Equity, diversity and inclusion at Canadian universities

Universities Canada's 2022 survey on
equity, diversity and inclusion

Canadians value an inclusive country, where equity is embedded, and diversity welcomed. Canadian identity is expressed in the shared values of openness, fairness and tolerance. Building on this, Canada's universities believe our teaching, research and community engagement are also enriched by diversity and inclusion.

In 2017, university presidents from across Canada made a personal commitment to being active champions of equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) on our campuses, in our communities and across the country. That commitment and others were made publicly through Universities Canada's Inclusive Excellence Principles. In a series of seven principles, they made clear the vital importance of a diversity of identity and thought at our institutions by: providing equity of access and opportunity; identifying and addressing structural barriers to, and providing supports for, the recruitment and retention of senior university leaders, faculty, staff and students, particularly from underrepresented groups; and demonstrating progress over time.

In 2019, Universities Canada initiated a series of ongoing surveys to identify the work being carried out to advance EDI across campuses and to mark progress or identify areas in need of ongoing effort. A benchmark was established, and a second survey conducted in 2022.

Progress, with an ongoing commitment

The results of the 2022 EDI survey demonstrate that progress is being made. This is observed in three key areas: 1) structural changes, 2) policies and practices, and 3) campus culture. This progress is not only welcome, but also critical. Nevertheless, Universities Canada and its members recognize that gaps remain, and ongoing efforts across all campuses to meet the commitments made through the *Inclusive Excellence Principles* continues to be a priority.

EDI at a glance

EDI plays a significant role in the strategic planning and long-term vision of Canadian universities. It is a critical lens through which institutions evaluate and shape initiatives. Canada's universities are committed to embedding diversity and inclusion principles into the core of operations and decision-making processes. Some key statistics point towards the changes made since the last survey:

- 89% of institutions have explicit reference to EDI in their strategic plan, up from 77% in 2019.
- 88% have a campus wide definition of EDI, up from 55% in 2019.
- 83% of institutions have an EDI action plan in development or already implemented, up from 70% in 2019.

EDI and Indigenous Peoples

Indigenizing campuses and advancing reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples at universities in Canada is a core priority for our member institutions and our organization. Universities Canada recognizes that Indigenous Peoples have a unique history in Canada. Therefore, Indigenization and reconciliation are specific efforts, but they also intersect with advancing EDI work. An example is the representation of Indigenous Peoples in senior leadership in universities. According to our 2022 survey, 3.3% of university leadership identifies as Indigenous, a slight increase from 2.9% in our 2019 survey.[1] For more information, the results from Universities Canada's 2022 Survey on Indigenous Education can be consulted here.

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EDI priorities in 2022

University presidents were invited to list their top EDI priority in the upcoming year. The top three priorities in 2022 were to:

1. Implement EDI plans and strategies, policy review and development.
2. Build an inclusive culture on campus.
3. Hire and recruit senior leaders, faculty, staff, and students from underrepresented groups.

These priorities demonstrate a continuation from those indicated in the 2019 survey. The first priority, to develop EDI plans, strategies and policies has shifted to implementation. The second priority, to recruit and retain staff and students from under-represented groups has evolved to the creation of an inclusive campus culture for everyone. Hiring and recruiting diverse senior leaders, faculty, staff, and students remains a high priority. A closer look at structural changes, policies and practices and campus culture illustrate how some of these priorities have been implemented and continue to be ongoing commitments.

[1] This parallels the demographics of the larger Canadian population. In 2021, 5% of the Canadian population identified as Indigenous. Source: Indigenous identity by Registered or Treaty Indian status and residence by Indigenous geography: Canada, provinces and territories (statcan.gc.ca).

Structural change

Universities require administrative structures and staffing to develop, implement and monitor equity, diversity and inclusion strategies and action plans. For example, EDI office employees provide advice on EDI related policies, procedures and protocols; organize events to raise awareness about and communicate the importance of EDI; and provide education and training to support an equitable, diverse and inclusive campus. In addition to these activities, the survey highlights the following structural changes:

- 91% of universities surveyed have an EDI task force or are currently developing one, up from 78.5% in 2019.
- Self-identification data shows that university leadership is becoming more diverse:

Identities	2019 Survey	2022 Survey	2021 Canadian population[2]
Women	49%	53%	50.3%
Person with a disability[3]	4.5%	7%	22.3%
Racialized	8%	15%	26.1%
2SLGBTQIA+	8%	9.5%	4%

