

Towards a Conscious Integration of EDI Values on Canadian Campuses: A Case Study Analysis

Vicki Squires¹, Alexander Gavu¹, Hannah Moore², Rohan Gopakumar³

¹ University of Saskatchewan, ² Durham University,

³ Indian Institute of Technology Madras

Abstract

Campuses are focusing on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) initiatives and programs as a response to urgent calls for higher education institutions to exemplify these principles. This study focused on determining the current environment for embedding EDI principles to identify next steps in galvanizing efforts in this work. This qualitative multi-case study had two phases. In the first phase, we conducted an environmental scan of the websites of the 15 research-intensive universities in Canada (U15) to determine how EDI efforts were included in any publicly available documents and on the websites. In the second phase, we conducted semi-structured interviews with members of an EDI Champions committee at one campus to explore how the EDI commitments were being actualized on that campus. Participants confirmed that work was ongoing but that determining a shared understanding of EDI, articulating a strategy for implementation, and promoting EDI efforts on campus faced many challenges including creating understanding and commitment across campus to further the EDI strategies. Campuses need a well-articulated strategy complete with processes and targets to inform campus members about EDI, determine ways to support action, and articulate ways to measure progress against EDI goals.

Keywords: Equity, diversity, inclusion, policies, higher education, champions

The Evolution of EDI on Canadian Campuses

Historically, the first universities served specific groups of people, including the aristocracy, religious and political leaders; access for others was extremely limited (Austin & Jones, 2016). Universities became more accessible to the middle class as more universities with a broader range of programs were established. The return of veterans after the Second World War and the resulting policies and financial support for these veterans to access higher education fundamentally shifted the student population (Austin & Jones, 2016; Hardy Cox & Strange, 2010). However, the principles of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) and the efforts towards integrating these principles in the core work of research and teaching in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are relatively recent.

The integration of EDI principles, though, faces several challenges. Equity, diversity, and inclusion are complicated and often controversial terms in both meaning and enactment, according to Tamtik and Guenter (2019). Most definitions of diversity usually include color, gender, age, sexual orientation, socioeconomic class, disability, religion, education, and family/marital status (Loden & Rosener, 1991). Authors such as Chan (2005) and organizations such as Multiculturalism British Columbia (2000) noted that diversity should be considered beyond categorization, which is reflected as people's identities and rather, should focus on the principles of inclusion, the recognition and valuing of difference, and the ability to participate equitably in society. There is a resulting tension in the literature between defining EDI and diversity by describing categories versus defining EDI by advocating for inclusivity and recognizing differences.

A factor to consider in Canadian higher education EDI efforts is that education falls under provincial jurisdiction in Canada (Austin & Jones, 2016). As such, there is no federal authority that has official oversight of HEI policies or provides guidelines and strategic directions for higher education. However, the federal government does have influence through the federal research funds. For example, a requisite element for all Tri-Council research grant applications is the inclusion of EDI principles throughout the description of all stages of the proposed research study (Government of Canada, n.d.). Additionally, a requirement for all HEIs applying to the Canada Research Chairs (CRC) program is the development and publication of an institutional EDI action plan (Tamtik & Guenter, 2019).

Many scholars associate EDI in higher education environments with statistical reporting of employed staff or admitted students as a representation of diversity in these institutions (Green, 2018). This view of EDI may not necessarily represent EDI integration because of the complexities of HEIs, the decentralized nature of decision-making and authority, and the long history of HEIs as elitist and grounded in Western approaches to knowledge making and knowledge mobilization (Green, 2018). Therefore, a multilayered and longitudinal approach is required to truly integrate the values of EDI into HEIs (Green, 2018). Isomorphic pressures, high-level political pressure from federal research-granting agencies, and public calls for social justice are underlying a recent push for widespread formulation and adoption of EDI policies across higher education (Tamtik & Guenter, 2019). However, Hoffman and Mitchell (2016) emphasized that HEIs' efforts regarding EDI integration should not be mere knee-jerk reactions. Importantly, these diversity declarations have been criticized for being more performative than meaningful (Hoffman & Mitchell, 2016; MacKenzie et al., 2023; Pidgeon, 2016; Tamtik & Guenter, 2019). Hoffman and Mitchell elaborated, saying that institutional talk about diversity, equity, and inclusion can be "performative," despite pressure to move beyond "cosmetic diversity" (p. 288) and focus on declarations that are linked to and supported by tangible actions.

According to Tamtik and Guenter (2019), diversity and inclusion policies in Canada did not begin as educational policies but are rooted in the Canadian legal framework and constitutional values. The actions of HEIs toward EDI integration stem from constitutional provisions and may not necessarily reflect actions aimed at social justice. Chan (2005) examined policies and federal legislation that provide the foundation for EDI efforts. As Chan pointed out, these documents include the Employment Equity Act, which was initially enacted in 1986 and later revised in 1992, the Canadian Human Rights Act (1977), the Canadian Multiculturalism Act of 1988, and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982). Many educational institutions have gone beyond these federal guidelines and statutes in their efforts toward EDI integration on their various campuses. Even with these legal documents as a foundation, though, differences in definitions of EDI terms and concepts are hindering the universality of EDI practices (Tamtik & Guenter, 2019). Diverse scholarly critiques are also being published (see for example Abbot et al., 2023) Champions of the EDI efforts on Canadian campuses have experienced critiques and resistance in various ways (MacKenzie et al., 2023) and American faculty and HEIs are facing even stronger actions and sanctions against Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) efforts (Feder, 2024). Understanding the state of EDI evolution on Canadian campuses can potentially bring some of the successes, tensions, and challenges of EDI work in higher education to the forefront.

