that has an initial process with an end goal through utilizing the plan. We must note that the plan addresses significant colonial events of the past, but the recent broadcast does not reflect solidarity with the Indigenous students, faculty, and staff. According to the ISP, "*for many Indigenous students, faculty and staff, colonialism is a daily reality at UBC. One need not look far to recognize the value that has been placed on Eurocentric approaches to teaching and research to understand why so many do not see themselves reflected in the classroom and workplace.*" (ISP, 9.) Thus, this broadcast is even more deeply egregious as we approach Reconciliation Day on Sept 30th. While we often give performative land acknowledgements, there is often little action to address the violence of colonialism within Canada. The GRSJ students associated with this communication support the 3 requests of the Social Work Students as noted

1. That UBC retracts the previous statement released on September 8, 2022 and the UBC broadcast sent on September 13, 2022.
2. That UBC provides an apology for not including those of us who are directly impacted by colonization in the discussion, decision-making and releasing of these statements.
3. That UBC acknowledges the harm that has been and continues to be caused by British colonialism."

We too have requests from UBC in support of the Social Work Students, as follows:

1. That UBC commits to do a yearly review of where the institution fails to uphold the commitment to the implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation calls to action in education and the Indigenous Strategic Plan.
2. That UBC acknowledges these areas within the calls to action of the TRC as it relates to education and updates regarding the review of the Indigenous Strategic Plan publicly and create a plan to improve in these areas.

As students who work towards building justice in an unjust world, we honor those who we share space with. We are privileged to learn together from one another even if this is under a colonial systemic structure. We are constantly attempting to decolonize our classrooms, lectures, and our lives and must center the lived experiences of those directly affected by the oppressive systems that surround us. We

share the sentiments of the BSW students, recognize that often our departments also fail to be critical of the institution in which they are housed and thus the labor of educating peers, departments and institutions are left for students to undertake at great emotional cost. We hope UBC is able to respond to the open letters and to the BSW student demands with the same efficacy and speed that the UBC Broadcast was drafted under.

In solidarity,

Signed,
A Group of GRSJ Graduate Students