Introduction and Reflections on Equality Diversity and Inclusion at University of Alberta

Xu Huang

International Cooperation and Exchange Office, China University of Geosciences, Beijing, China

Abstract: Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, or EDI, refers to the understanding and inclusion of people with protected characteristics (including age, physical disability, marriage, race, religion or belief, gender, sexual orientation, etc.) or related matters. The University of Alberta has established a Vice President of EDI to strategize, train, and publish an annual report on EDI, which has achieved good results. Chinese universities should consider taking their strengths and identifying minorities, understanding them and respecting them under certain preconditions.

Keywords: Canada; University of Alberta; equality; diversity; inclusion

1. Introduction

Chinese universities and colleges have done little research on equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI), while Western universities and colleges, such as the University of Alberta, have incorporated the concept of EDI into their daily lives and have been admired for their acceptance and tolerance of multiculturalism. This paper elaborates on the origin and concept of EDI, the status, performance and role of EDI in Canada, especially in the University of Alberta, and analyzes it in comparison with Chinese universities, drawing conclusions that are expected to provide useful reference for Chinese universities.

2. What is Equality, Diversity, Inclusion (abbreviated EDI)

The definition of EDI by ZhiHu [1] is an acronym for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. The UK Equality Act 2010 covers these character traits, known as protected characteristics, and it is against the law to discriminate against people who fit these characteristics. Protected characteristics include age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation.

Equity is the promotion of justice, fairness and equity in the procedures, processes and allocation of resources in an institution or system. Addressing equity requires an understanding of the root causes of differences in outcomes in our society. Diversity is the existence of differences including race, nationality, religion, language, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, (disability) ability, age, beliefs or political views; which are still under-represented and marginalized in society at large. Inclusiveness means that members can be equally accepted and welcomed by the group and have the same opportunities and treatment as others, even if they behave differently from others, while adhering to organizational norms [1].

Diversity means difference or variety. In the broader social EDI context, diversity refers to demographic or identity diversity, including diversity on protected grounds. Equity means fairness in access to education and employment and opportunities to succeed in these areas. Employment equity principles, policies, and practices enable equitable access, representation, opportunity, and meaningful participation for diverse social groups from federally designated groups and other equity-seeking groups (e.g., women, members of visible minorities, Aboriginal people, people with disabilities, and LGBTQ2S+ people). We recognize that policies, practices, informal processes and language developed by and for specific groups, considering default norms, create structural barriers that limit the participation and inclusion of other individuals and groups. Inclusion means that we value and nurture the full and meaningful participation of historically and structurally excluded individuals and groups [8].

3. The Progress of EDI Research at China and Abroad

Searching EDI from Chinese resources of domestic universities, there are 26 results, 20 in the last five years, including information related to the International Conference on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and research on the construction of museums, women's economic empowerment, etc., with less content.

Searching EDI from foreign language resources of domestic universities, there are 208 results, 76 in the last five years,

and most of the researches are concentrated in medicine, chemistry, engineering, library and informatics, geomorphology, employment recruitment, human resource management (Germany, Turkey, India), music, evaluation, etc., with less than 10 EDI-related contents of universities. A search for EDI in higher education from Google scholar returned about 10 relevant results since 2019.

There is a desire for change, but issues related to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) are still spreading across the research and academic community, from inequalities at entry to university, to lack of diversity and equality in senior positions. Many academic institutions and governments are acting to address these issues [2]. Italian scholar Anna Siri studies EDI in European colleges and universities in the aftermath of the epidemic, from teaching and learning to student employment; Canadian scholar Angela Campbell notes that institutional EDI strategies primarily include preventing and responding to instances of discrimination, and that multiple forces are pushing Canadian universities and other institutions to enhance equity, diversity, and inclusiveness [3].The value of EDI education, especially regarding unconscious bias and how to reduce its negative impacts, has received much academic attention [4].Roger Milian argues that the higher education sector is the most fertile ground for EDI initiatives, and that it is driven by politically progressive activists and internal stakeholders. The value of EDI training for Canadian universities has not been academically assessed, and the role of EDI training in universities in promoting organizational change and EDI training in universities has limitations and potential to contribute to organizational change and more equitable, diverse and inclusive institutions of higher education [5]. Gilbert Okebiro studies EDI in Kenyan higher education, and the new One University initiative at the University of Sheffield in the UK has placed EDI alongside research, innovation, and education as a core priority for universities. Our Gender, Disability and Ethnicity Action Plan enables us to make measurable and impactful change. Addressing EDI requires a collaborative approach, action at an institutional or sector-wide level, and clear commitment from senior leaders [2].