Purpose of the Study

While the intent of equity and inclusion for all is an aspirational principle upon which campus members can agree, some writers argue that the discourse and the rhetoric do not lead to actions and achieving intended outcomes and are merely performative (Hoffman & Mitchell, 2016; MacKenzie, et al., 2023; Pidgeon, 2016; Tamtik & Guenter, 2019). Our interest in researching EDI in higher education was sparked by global events and the development of an EDI framework on our campus. We limited our study to the 15 most research-intensive campuses in Canada (also known as the U15) because of the added emphasis on EDI in research. The full names of the U15 are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Top 15 Research-Intensive Universities in Canada (U15)

University of Laval	University of Toronto (U of T)	University of Manitoba (U of M)
University of Ottawa (uOttawa)	University of Waterloo (uWaterloo)	University of Saskatchewan (USask)
Montreal University	Western University	University of Alberta (U of A)
McGill University	McMaster University	University of Calgary (U of C)
Dalhousie University	Queens University	University of British Columbia (UBC)

We wanted to uncover how the U15 campuses were expressing equity, diversity, and inclusion on their websites and in their publicly available documents. Websites are important sources in identifying what campus senior leadership purports to be important to the work of universities. According to Morphew and Hartley (2006), institutional websites have become a frequent way for institutions to communicate their ideals to external stakeholders. As institutions adopt missions that promote EDI, many of them utilize their websites to disseminate these ideals (Wilson et al., 2012). Consequently, HEIs have created websites that are appealing to a wide range of stakeholders with the aim of communicating with these stakeholders and attracting prospective students (Saichaie & Morphew, 2014). LePeau et al. (2018) noted that the majority of university websites are now used to express institutional aims for enhancing compositional diversity. Harris et al. (2015) cautioned HEIs about the importance of avoiding jargon-laden diversity statements, policies, and commitments that are not explicitly critical of systems of institutionalized privilege and can stymie, if not reverse, progress toward equity. In the Canadian context, EDI is becoming a normative practice, as evidenced through Tri-Council agency expectations around and emphasis on addressing EDI in all research grant applications.

In addition to conducting an environmental scan of websites, we also wanted to explore more deeply how one campus, through the work of its EDI Champions Committee, was supporting the actualization of EDI principles and action plans on campus. We were curious to know whether words were turning into concrete changes on campuses; specifically, were campuses attending to the critiques expressed by previous authors that EDI intent did not match action?

The research questions that guided our analysis were: How are U15 campuses embedding EDI into institutional strategies and policies? At one U15 campus, how was the university moving the policy intent into action?

Theoretical Framework

The framework suggested by Howlett, Ramesh, and Perl (2009) for studying policy cycles is helpful in structuring our conceptions of the implementation and evaluation of EDI commitments, even though not all the documents and strategies were framed as policies. Howlett et al. posited that the study of policy development can be framed as an examination of a series of stages within a policy cycle. By considering each stage of the process, decision makers and researchers can identify stage-specific actions and decisions. According to Howlett et al., the policy cycle has four stages. The first stage is *Policy Adoption*, whereby a problem is recognized, possible solutions are proposed or examined, and a solution is determined using the tools or policy instruments available (Howlett et al., 2009). The second stage is *Policy Formulation*, where the solution is better articulated and a plan of action is crafted. The particular initiatives are then enacted in the *Policy Implementation* stage. The *Policy Evaluation* stage may occur at different times during implementation, and results can inform further action. Although the policy cycle model may suggest that the process is linear, it is most often iterative (Howlett et al., 2009).

Using the policy cycle as a research framework, we assumed that HEIs had determined that the development of strategies, policies, and action plans to support EDI was critical; in essence, these institutions had progressed through the adoption stage and were at various stages of formulation. Each institution had to evaluate what strategies were needed and determine what the intent of the goals of the plans was. The implementation stage is key for moving from intent to action; our website analysis could uncover elements of adoption and formulation, and we further hoped we could identify how (and if) policies and strategies were being implemented. The policy evaluation stage can occur at any point in the

process and may inform next steps for the HEIs. Unfortunately, evaluation of progress towards the policy goal is not often discoverable through an analysis of institutional documents. However, the articulation of goals, indicators, or targets is indicative of plans to evaluate progress.

Methodology

This qualitative case study of one Canadian U15 campus was conducted in two phases. Case studies are common methodologies in higher education as the context is a key element of the study; the study has bounded by specific parameters and can be focused on a single case or multiple cases (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009). Further, several methods can be used to gather data in hopes of understanding the focus of the study more deeply (Creswell, 2014). First, we conducted a review of EDI websites and documents of the U15. The review provided us with an environmental scan that helped us situate the campus of study within the broader U15 landscape. The findings of the review are presented first. The data collection began in winter 2022 and continued into the fall term of 2022; the data collection was supported by two students from the Mitacs Globalink Research program and a doctoral graduate research assistant. EDI efforts are ongoing across Canadian campuses; as such, our environmental scan provided a snapshot of the available information within that time frame. Undoubtedly, campuses have continued to update their websites as new policies, strategic plans and supports are developed and implemented. The results of the website review helped us determine the state of EDI implementation on U15 campuses at the time of our study.

