

Hello everyone and welcome to this year's SEEDS conference. My name is Priyanka, but I go by Pri and I am one member of the beautiful SEEDS leadership council. It is my absolute pleasure to be here among so many scientists, researchers, and educators that are as passionate about the spaces and places we occupy as I am.

Unfortunately for me, I've not had the pleasure of working with the amazing folks at SEEDS in a face-to-face capacity or with any of you folks, for that matter. Our interactions have been virtual, scattered, sometimes in the darkness of a short winter's evening in Toronto or in the bright blinding lights of an early summer's day in New Zealand. That being said, each interaction has made me feel alive, renewed, and confident. Above all, they make me feel heard.

I grew up in the context of Alberta, which is not necessarily a place exploding with EDI work, until recent years of course. The classrooms I occupied very seldom had a teacher that looked like me. As I grew older, I realized my personhood, my identities, would rarely be represented in this capacity.

There was a time where I actually had an outburst in a university classroom about the ignorance and misplaced understanding of microaggressions being discussed by my fellow colleagues, predominantly white folks. The frustration with our current systems clearly runs quite deep and I needed some kind of an avenue for it.

I can't quite recall how I came to join SEEDS. I imagine my colleague and friend, Dr. Marc Higgins, had something to do with it, as he has a lot to do with my own understanding of self and decentering colonial systems in my everyday interactions. But I am forever grateful for the experiences I've shared with these folks and now with all of you.

In our efforts to change the way STEM is done, taught, and shared, I've made a hefty number of meaningful connections and relationships. This community is the one I've been searching for in which I could flourish as an EDI-focused educator. And I hope you all have the opportunities to find your path to do the same here.

As we navigate the climate of social justice and change with the overarching context of a pandemic, the need for true, deliberate action is greater than ever. It warms my heart deeply to see the number of people here that have a dedication toward this work. It is with you that this action can be taken. The tools to further dismantle the systems in place are already embedded within all of you.

That being said, social justice work is hard to do alone.

I encourage you to find community in SEEDS as I did. There are a number of avenues for any kind of social champion. I've found my footing within the Organizational Structure committee but the work we do is multi-faceted as are all aspects of meaningful societal disruptions and changes. Take it from me, a young, second-year masters student based in Alberta: if you are looking for support, look no further than the community surrounding you today.

With that, please join me in commencing this year's conference so aptly named Refusing Back to Normal.

Thank you,

Priyanka Dutt