4. EDI at the University of Alberta

4.1 EDI in Canadian Universities

The Equity/Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in Universities initiative originated in 2005 with the Athena SWAN (Scientific Women's Academic Network) Charter for Advancement of Higher Education in the United Kingdom (UK), with the aim of initiating action to promote gender equality in UK universities. Since then, Advance HE has also developed a 'Race Charter' to address equality issues for ethnic minority staff and students in higher education. Today, universities in many countries use the phrases 'equality, diversity and inclusion' and 'equity, diversity and inclusion' (henceforth referred to as EDI) to emphasize that efforts are being made to redress issues relating to EDI for students, non-academic staff and academic staff. It extends its focus from gender to other underrepresented groups, including students with disabilities, non-academic staff with disabilities and academic staff with disabilities [6]. It ensures fair treatment and opportunities for all and aims to eliminate prejudice and discrimination based on the character traits of individual groups.

In May 2017, the Canada Research Chairs (CRC) program issued a groundbreaking call for Canadian universities to address the underrepresentation of women, Aboriginal people, people with disabilities, and minorities in key positions. That same year, these universities collectively committed to a five-year action plan to "integrate equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) into their teaching, research, and administration" (Universities Canada. 2017). Since then, most Canadian universities have updated or developed EDI policies. Among them, the University of Montreal's 2020 action plan commits to placing EDI at the heart of its institutional life, whether as a learning, research, work or living environment, or as a civic partner [7].

4.2 The EDI Situation of the University of Alberta

A search of the University of Alberta website for EDI resulted in more than 1,600 entries involving 20 units. In addition to EDI descriptions and initiatives published by the faculties, university releases are contained in the university's EDI column pages; including the university's EDI strategic plan, services for students, community, faculty and staff, faculty and institutional initiatives, and education and training resources for the following populations: women, members of visible minority groups, Indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, and LGBTQ2S+ (women, members of visible minority groups, Indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, and LGBTQ2S+ people); the main components are:

4.2.1 University of Alberta EDI Strategic Plan (2018-2022) [8]

Shaping a More Equitable and Accessible University (Shaping a More Equitable and Accessible University), including the EDI Strategic Plan, the SHAPE Schools Strategic Plan, and the Aboriginal Strategic Plan, which has descriptions for teaching and research, public service, hiring faculty and staff, student academic careers, and teaching and learning climate.

The University of Alberta has a long history of supporting Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in programs, services, teaching, scholarship and advocacy.

The EDI Strategic Plan builds on this history and reflects the commitment embedded in For the Common Good to advance EDI and build respectful relationships among our staff, disciplines, faculties and campuses, as well as beyond our institution. At the University, we are committed to creating a more diverse, equitable, accessible, and inclusive environment for all who work, study, and live in our community, one that is characterized by a fundamental shared commitment to respectful participation and human dignity. We value academic freedom and welcome and support diverse perspectives.

This Strategic Plan aims to integrate EDI into the culture of the University of Alberta community from the grassroots to the top. It proposes strategic direction and high-level responsibilities designed to empower faculties and administrative units across the University to develop and implement their own EDI programs and initiatives. It includes a set of proposed structures and approaches with clear expected outcomes that will support our community-wide efforts to become more diverse, equitable, and inclusive. However, this is not a top-down program.

In order to achieve our goals, every member of the University of Alberta has a role to play. In order to integrate EDI into the fabric of our culture, each of us must develop programs and initiatives at the local level. We must take deliberate action based on the best available evidence and institutional data. By working together, we can ensure that EDI flourishes in our community and enriches the lives of all [8].

In its interpretation of the EDI, the Strategic Plan recognizes that within the University, diversity includes differences or variety in education, perspectives, opinions, heuristics, disciplines, faculties, skills and learning opportunities. The University of Alberta supports and encourages diversity by identifying and removing barriers and biases, and creating working and learning environments that are free from harassment and discrimination. Inclusion means enabling all people on our campus to take full advantage of the opportunities offered by the University, and allowing all equity-seeking groups to be meaningfully represented in all aspects of University life and in decision-making roles across the University. Using equity as a guiding principle means that our university will respect and value the differences of its members by actively identifying and removing barriers, including structural barriers, in order to ensure that historically excluded groups have the same opportunities to flourish at the University of Alberta.

4.2.2 EDI Module Program at the University of Alberta [9]

The EDI Module Course is published by the Office of the Vice-Provost for EDI and consists of nine sections (Welcome - Foundations of EDI, EDI and Decolonization, EDI and Human Rights, Historical and Theoretical Origins of EDI, Creating EDI that can be Universally Agreed upon, EDI that already exists in your unit, department, or faculty, Glossary of Terms, Explanatory Notes, and Statements) that are designed to provide university faculty, students, and staff with EDI teaching and learning resources.