The second phase of the study focused on semi-structured interviews with key individuals who were involved in promoting EDI initiatives at one campus; for the purpose of the study, we are naming the committee the EDI Champions Committee. This university is part of the U15 and is of medium size (around 30,000 students and 1,000 faculty) and offers a broad range of disciplinary and some interdisciplinary programs. The student body is diverse, with international students from many countries (approximately 15% of the student body) and approximately 15% Indigenous students. At this campus, the EDI framework was in the final stages of development but had not been widely disseminated. Many of these committee members were involved since the initial stages of the framework's development, before the wider campus was involved. We wondered how they perceived the work towards a more formal strategy or document as campus members who were interested in or passionate about EDI. The interview findings are described in a subsequent section.

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012) was used to determine themes and subthemes for the document analysis and the interview data. According to Braun and Clarke, thematic analysis is “a method for systematically identifying, organizing, and offering insight into patterns of meaning [themes] across a data set” (p. 57); Castleberry and Nolen (2018) supported this point and added that this type of analysis was especially useful when analyzing large amounts of qualitative data. The following sections present the findings for the two phases.

Findings: Environmental Scan

Search Strategy

As Choo (2008) noted, “environmental scanning is the acquisition and use of information about events, trends, and relationships in an organization's external environment, the knowledge of which would assist management in planning the organization's future course of action” (p. 4). Organizations build awareness of trends and issues and gather information on institutional responses of similar organizations. To develop a current picture of the state of EDI as integrated into university policy and practice, we first conducted an environmental scan of existing EDI documents. We performed a general search using the search engines of the websites of U15 universities with EDI-related keywords and concepts as depicted in Table 2 between 4th January 2022 and 26th February 2022, and then between April 2022 and May 2022. The keywords for this study are “equity,” “diversity,” “inclusion,” “post-secondary education,” and “U15 Canada.” Using these terms, we identified any policies, documents, offices, processes, and institutional information connected to EDI.

Table 2
Terms and Associated Webpages

Key words/concepts	Webpages
Non-academic Misconduct	Policies and Statements
Hiring	Policies and Statements
Admission	Policies and Statements
Support for Staff	EDI policy/office Human right office
Support for Students	EDI policy/office, Human right office
Harassment/Discrimination	Office of the Ombudsman, Human right office
Launching Complaint	Policies and Statements
EDI Training and Education	EDI Resource
EDI Initiatives	EDI Resource

The review explored a total of 124 documents that were relevant to EDI on the websites of U15 universities. We considered a wide range of policy documents related to hiring (26), admissions (14), harassment (29), launching a complaint (14), support for staff (9), and support for students (19). To ascertain other actions of these institutions towards EDI integration, which may not be found in policy documents, we also explored information on EDI leadership; of importance was the availability of EDI offices on their campus, institutional initiatives for EDI, and education and training to create awareness about EDI. For the selection criteria, we reviewed any policy documents related to EDI, such as institutional EDI policies and procedures, strategic plans, reports, and statements that were accessible on the universities' websites.

The findings of this review are further described in the following section. We acknowledge that any form of analysis of institutional policies must take into consideration the institutional climate and governance structures for leadership and advocacy that are required to make inclusion a reality (Green, 2018). We further acknowledge that our search was bounded within a particular time frame; it is conceivable that further development of documents, policies, and resources has occurred since the end of 2022. There were several main themes regarding the information on the websites: provision of definitions of terms and concepts, strategies on training and education, institutional initiatives, policies about launching a complaint, hiring guidelines, and considerations for admissions. An overview of the findings specific to each campus is presented in Appendix A; the following sections provide a deeper description of the themes.

Definitions of Terms/Concepts

According to Green (2018), EDI integration in postsecondary education can be compared to playing a game of chess. To implement an EDI agenda with intentionality, an institution must be patient and strategic, with a clear focus on leadership and advocacy, education and training, workforce diversity, and authority and resources (Green, 2018). In these efforts, the definition of terms is key to institutions' EDI integration agenda. Throughout our search, we noticed the most common EDI terms among U15 Canada were diversity, equity, and inclusion; all institutions (with the exception of the University of Waterloo) provided definitions of at least those three key terms. Additional related terms (that were sometimes unique to one institution) included terms such as accessibility, human rights, intersectionality, equality, *Manācihitowin* (let us respect each other), human dignity, and systemic bias/institutional bias. One challenge towards EDI integration in U15 Canadian universities, though, is the various definitions offered by different institutions, even with the common terms such as diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Strategies on Training and Education (Creating Awareness)

According to Dobbin and Kalev (2016), institutions must provide a variety of EDI educational experiences that support people in taking personal responsibility and action rather than achieving inclusion through education and training. To engage earnestly in the implementation of EDI principles, people must first become conscious of their own social and cultural identities, beliefs, and prejudices (Hartwell et al., 2017). To address the need for EDI training and education, some U15 universities have created various platforms for EDI education and training. Examples include EDI Training and Workshop (University of Toronto), Equitable Recruitment and Selection Training (University of Waterloo), EDI Workshops and Training Sessions (Western), and Inclusion and Anti-Racism Education (McMaster University). Others offer sessions organized around particular calendar events such as Black History Month. Even though our study revealed many of these institutions have instituted some form of EDI workshops or training, others are yet to develop awareness programs as part of their campus activities or as a feature on their website. Most of the existing education initiatives appear to be offered sporadically; in some cases, the training is hosted as a yearly activity, which may have limited impact and reach. The scope of our environmental scan, though, meant that we did not search through all the college or faculty websites within a university. Because some activities may be happening at a smaller scale or for a targeted subgroup on campus, there is the potential that our review of websites would not have linked the EDI programs of limited size or scope to the university website.

