

# **Investigation Into Workplace Dynamics at the UPEISU**

## **Ombudsperson Report**

**January 30th, 2022**

On Sunday January 16th 2022, a motion was moved by Senate Rep LeClair which states “ I will like to move a motion to launch an ombudsperson investigation to speak to all the workers at the UPEISU as well as the executive”

For the purpose of this investigation, I met with all the full-time staff who work with various executives in different capacities, I also met with all the student staff (i.e coordinator), executive members and a few students. In this report, no names will be used to keep the confidentiality of various individuals.

In my meetings, there were some major themes mentioned which is:

- 1.) A toxic environment created majorly by an executive member but this does not exclude other executive members and student staff who contributed to this toxic work environment.
- 2.) Long term bullying and exclusion
- 3.) Threatening of Jobs
- 4.) Gossiping
- 5.) Suicidal jokes in the work place
- 6.) Racial Issues

It is important to note that all of this caused the full time staff, executive members and student staff to emotionally deteriorate and seek counseling throughout the year.

### **Long Term Bullying and Seclusion**

The primary point mentioned by all the full-time staff, students and executives interviewed was the constant bullying that happens in the workplace. The executives and students interviewed said that the executive in question had a pattern of alienation. Where they would single out a specific person to pick on and then cause others around the office to turn against that person, this happened in several instances throughout the year. It was mentioned that anyone seen speaking or being friendly to the alienated person is automatically treated negatively. This happened for a long while, which made executives and students afraid to speak

up and just joined the trend because they claimed they felt threatened and manipulated to their side.

When speaking about bullying in the UPEISU this year, it is important to mention a student who experienced bullying firsthand in this organization. After the executive transition in April 2021, a student was mistreated by the executive in question and other executive members. However, the other executive members claimed to have been influenced by the executive in question. Bullying to this student looked like constant isolation, being looked down upon and their ability to do their job was being questioned even though they made her mental health struggles clear from the beginning of the year. Executives members were still not talking to this student, and the executive in question would punish any full-time staff that did so. Punishment for the full-time staff also felt similar to what the student experienced. The exec in question ignored them, would not acknowledge their presence in the office and would avoid any interaction with them. This made the full-time staff feel anxious, depressed, unsupported and felt their job was on the line.

Lastly, it is essential to add that not only did students and full-time staff experience bullying, but student staff also claimed to have been bullied in various and similar capacities.

It is important to note the executive in question mentioned that they had no intentions of secluding or bullying any individual, but rather, they were secluding themselves whenever they felt unsupported

### **Threatening of Jobs**

Another prominent point made during my interviews was the fear of losing jobs by a couple of full time staff, executives members, students and even student staff.

Some executives mentioned that they felt pressured to join the executive in question because they felt that if they didn't join in the behavior they would be the next target or be gaslighted by the executive in question which was evident in the pattern that was created around the office.

Even though the full-time staff did not receive threats directly, they were threatened by the actions of the executive in question because it is public knowledge that full time staff work for executives. For example, during the meeting with HRA, the first question asked by the executive in question was “ who can fire who” . This statement came as a threat to the staff because the workplace was already toxic enough for them and this created a new worry for them

to deal with. On the flip side, the executive in question made it clear that they did not mean harm to anybody's job but rather they were just seeking clarity on different roles around the office. Another instance that was brought up was regarding the role of the communications manager role, it was mentioned by a student that during the summer the executive in question was looking for loopholes in the role of the comms manager and wanted to change the role back to a student position because they felt that the comms manager was not fulfilling all their responsibilities. In addition to this it was mentioned by an executive member that when the executive in question felt that the comms manager put in a report about them to council, they were determined to bring a proposal to council about changing the role back to a student position ( there was proof of this discussion) however when the executive in question was interviewed, they mentioned that they were just seeking clarity and meant no harm.

A student staff also mentioned that while working with the exec in question they ran out of work to do and the executive in question told them that if they run out of work to do they should just put in the hours they were in the office in their timesheet as long as no one knew about it but the student staff did not feel comfortable doing so. In order to keep themselves busy they assisted another student staff with their event and reachout to the exec in question about putting in that hour in their time sheet but the exec in question said “ You will only get paid for things I tell you to do. Do you Understand!” This made the staff feel talked down on and after this incident, there was no responsibility given to them for 2 months.

### **Gossiping**

Another main point brought up by various staff, students, and executives was the constant gossiping that occurred amongst various executives and student staff.

### **Suicidal Jokes in the Workplace**

During my interview with various executives and students, they mentioned that there was constant suicidal joke being made by an executive in the office and they mention that this joke had negative impact on them which lead them to seclude themselves from this executive members just as a means to protect their mental health

### **Racial Jokes**

One of the interviewed people mentioned that they felt like some racial jokes made around the office targeted them, and they felt offended by this joke.

## ***Recommendations***

In terms of recommendations, I asked all members of the team what can be adopted to help the structure and handling of this organization and some of their answer were:

- 1.) Having a HR investigation will be a great start
- 2.) Having a solid HR practice in place people that are actually trained so that if issues like this arises staffs will have the opportunity to speak up rather than suffer in silence and confusion
- 3.) Assist training for all staff and executive members
- 4.) Even though it is a student led organization, there should be a permanent role in place who executives can be accountable to.
- 5.) Impeachment of the executive in question
- 6.) EDI training for student staffs and full time staffs
- 7.) More clarity on roles and responsibilities in the organization