

# Dal restricts search for new VP to 'racially visible,' Indigenous candidates

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Jasmine Walsh, assistant vice-president of human resources at Dalhousie University, said Tuesday Dalhousie has been "deliberate and proactive" in its recruitment so students will be able to see themselves reflected throughout the university's ranks.

Dalhousie University says its search for a new senior administrator will be restricted to "racially visible" and Indigenous candidates, part of its efforts to increase underrepresented groups on the Halifax campus.

In a memo to the university community, provost and vice-president academic Carolyn Watters said the prerequisite is in line with the principles of Dalhousie's employment equity policy.

"We have embarked on the process of selecting a new vice-provost student affairs," she stated in the memo last month, adding that the search "will be restricted to racially visible persons and Aboriginal Peoples at this time."

Jasmine Walsh, Dalhousie's assistant vice-president of human resources, said Tuesday Dalhousie has been "deliberate and proactive" in its recruitment so students will be able to see themselves reflected throughout the university's ranks.

"This is a position where we're looking across our senior admin ranks at Dalhousie, we note that there are representation gaps for racialized and Indigenous People, and so the decision was made to try and target our recruitment efforts to find qualified candidates who will help to increase our representation in the senior ranks," Walsh said.

The search comes after incumbent Arig al Shaibah announced she would be leaving the university at the end of March after less than two years in the role.

She became the public face of the university's high-profile decision to consider disciplinary action against student leader Masuma Khan who criticized "white fragility."

The recruitment process for her successor raises questions about whether such restrictions could be a form of either tokenism or discrimination.

Walsh dismissed any suggestion that the recruitment is a symbolic gesture to give the appearance of racial equality in the university workforce.

"If this were the only thing that we were doing, that would be a different conversation. But it's part of a broader context," she said. "We've been working hard for the past several years in relation to diversity and inclusiveness on campus."

As for the suggestion that limiting the competition somehow constitutes "reverse racism," Walsh said the university is taking a "fair approach" to recruitment.

"What we're ultimately striving for is fairness in our recruitment processes" she said, explaining that university's goal is to align Dalhousie's workforce with the general labour market.

The latest Statistics Canada census figures show that visible minorities make up just over 21 per cent of the country's total employed workforce.

A Dalhousie report from 2016 found the percentage of racially visible employees at the university was about 11 per cent.

The numbers were lower among high ranking university officials, with only 4.7 per cent of senior academic management and 2.8 per cent of senior staff management identifying as racially visible.

The Masuma Khan dispute sparked debate about free speech, inclusion and equity on campus and eventually led al Shaibah to acknowledge that the university's code of conduct may not place two core institutional values — freedom of speech and the prevention of demeaning and intimidating behaviour — in sufficient and proper context.

Al Shaibah, who has accepted a position at McMaster University as the inaugural associate vice-president, equity and inclusion, declined an interview request Tuesday.