Institutional Initiatives

In our search of U15 websites, we found that institutional initiatives such as the Indigenous Awareness Week and Equity Awards (McGill University), Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Awards (University of Calgary [U of C]), EDI Action Network (University of British Columbia [UBC]), Employment Equity Award (Queens University), and Love & Liberation: Blueprints for a BIPOC future conference (University of Toronto) are several of the many initiatives that may enhance interest in EDI among the U15 communities. Some initiatives are longer in scope, such as mentorship programs for Black medical students (University of Ottawa), Equity Enhancement Fund (UBC), and an Employee Resource Group for Black, Indigenous and Racialized Staff (McMaster University). There were many examples of institutional initiatives, ranging from ongoing support to special events.

Policies Related to Launching a Complaint

Our search found that most of the U15 have in place policies or statements on the launching of complaints with regard to EDI. Unfortunately, some of the policies or statements are not explicit enough and do not provide specific enough information to guide the complainant. The policies and processes should be designed to guarantee confidence on the part of the complainant that their complaint will be heard and they will not suffer consequences because they have initiated a complaint. Whereas many of the institutions have established safe mechanisms for reporting EDI-related incidences with the Safe Disclosure Policy, worthy of mention are the Procedure for Protected Disclosure (U of C, 2015), Safe Disclosure Reporting and Investigation Policy and Procedures (Queens University, 2011), and the Office of Safe Disclosure and Human Rights (University of Alberta), which provide a well-documented procedure and process of launching complaints without any reprisal. We also observed that institutions that had established EDI offices and had identifiable EDI teams—which were discoverable through a web search—had a more practicable procedure for launching complaints.

Policies Related to Hiring

Through our searches, one of the most common themes we identified among many of the institutions was in relation to hiring staff for various roles. EDI has become a prominent consideration in hiring through policies such as the employment equity policy, which was discoverable on the U15 websites. The Policy on Recruitment and Selection of Faculty Members (McMaster, 2020) promotes equitable, inclusive, and meritocratic examination of potential faculty applications through the preparation, advertising, assessment, and selection phases of the search process. Employment Advertising Policy (UBC, 2019) provides equal opportunity to all who seek employment at UBC. The pro-active Recruitment of Women Profes-

sors' policy (uOttawa) promotes a better balance between the number of men and women professors. The above highlighted policies are some of the unique policies of the U15 focused on enhancing EDI on their campuses through hiring. Our search revealed that all these institutions currently have employment or recruitment equity policies that seek to promote a diverse workforce for their growing diverse student population.

Policies Related to Admissions

Even though many countries are implementing policies, programs, and actions to support EDI in higher education for students from under-represented groups, the challenge has always been the absence of a universally agreed-upon definition of individuals who fall within the EDI categorizations (Salmi & D'Addio, 2021; Sursock, 2018). To further ascertain the commitment of U15 Canada towards EDI integration, we explored policies related to admission in these institutions. We found that most of the institutions have implemented some policies that enhance EDI on their campuses. The Policy on Admission to Degree Programs (University of Saskatchewan, 2012) ensures there is equity, diversity, and transparency in admission practices by the various colleges and schools; Aboriginal Student Admissions Policy (U of C, 2005) ensures equitable access for Aboriginal Students to undergraduate degree programs at the U of C. The Educational Equity Policy (Queens University, 2001) provides means of access, admission, and retention of a wide diversity of students. All campuses had student support centers for access and equity and had established policies supporting the inclusion of all students with disabilities. These policies are uniquely developed to address EDI among U15 campuses and enhance equity and inclusion of a widely diverse student population. A limiting factor for our research, especially regarding student admissions and supports was the variability in websites across the U15 in terms of presentation of the information and ease of finding relevant information.

Findings: Interviews

After receiving research ethics approval, we emailed an invitation to all members of the EDI Champions group. Of the possible 30 members of the group, six people chose to participate. Because the campus had not yet released its EDI guiding documents, we limited our pool to campus members who had already been engaged in EDI conversations. Interviews were conducted via Zoom and transcribed using the transcribing feature in Zoom. Once the transcripts were edited, they were sent to participants for review. Data analysis began once permission to use the transcript was received from the participant. Using a thematic analysis approach, we coded for themes and subthemes according to the process as described by Braun and Clarke (2012). The following table summarizes the interview findings.

Table 3
Themes and Subthemes from Interviews

Main Themes	Sub-Themes	Strength
Definition of EDI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Providing equitable access to opportunities and resources. -Ensuring fair and unbiased treatment of all individuals. -Fostering a sense of belonging and connectedness. -Recognizing the wide range of backgrounds and identities that exist within a community or organization. 	Featured heavily in the conversations with most participants

Main Themes	Sub-Themes	Strength
Institutional Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recognizing the role of the institution in perpetuating or challenging systemic inequalities. - Encouraging a diversity of perspectives and ideas within the institution. - Providing training and resources to support the implementation of inclusive policies and practices. 	Some of the participants were unsure of institutional engagement; several identified the support of key leadership through dedication of resources and establishing a committee.
Beyond the numerical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Understanding the nuances of diversity and inclusion issues that cannot be captured by numerical data. - Recognizing the importance of an intersectional approach in creating truly inclusive environments. - Creating opportunities for individuals to engage in meaningful ways that go beyond surface-level diversity initiatives. 	Featured in the interviews with most participants but gathering metrics was expressed as a starting point for EDI.
Safe reporting Channels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Providing clear and easy to understand reporting processes. - Establishing clear timelines for responding to reports of misconduct or discrimination. - Maintaining confidentiality and privacy throughout the reporting and investigation process. - Providing training to all employees on the importance of reporting misconduct or discrimination. 	Most of the participants were unsure of the existence of safe reporting channels.