4.2.3 Results of the University of Alberta EDI Survey [10]

In August 2023 the University of Alberta released the results of its latest EDI survey on the demographic organization of university faculty and staff compared to 2019, including gender and orientation, whether Aboriginal, whether minority, place of birth and language, beliefs and religion, marital and family, and disability.

GENDER IDENTITY AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION: Survey participants were asked if they identified with one or more of the following genders: gender-fluid and/or non-binary; male; transgender; two-spirit; or female. The primary categories of gender expression were female and male.1.3% of the current workforce identified as gender-integrated and/or non-binary, with a very small percentage of respondents indicating other gender identities (transgender, two-spirit, or self-identified categories). This is roughly the same as the 2019 Census results. The majority of census respondents identified themselves as female. The survey response rate was higher for females compared to males. This is true for both the 2019 Census and the current labor force.

Aboriginal Identity: 3.2% of respondents identified themselves as Aboriginal in the 2019 Census, compared to 3.4% of respondents in the current labor force, an increase of 0.2 percentage points. In the 2019 Census, slightly more females identified themselves as Indigenous (3.5%) compared to 2.5% of males.2 Similarly, in the current labor force, slightly more females identified themselves as Indigenous (3.8%) compared to 2.4% of males.

Visible Minority (Appears to be a Minority): 22.8% of respondents in the 2019 Census indicated that they were a visible minority. In the current labor force, the percentage of respondents identifying as visible minorities increased to 25.3%. The largest group in the 2019 Census and current labor force is Chinese, followed by South Asians.

Disabled and Deaf: Survey participants were asked "Do you identify yourself as disabled or deaf? The results for the 2019 Census are similar to those for the current labor force, with 4.9% and 5.3% of respondents identifying themselves as "disabled" respectively. Similarly, the percentage of respondents who chose "another status that should be protected on grounds similar to disability" remained nearly constant between the 2019 Census (1.5%) and the current labor force (1.4%). There was also a small proportion of respondents who indicated that they were 'deaf'. Of the respondents who indicated

they had a disability, the most common conditions in the 2019 Census and the current workforce were "Chronic Health Condition" and "Emotional, Mental, or Spiritual Health".

4.3 The EDI Experience in University of Alberta

Walking around the University of Alberta campus, it's evident everywhere that the university takes EDI seriously: the university has a School of Aboriginal Studies, which specializes in the study of Aboriginal cultures; an Undergraduate Students' Association and a Graduate Students' Association, which help students succeed through workshops, individual advising, and online resources; there are 10-15 dedicated staff members who are credentialed to provide the service; there are also professors and a 20-ish person team of volunteers to provide services; services can be provided face-to-face or online. Approximately 10,000-15,000 students receive services each year. Based on the University's requirement to enroll and maintain qualified persons with disabilities, the Center for Special Services and Services for Persons with Disabilities facilitates and coordinates the work of the University's institutions and off-campus agencies to meet the needs of the students and provide appropriate support to ensure equal access to the University for all students.

Students with disabilities may be given an appropriate extension of time to answer questions with the production of a doctor's diagnosis. Hearing-impaired students may offer to have a sign-language interpreter while listening to lectures. A total of 10 staff are required for these tasks, with the overall cost being one-third provided by the University and two-thirds by both levels of government. Religious concerns, such as human rights issues, the need for prayer, or exams conflicting with important religious events, require a certificate to be issued and an additional exam time to be scheduled.

The Student Services Center provides information and services to support students' academic, financial, mental, and physical well-being, and hosts a variety of events throughout the year, including lectures, seminars, conferences, and concerts, most of which are free to students.

There are more than 400 undergraduate clubs, including 65 multicultural and ethnic clubs, 3 women's clubs, 3 sexual minority clubs, and 25 religious clubs. student ombuds office is a very characteristic function of North American colleges and universities, helping students to complain about academic misconduct or certain students' own controversial and unreasonable events. Unlike domestic colleges and universities, where students may go directly to the disciplinary department to file a complaint, there is no specialized person to provide advice on how to deal with similar incidents.

The university provides all kinds of EDI resources and support, including cross-cultural courses, arranging festivals and events in various countries; the University of Alberta's online counseling staff have all kinds of national backgrounds, trying to eliminate the concerns of minority students and faculty; all sliding doors in campus buildings are set up with accessibility buttons to facilitate the use of people with mobility impairments; and rainbow flags are used as part of crosswalks on campus roads... ...In short, an atmosphere of equality and tolerance fills the campus, and people of different cultures, ethnicities, genders, and other types of people are respected.

5. Conclusion

Chinese and Canadian colleges and universities have different attitudes and performances towards EDI-related content.