While we see improvements in diversifying administrative structures, some groups remain underrepresented in senior leadership. Comparing our survey results with the most recent available data on Canadian demographics provides insight as to which groups are underrepresented. These include persons with a disability and racialized individuals. Recruitment and retention of diverse talent from these groups should be prioritized

[2] Sources: Population estimates on July 1st, by age and sex (statcan.gc.ca); Canadian Survey on Disability, 2017: Data Visualization Tool (statcan.gc.ca); Visible minority by gender and age: Canada, provinces and territories (statcan.gc.ca); The Daily — A statistical portrait of Canada's diverse LGBTQ2+ communities (statcan.gc.ca).
[3] It is possible that the disparity in the representation of persons with a disability in university leadership (7%) and in the Canadian population (22.3%) is due to framing of the survey question. There is expectation this disparity will narrow after the next survey by reframing the question on disabilities.

Policies and practices

Universities are developing, reviewing and implementing policies and practices in a way to commit to equity, diversity and inclusion. Some practices are worth highlighting.

- Self-identification data is used in a variety of ways at universities. The top three ways include: benchmarking and measuring the progress of institutional strategies and plans (64%); developing and reporting on Canada Research Chairs action plans (60%); informing student recruitment (51%); and informing staff and faculty recruitment, retention and promotion processes (51%).
- 88% of universities share their best practices with other institutions and organizations by:
  - Networking and collaborating with other institutions and organizations in the EDI field.
  - Participating in various EDI-related networks, committees, and communities of practice.
  - Sharing of resources and information on websites and social media with other postsecondary institutions.
- 78% of institutions consider intersectionality in policy development and practices, up from 67% in 2019.

Campus culture

To ensure equity, diversity and inclusion are woven into the fabric of campus culture, most universities are engaging in various activities to gauge their climate and to identify barriers to inclusive excellence:

- 64% have means of recognizing contributions from the university community to EDI, double from 32% in 2019.
- 63% have a definition of campus climate or culture, up from 48% in 2019.
- 60% collect data to assess campus culture, up from 42% in 2019.

Considerable progress has been made regarding culture. Yet an important gap remains: a little over half of our surveyed members engage in each of the mentioned activities. As building an inclusive campus culture is one of the top three priorities for presidents in 2022, it is possible improvements will be more noticeable in the next survey.

2022 SURVEY

on equity, diversity and inclusion

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and inclusion at
Canadian universities

◆ Universities
Canada.

Challenges

Understanding the key challenges to advancing EDI on campus is vital to changing the current landscape. University presidents have ranked their top five internal challenges and barriers in implementing EDI at their universities:

1. Attracting or retaining diverse talent (faculty or staff).
2. Lack of resources (financial, human, material and temporal) to support new EDI initiatives.
3. Lack of data on institutional challenges.
4. Institutional culture (changing deeply embedded patterns of organizational behaviour and the shared values, assumptions, beliefs or ideologies that constituents have about their institution).
5. Institutional systems, policies, or governance structures (ensuring EDI considerations and objectives are embedded throughout). A comparison with the 2019 survey results indicates that the same five challenges persist, with a few changes in ranking. This suggests that these barriers and obstacles are deep-rooted and there is a clear need for them to be addressed for EDI to be successfully embedded at universities.

The path forward

As part of its mandate to support Canadian university presidents in their work to advance EDI at their institutions, Universities Canada will continue to collect and share best practices, success stories and national data. These activities will continue to underpin advocacy efforts—for all members, partners, stakeholders and governments—around the need for more resources to support EDI on Canadian campuses. Despite the reported challenges, there are many promising practices pointing towards encouraging developments on our Canadian campuses.

A follow up member survey is planned for 2025.

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About Universities Canada

Universities Canada is the voice of Canadian universities, at home and abroad. We are a membership organization providing university presidents with a unified voice for higher education, research and innovation. Universities Canada advances the mission of our member institutions to transform lives, strengthen communities and find solutions to the most pressing challenges facing our world.

About Universities Canada's 2022 Survey on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

The purpose of the 2022 survey was to learn where progress has been made in advancing EDI, tracking changes in the diversity of senior university leaders, promoting culture change, addressing all forms of systemic racism and to understand where challenges and gaps still exist.

The three-part 2022 survey was distributed to all member universities of Universities Canada. The survey was answered by 66 universities, representing a 68% response rate. The first part was distributed to executive heads (n=44) and the second part to university EDI leads (n=47). The final part collected self-identification data of senior university leaders (n=1,227).