Definition of EDI

To fully understand the efforts of postsecondary education institutions towards EDI integration, the definition of the term EDI is an important place to start. We asked each participant about the term itself. Participants could choose to define each term within the acronym, or they could focus on defining the acronym as a whole and situate the definition in relation to HEIs. Many of the participants defined EDI as collective action to ensure that everyone felt included and had equitable opportunities to achieve personal and professional goals. This sentiment is succinctly identified in the definition provided by *participant 3*: “EDI is really about acceptance, that’s really what it is for me, that it’s understanding that there are differences, appreciating that the differences exist, accepting those differences and, thinking about us as a collective, rather than as an individual.” *Participant 2*, on the other hand, noted a prevalent and narrow perception of diversity, stating, “When I think about diversity, I think about variety and how we measure diversity or that variety is often by counting things.” The participant added that, “if we have a diverse population, are we providing what the people that comprise that diverse population need or are we just trying to [have a] one-size-fits-all.”

Participant 1 identified that the goal of EDI was “giving everyone the access to as level a playing field as possible and removing as many barriers as their own demographic or personal histories have put in place because of, especially, institutional barriers or societal viewpoints”. Interestingly, *Participant 6* believed that EDI was a formal way for institutions to approach the issues of discrimination and racism in HEIs. They said, “from my perspective equity, diversity, and inclusion is a term that institutions and organizations use because it’s a bit more palatable than talking about racism, misogyny or discrimination.”

However, some participants understood the definition of EDI based on the individual definitions of the acronym. For them to fully understand the concept, they believed it was important to fully comprehend the various words and what they stand for. *Participant 4* considered the various individual terms of the acronym (EDI):

So, there are three terms. Obviously, it starts with the diversity, in my opinion, so we see the different demographics, ‘differences’ among us and differences could be many different things, could be from our genetics and that derives how we look to how we think, how we do things. We are all different, shaped through different experiences through our lives and that is diversity. Equity refers to thinking about fair share, not equal share, recognizing that because of the differences in needs that is derived from diversity, some would require more support than others to be successful. So, it’ll be different, depending on what it is and where it is, but it’s always that issue there. So that is equity - when it comes to the fact that not everyone has the same kind of access to the resources, to the advantages, and to be successful. That is equity, and inclusion is you see everyone is engaged in achieving something. So, everyone engaged, able to contribute, and their voices are heard. This doesn’t happen naturally.

While most participants defined EDI in broad terms and talked about collective work to achieve goals, two participants thought it was important to carefully consider all the words individually as a starting point to understand EDI.

Institutional Engagement

The institutional involvement in EDI efforts on their campuses was another question of interest. The majority of the participants asserted that they were only comfortable speaking on behalf of their individual colleges, departments, and units because they were not aware of the university’s broader activities. In keeping with this, *participant 1* commented that they had had several presentations on various topics around racism and micro-aggressions. Furthermore, the Human Resources staff reviewed all job postings to “make sure that they are equitable as possible, that there aren’t those subconscious barriers embedded in them.”

Whereas the various colleges, departments, and units may have developed some engagement strategies for EDI, there seemed to be a lack of general strategies for engagement of the entire university and a lack of awareness of whole campus approaches. This perception may be in part an outcome of loose coupling in university organizations and administration (Weick, 1976). *Participant 3* expressed a similar view, stating, “To be honest with you, I don’t know if formally any communication has gone out from the president’s office or the provost office.” They added that they were the key communicator about EDI events and initiatives to the rest of their college, but they were not aware of the extent of engagement at the senior executive level.

The above opinions are supported by *participant 2*, who indicated that their focus is on staff and faculty, and engagement was variable; they commented that “My focus is really on the staff and faculty. ... It depends on their positionality. It depends on their bias; it depends on their openness and their willingness to engage.” Interestingly, *participant 3* noted that there was some level of engagement with students at their college level.

We have an EDI collective on which we have a student as well, she is part of the [college] student’s society. So, then she would forward that message to the student groups. In that sense, I think by having just sent those kinds of communications at least people within the [college] are aware that there is something called an EDI champions group.

Participant 5 also indicated their engagement with both instructors and students on EDI initiatives and identified the similarities and differences between EDI and Indigenization efforts;

The question for our unit is really about support for instructors and graduate students in their teaching and supporting student learning through supporting teaching, and much of my

work is around Indigenization, as well as equity, diversity, inclusion. And so, there's overlap there as I mentioned but with Indigenization or Indigenous concerns, there are differences as well.