Table 1. Attitudes and performance of Chinese and Canadian colleges and universities towards EDI-related content

	EDI Related Content	Chinese universities attitude and performance	Canadian universities attitudes and performance
1	Race, Nationality, Language	Respectful, poorly labeled in English. Special policies for minority students	Respect, bilingual English and French signage. Specialized support places for Aboriginal people
2	Religion, Beliefs	Respect, no religious and political activities on campus	Respect, form societies freely
3	Political views	No political activities on campus	freely express political views
4	Gender, Sexual Orientation	Equal treatment of men and women, but different application fund and retirement age; no public discussion of sexual minorities	Equal treatment for all categories, annual statistics and public announcement
5	Learning Ability	There are academic counseling mechanism and meritocracy mechanisms	There is academic counseling mechanism No meritocracy mechanisms
6	Physical (disability) ability	Respect, inadequate campus accessibility	Respect, good accessibility to campus
7	Age	No age limit for students	No age limit for students

According to the above table 1.colleges and universities in both countries respect the race, nationality, and language of foreign students, teachers and staff, China has special policies for ethnic minority students, and Canada has special support places and Aboriginal colleges for Aboriginal people. Chinese colleges and universities have imperfect English signs, and

Canadian colleges and universities have signs that are bilingual in English and French according to national regulations. (2) (3) Religion, beliefs or political views, both countries respect the religious beliefs of students, faculty and staff, but Chinese colleges and universities stipulate that students and faculty do not engage in religious and political activities on campus, while comparatively speaking, students and faculty in Canadian colleges and universities can set up religion-related associations and freely express their political views. (4) In terms of gender and sexual orientation, Chinese colleges and universities are equal for men and women, but the application fund and retirement age are different; sexual minorities are not openly discussed, while Canadian colleges and universities treat all kinds of situations equally, and publish statistics and public releases every year. (5) With regard to students' learning ability, colleges and universities in both countries have academic counseling mechanisms, and only China has a mechanism for cultivating excellence. (6) With regard to physical (disability) ability, both countries consider the needs of physically disabled people, but the accessibility of Chinese campuses is not perfect, while Canadian colleges and universities have perfect accessibility facilities. (7) Regarding the age of students, there is no age limit for students in both countries.

The University of Alberta and other foreign universities emphasize EDI for a variety of historical, cultural and social reasons. The University of Alberta's series of practices of respecting minorities does have a certain positive effect on its normal operation and positive publicity to the outside world, which is worth recognizing. Next, the university can carry out empirical work to understand not only how students, faculty and staff view EDI in the university, but also how they experience and evaluate EDI.

The University of Alberta and other foreign universities emphasize EDI for a variety of historical, cultural, and social reasons. The University of Alberta's series of practices of respecting minorities does have some positive effects on its normal operation and positive publicity to the outside world, which deserves to be recognized. Next, the university can carry out empirical work to understand not only how students, faculty and staff perceive EDI at the university, but also how they experience and evaluate EDI.

China's social history and cultural conditions are very different from those of Canada, and the stage of development of Chinese colleges and universities is different from that of Canadian colleges and universities, so the attitudes and status of colleges and universities towards various minority groups are also different. However, there is nothing wrong with recognizing, understanding and respecting minorities under a certain premise and in a wider scope, and gradually moving towards "equality, diversity and inclusion".

Acknowledgements

References

[1] Employee Experience in ZhiHu [Z]. https://zhuanlan.zhihu.com/p/342322169
[2] Prince L, Francis S, Barriers to equality, diversity and inclusion in research and academia stubbornly persist. So, what are we doing about it? [J]. Disease Models & Mechanisms, 2023, 16(7):1-5.
[3] Siri A, Leone C, Bencivenga R. Equality, diversity, and inclusion strategies adopted in a European university alliance to facilitate the higher education-to-work transition [J]. Societies, 2022, 12(140):1-16.
[4] Campbell A. Equity education initiatives within Canadian universities: promise and limits[J]. Perspectives: Policy and Practice in Higher Education, 2021, 25(2) :51-61.
[5] Milian R. Why do EDI policies fail? An inhabited institutions perspective, Department of Leadership, [J] Higher and Adult Education, 2022,43(9). 449-464.
[6] Wolbring G, Lilllywhite A. Equity/Equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) in universities: the case of disabled people [J]. Societies, 2021, 11(49):1-34.
[7] Séguin M. The changing diversity and inclusion landscape of Canadian universities: The université de Montréal case [M]. Leading with Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, 2022: 341-355.
[8] https://www.ualberta.ca/equity-diversity-inclusion/media-library/edi-strategic-plan-final_feb2019.pdf
[9] https://www.ualberta.ca/equity-diversity-inclusion/guides-and-resources/index.html
[10] Census Results for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Update[R], 2023.8, https://www.ualberta.ca/equity-diversity-inclu-sion/media-library/edi/survey-and-reports-page/publicstaffedi-report-r06-23.pdf