Although there appeared to be engagement in EDI work in some colleges, some participants had little knowledge of or visible evidence demonstrating the efforts of the university and of the engagement of the executive leadership. This contention was in opposition to several participants' views. When we asked participants of their knowledge of senior management involvement in EDI issues on campus, some of the participants were satisfied with the involvement of management as *participant 4* noted: "I see a lot of efforts and those are financially and enthusiastically supported by president's office" and in *participant 2's* words "I mean if you think about our president, he engages with us and he was the executive sponsor of the first EDI event". They added: "I think that when you have the most senior people at the institution, committed to engaging in EDI and anti-racism – I think it becomes both a top down and bottom up exercise." *Participant 5* stated: "I think I know what our leaders believe at various levels because I have listened to them speak about it, but I can not comment on the level of involvement of senior leaders" and *participant 1* said, "the announcements say they are dedicated, but I do not have enough interactions myself."

Some of the participants expressed their frustration concerning the challenges that exist regarding EDI engagement. For instance, *participant 6* made the point that "there are a lot of people who talk the right talk, but their actions do not actually match what they are saying, and I think that there are institutional barriers as well." They contended that, at the human resource department level, there was not enough diversity and that the imbalance meant that the university would struggle with identifying what barriers did exist. *Participant 3* also observed a lack of diversity among the senior executive leadership. Similarly, *participant 5* emphasized that there was a lack of Indigenous staff, faculty, and students but there were many reasons for that issue; factors included "discrimination, racism, structural issues, a smaller pool of Indigenous faculty, not because of ability just because of historical, social, and political injustices." *Participant 5* added that retention of Indigenous staff and faculty was difficult, and they are leaving in significant numbers, which is a tremendous loss for the university. *Participant 6* also made the point that "I think there's a lot of verbal support, but it's hard to see real change, like there has been no change in the hiring practices as far as I have seen. Again, I'm the only non-white person on my team."

Some participants were of the view that difficulty retaining diverse faculty could be attributed to pre-existing biases. *Participant 1* posited that there were "certain pockets of certain colleges that are resistant to EDI initiatives, I think, especially in the graduate student supervision realm"; further, they believed that academics are part of a culture where the journey was hard for them so the experiences of the current graduate students should be hard as well. Any efforts or supports, including EDI initiatives, were perceived by some members of the academy as reducing the rigour of tenure and promotion that aspiring academics had previously experienced.

An equally strong opinion in this vein is *participant 1's* statement when asked how diversity is demonstrated horizontally and vertically in the institution:

I think one of the things that gets in the way, horizontally and vertically and particularly with faculty positions, is this notion of excellence, the best, we need to hire the best. "We are not going to trade off excellence for diversity." And that is such a lame argument. It is so old and so lame. Part of our work when we talked about bias is saying, "Diversity and excellence are not mutually exclusive" and there are all kinds of literature you need diversity to have excellence. We have talked about "who is in the room"; who is defining excellence.

Despite these bleak assessments of diversity, the participants were generally of the opinion that the university has made significant progress towards EDI integration through initiatives such as the EDI Champions group which seeks to expand the discussions to all aspects of the institution. For example, *participant 2* noted that the campus had the "EDI champions network which I think is valuable because we do have responsibility for leadership development programming. *Participant 2* also pointed to the collaboration with the Office of the Vice President Research (OVPR), which depicted a high-level in-

volvement on EDI engagement in the university; they noted that they were working with the OVPR in connection with the Canada Research Chairs program, given its stringent requirements regarding “better representation of designated equity groups.” Most participants could see some progress towards institutional engagement and moving towards more diversity on campus.

Beyond the Numerical

Regarding diversity, the key is to make sure that the growth in diversity is not just for show or performative. *Participant 1* was of the view that departments and institutions “get caught up in the fact that ‘representation means the percentage of students and staff here are representative of those in the population’” rather than creating a diverse population. They added, “That is a good goal to measure metrics to show the public or yourselves that you have hit that goal, but that is not the be-all and end-all.” According to most participants, it is therefore incumbent on the institutions to develop strategies and policies that aim at influencing institutional culture and practices. To this point, *Participant 3* stated:

If any organization is serious about EDI, then the EDI lens becomes central and looking at planning, looking at budgeting, looking at resource allocation, looking at developing academic standards, all of that one would have to look at it through that lens. What would that mean? What would the ideal mix of faculty be if we were to look at it from an EDI angle. So, again, that is difficult but that is the effort that I think we need to make if we are serious about it. And yes, it can take five years, 10 years or 20 years but if we don’t embark on that journey then that becomes challenging.

However, some of the participants were of the opinion that the existence of quotas for EDI on campus is important, as it is the starting point to evaluate an institution’s efforts towards EDI integration. *Participant 3* added that “this numerical quota should not be a check box, and if you check off that box you should not be feeling satisfied.” This view was reiterated by *participant 5*:

I just know that we need the numerical quotas, at least at first, so that we can start to see some change. And then once that change starts to feel more natural, we won’t need the quotas anymore, because people will just start to be more able to see diversity everywhere they go.

Some participants agreed with the statement that universities need tangible goals such as hiring quotas so that we at least have a starting place and a way to identify progress. Importantly, though, institutions need to move beyond the numerical, hiring metrics.

Safe Reporting Channels

Our review of the U15 Canadian university websites concerning EDI revealed that institutions that had established EDI offices and identifiable EDI teams had a more transparent procedure for launching complaints. This revelation is supported by *participant 5* when asked about their knowledge of the safe launching of EDI complaints on campus. They stated that people are directed to go to their immediate supervisor; employees or students can also go through the department heads. Neither of these mechanisms is anonymous, but there is also a channel for and guidelines in place for complaints. However, *participant 5* added that EDI complaints were not covered explicitly within these mechanisms, and they had discovered how difficult it was to determine next steps. The lack of clearly articulated procedures and channels to use in reporting complaints related to EDI was further reiterated by *Participant 6*; they knew the EDI advocates on campus and were aware of the policy, but they “don’t know if people would say ‘I feel totally confident in that following this procedure, and that I will be safe to do so.’ I’m not sure.”

Contrary to the above views, *Participant 4* submitted that there were several formal channels already existing for individuals to use in launching any such complaint. This information was mostly located on the university’s website. They commented that there are “channels and procedures we have in our workplace, different links available along the lines of harassment, discrimination, diversity, responsibilities, accessibility, etc., and there are quite many formal channels.” *Participant 2* also enumer-

ated some of the already existing channels and mechanisms that could be used for the safe launching of EDI-related complaints. They pointed to the safe disclosure line, strategic business advisors within the units, and the employee Family Assistance Program with counsellors, “so that would be another venue for raising a concern, getting advice, from a professional.” *Participant 2* added that “there’s always your immediate supervisor, but I know that that’s problematic or can be a problem.” While there are existing processes for making a complaint, the process itself might not feel safe for complainants. According to participants, additional supports may need to be explored for particularly sensitive EDI issues.

The themes emerging from the interviews seemed to echo the main elements of documents and policies found on institutional websites. For instance, difficulties with defining EDI are reflected in the multiple approaches that campuses have taken in their attempts at definition. The topic that generated divergent views concerned institutional engagement, with some participants identifying strong engagement of senior leadership and others unable to articulate the types of support coming from the senior leadership. This finding may reflect a lack of connection between leadership and the working group, or potentially, it could reflect that some participants doubted the authenticity of the institution’s policies and leaders.

Discussion of the Findings

This study sought to conduct an environmental scan of EDI efforts across the Canadian U15 campuses and to examine more deeply the experiences of people involved in an EDI Champions group at one Canadian campus. As noted by Berry et al. (2018) and Gurin et al. (2004), the nuances of EDI in postsecondary education point to the need for diversity efforts to be planned and coordinated and move beyond metrics; this contention was supported by the participants in this study. EDI efforts have become increasingly important in Canadian HEIs with a growing recognition of the need to create more equitable and inclusive environments. Similarly, Scott (2020) was of the view that issues of EDI can be seen both as a driver and resource, in that it requires institutional leaders to elevate the priority given to EDI actions, supported by measures of performance and linkages to funding. EDI initiatives aim to redress systemic inequalities and create a campus culture that values diversity, inclusion, and equity. These themes were echoed by the participants.

To effectively engage with EDI at the HEI level, the institution must be willing to commit to meaningful and sustained action. This study identified the need for long-term commitment to intentionally designed EDI goals. These actions may require going beyond simply reporting numerical data and implementing safe reporting channels. Even though numerical data could be viewed as a starting point towards ensuring EDI on the campus, the collection of numbers should not be seen as a check box. Successful implementation of EDI initiatives on campus will require sustained, long-term institutional commitments that go beyond individual initiatives or once-in-a-while activities. It involves creating structures and processes that support ongoing dialogue and collaboration among different groups within the institution. This dialogue could take the form of the creation of EDI committees or task forces, the establishment of regular feedback mechanisms, and the provision of resources and support for staff and faculty who are working to promote EDI.

EDI initiatives should be characterized by meaningful collaboration with diverse groups and communities, including students, staff, and faculty. This goal means actively seeking out and valuing diverse perspectives and experiences, and creating opportunities for meaningful engagement and dialogue. It also means involving marginalized communities in decision-making processes and giving them a voice in shaping policies and practices. Another important aspect of institutional engagement with EDI is the need to address systemic barriers to access. This approach may involve examining and changing employment policies, admissions policies, financial aid structures, and curriculum design to ensure that they are inclusive and equitable.

According to a report by Universities Canada, EDI efforts can take many forms, from developing inclusive curricula and hiring practices to offering mental health and other support services to diverse groups of students (Universities Canada, 2019). It is important to recognize that institutional engagement with EDI in Canadian postsecondary education is an ongoing process that requires sustained and intentional effort. This process may involve challenging long-held assumptions and biases, rethinking traditional models of leadership and decision-making, and fostering a culture of accountability and con-

tinuous improvement. An EDI approach requires ongoing and active engagement by all members of the campus community, including students, staff, faculty, and administration.

Many institutions and professional associations are diversifying more and more, as evidenced by increasing diversity among their members (Pitts & Recascino Wise, 2010; Shore et al., 2009). However, research on the diversification of associations and campuses has mainly focused on the definitions of diversity and collection of data on demographic diversity; equal numbers at a particular institution indicate the diversity of membership but do not necessarily live up to the principles of EDI (Green, 2018).

Furthermore, ensuring equitable chances for retention and promotion for everyone, irrespective of the group they belong to, should be a priority rather than just increasing the demographic diversity of the campus to meet EDI goals. Studies, for instance, have revealed that while diversity among trainees and new staff has increased in academia, there is a bottleneck effect that reduces diversity among faculty and high-level appointments (Aldrich et al., 2019; Hoppe et al., 2019; Krupnick, 2018). Hiring a diverse population does not mean that they can achieve their goals, including retention and promotion.

Institutional websites have become a frequent way for institutions to communicate their vision, mission, and values to external stakeholders (Morphew & Hartley, 2006). To promote key priorities (such as EDI), many institutions utilize their websites to communicate those principles (Williams & Clowney, 2007; Wilson et al., 2012). With regard to face value information found on the websites, we observed that many of the institutions have dedicated webpages for EDI, which provided detailed and comprehensive activities such as forums, symposiums, and lectures for both students and staff as well as the wider community. In most instances, these webpages contained video and pictorial documentation of these activities which makes it easy for first-time visitors to appreciate the institutions' efforts towards enhancing EDI while at the same time learning about EDI application in the institution. The range of EDI activities on these webpages was, in most cases, unique to the institution and seems to reflect institutional culture and representation of EDI on their campus. However, we also noticed that some of the websites of these institutions we reviewed were overly complicated and difficult to navigate. Searching for EDI activities, policies, and statements required several hours of reviewing before locating webpages on EDI, and in most cases, such webpages contained scant information on EDI which showed the importance such institutions attached to EDI on their campuses.

Furthermore, to ascertain the commitment of U15 universities to EDI integration on their campuses, we explored institutional policy documents, reports, and statements that reflected themes of EDI. On the point of policy documents, we noticed many institutions focused their efforts on achieving EDI in hiring policies such as employment equity policy which supports Tamtik and Guenter's (2019) view that universities are currently using recruitment initiatives to achieve more diversity on their campuses. Regarding admission policies, we observed that many institutions did not have policies that directly address EDI in their application process or the admission of students. Very few institutions developed unique policies to address admission equity, especially regarding First Nation and Indigenous students. The absence of specific EDI policies potentially could be attributed to other factors, such as admissions based on merit based on academic achievement, or may be based on merit and personal interviews. The current processes may be working well even though they do not have specific criteria. Some of these guidelines and policies are not easily discoverable in a search of the website.

We also tried to determine if there was an identifiable EDI office that would be the first point of connection for those who have concerns or questions about hiring, discrimination, and harassment. These offices could serve as a channel for EDI education and integration. We noted that, on campuses where EDI offices existed, there were well-established processes, procedures, and mechanisms for launching complaints relating to all forms of biases and harassment. Many people, especially students, express fear of reprisal as the reason they will not report issues of discrimination because of negative effects on their evaluations and grades (Caldicott & Faber-Langendoen, 2005; Medjuck, 2014). This finding reiterates the need for providing individuals with a safe haven to lodge complaints of discrimination without fear of victimization. The lack of properly articulated procedures or the lack of an identifiable point of contact may be a constraint for reporting EDI-related issues if victims feel the processes are complicated or not clearly provided.

Universities require administrative structures and staffing to develop, implement and monitor EDI strategies, action plans, policies and practices (Universities Canada, 2019). This point was echoed by participants. Foundational to this work is clearly defining the terms and gathering data as a baseline to

appreciate their current situation regarding EDI and to determine how to effect positive change (West et al., 2018). Across the literature, EDI education has focused on four common themes including awareness, knowledge, skills, and action (Burrell Storms, 2012; Fuentes et al., 2010; Iverson, 2012). It is therefore imperative for universities to incorporate these themes in their initiatives towards an institution that embraces EDI.

Limitations of the Study and Future Research

One limitation of the environmental scan was the resources and the expertise that each campus may invest in website design. Some websites were easier to navigate and find specific information. While that may indicate that the information is not available, it may also be connected to website design or the decision-making of the communication team that chooses what information is to be included or featured on the website and what design strategies to use. There will be variations across campuses in the decision-making and criteria around what and how to include information, as well as, the resources and tools available to the website design teams. Additionally, the variations will occur not only among institutions but also among colleges or faculties within an institution.

For the qualitative portion of this study, the investigation explored EDI efforts on one Canadian U15 campus. The participant pool was limited to the people on campus who were already engaged in EDI through the EDI champions group. We believed that this group would be most familiar with the foundational concepts of EDI and how the different colleges on campus were moving towards the strategic actions described in the framework. We were missing the voices of students from our campuses, and only one faculty member participated in an interview.

For future research, the scope of the qualitative interviews could be expanded to include different constituent groups on campus. Students, faculty, staff, and senior leadership would all present different perspectives on the implementation and actualization of an EDI framework. Additionally, after the data for this study were collected, there were several significant changes on the campus that was the focus of the case study. Similarly, there would have been changes in practices and policies that could have taken place on other U15 campuses that would not have been captured in our environmental scan. Revisiting campus websites periodically would be helpful to see the trajectory of EDI efforts on campus and whether data is being collected on the impact of those initiatives.

Conclusion

In our study, we conducted an environmental scan of the websites of the U15 campuses to determine the current available information on EDI efforts on campuses. Given the growing emphasis on supporting EDI efforts, our results must be viewed as a snapshot of activity at the time. Since we conducted that review, we have noted that there have been significant advances on several campuses, including the launching of new, dedicated webpages and the unveiling of new strategy documents. The participants' views aligned with findings in the literature regarding the difficulty with defining the term(s), the siloed nature of the initiatives and lack of awareness of whole campus approaches, the use of metrics as the main way to capture progress on EDI work, and the need to develop broader and deeper understanding of equity, diversity, and inclusion. While there are pockets of excellence and impactful initiatives happening across the country, we must continue to advocate and work towards ensuring EDI is evident in our daily work.

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