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The representation of equity-seeking groups in Canada's universities and colleges

Introduction

Persistent concerns remain within Canadian colleges and universities about the nature and extent of the barriers facing academic staff who are members of equity-seeking groups – women, visible minorities, Aboriginal peoples, persons with disabilities, and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered. Discrimination in post-secondary education is a serious concern, not only because it raises fundamental questions about basic fairness and justice, but also because it threatens to undermine quality in teaching and research. Universities and colleges are not taking advantage of the widest talent pool available if they discriminate against members of equity-seeking groups. When members of equity-seeking groups are under-represented, the diversity of pedagogical techniques used, research subjects explored, questions posed, and methodologies employed may also be limited. Canada's whole post-secondary education system suffers when there is a lack of equity.

Unfortunately, despite its importance, a complete and reliable picture of the status of equity-seeking groups in Canada's universities and colleges is not available. With the exception of gender, Statistics Canada collects virtually no national-level data on equity in the academy. While we know anecdotally that many equity-seeking groups remain seriously under-represented in Canadian colleges and universities, the lack of consistent and reliable data makes it very difficult to determine the full extent of this

problem. This hampers the ability of policy-makers, administrators and academic staff associations to know the exact nature of the problem and to develop the most effective and appropriate tools to ensure equity.

The absence of comprehensive equity statistics in Canada contrasts markedly with other jurisdictions where information on many equity-seeking groups is more systematically and routinely collected and analyzed. Statistical agencies in both the United States and the United Kingdom provide a far more detailed portrait of students and staff.

This report is the first in a series of reviews examining the status of equity-seeking groups in post-secondary education in Canada. It identifies the major data gaps in Canada; provides a partial picture of what we do know about the state of equity in the academy; and highlights the need for a more systematic approach to the collection of equity data in order to better inform the development of effective policies and practices to eliminate discrimination.

Equity in the Canadian Academy

Statistics Canada's primary survey of academic staff is the University and College Academic Staff System (UCASS), an annual census of full-time staff with teaching assignments in degree-granting institutions. Unfortunately, the UCASS collects no data on part-time academic staff and only very limited demographic data, namely gender,



age and citizenship. The UCASS is helpful in analyzing the status of women within the ranks of the full-time professoriate which is the subject of future reviews in this series. However, Aboriginal peoples, persons with disabilities, and sexual minorities are not collected in the UCASS.

The only national equity data available on academic staff, in addition to gender and citizenship in the UCASS, is provided through the Census. However, these data have to be read with considerable caution. The Census relies upon self-reporting of occupation and other variables, including some equity-related categories. This potentially yields less reliable results, particularly within the smaller categories of the Census.

In addition, the Census does not collect data on all equity-seeking groups. It includes some equity variables – Aboriginal Canadians, visible minorities, and linguistic minorities – but provides no information on persons with disabilities or sexual minorities. As such, the Census provides us with a limited and partial portrait of the status of some equity-seeking groups in Canadian post-secondary education.

With these caveats in mind, the Census data do suggest that Aboriginal Canadians are seriously under-represented within the academic world (see Table 1). In 2001, the most recent year for which data are available, just 0.7 per cent of all persons self-reporting to be university teachers identified themselves as Aboriginal, up only marginally from 0.5 per cent in 1996. By contrast, Aboriginal Canadians comprised 2.3 per cent of the total labour force aged 25 and older in 2001.

Of all university teachers, 12.4 per cent self-identified as visible minorities in the 2001 Census, up slightly from 11.7 per cent in 1996. This generally reflects the composition of the labour force as a whole in 2001 when visible minorities represented 12.7 per cent of all workers 25 and older.

TABLE 1: **Racial identification of university teachers, Canada, 1996 and 2001 (% of total)**

| | 1996 (%) | 2001 (%) |
|--------------------|----------|----------|
| Aboriginal | 0.5 | 0.7 |
| White | 83.9 | 82.4 |
| South Asian | 3.0 | 3.6 |
| Chinese | 2.9 | 3.6 |
| Arab or West Asian | 2.0 | 1.9 |
| Black | 1.5 | 1.6 |
| Latin American | 0.6 | 0.6 |
| Japanese | 0.6 | 0.5 |
| Korean | 0.3 | 0.3 |
| Southeast Asian | 0.3 | 0.3 |
| Filipino | 0.2 | 0.2 |
| Other | 0.3 | 0.3 |

Source: Statistics Canada, Census 1996 and 2001.

When cross-tabulated with income data, the Census seems to suggest there is a significant pay gap for visible minority professors. In 1996, the average employment income of all university teachers was \$53,576, but for visible minority professors it was just \$46,440, or 13.2 per cent lower. By 2001, the pay gap showed only modest signs of narrowing. The average employment income of all university teachers rose to \$60,250, while visible minority faculty earned an average of \$53,039, or 12 per cent less. However, because of the limitations of the Census, these data need to be read with extreme caution. The Census figures do not take into account the type of appointment held by a respondent indicating their primary occupation as “university teacher.” Because there are significant variations in pay between different academic ranks and because the distribution of visible minority professors across ranks may differ, the aggregated data may or may not necessarily reflect pay discrimination.

Furthermore, the Census reports on total employment income. This means that the figures are not limited to income from em-

TABLE 2: Race/ethnicity of faculty by academic rank, 2002-2003, United Kingdom

| | White (%) | Black (%) | Asian (%) | Other (%) | Refused (%) |
|-----------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|----------------|
| Lecturer A | 82.3 | 1.1 | 4.8 | 2.8 | 9.1 |
| Senior Lecturer | 88.0 | 0.4 | 4.6 | 1.7 | 6.5 |
| Professor | 88.6 | 0.2 | 2.1 | 1.4 | 7.7 |

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency.

ployment as a university teacher, but would also include any outside employment. In short, it is very difficult to determine the degree and extent of any pay gap for visible minority professors based solely on Census data. This underscores the need for more systemic and reliable collection of data for more equity seeking groups through the UCASS.

Equity Data in the United Kingdom and the United States

The partial picture of equity-seeking groups in Canadian post-secondary education contrasts sharply with the availability of far richer data in other countries. In the United Kingdom, for instance, the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) collects and publishes information on a number of equity-seeking groups at the institutional level. Annual surveys of current higher education staff include variables on gender, race/ethnicity, national identity and disability status. Data are not however collected on sexual orientation.

Cross-tabulations of variables within the HESA staff survey provide a more complete, reliable and up-to-date picture of the status of equity-seeking groups in higher education. For instance, HESA data reveal not just the overall representation of visible minorities within the UK's higher education system but also permit a breakdown of representation by academic rank. As illustrated in

Table 2, there is a noticeable under-representation of visible minorities amongst the more senior academic ranks.

Similarly, in the United States surveys of university and college faculty include a fairly broad range of equity data. The Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), unlike the UCASS, collects data on both full-time and part-time faculty and includes variables on gender and race/ethnicity. In addition, the National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF), conducted every five to six years, collects data on gender, race/ethnicity (including aboriginal peoples), citizenship, and disability status. Like the UK surveys, both American surveys allow for cross-tabulations that paint a more complete picture of the status of these equity-seeking groups. As illustrated in Table 3, for example, visible minority faculty in the United States, as in the United Kingdom, tend to be less present the higher the academic rank. In both cases, similar information can be gleaned about the distribution for faculty reporting a disability.

In addition, because data on part-time faculty are collected more systematically in the United Kingdom and the United States, it is possible to more fully explore questions revolving around equity and status of appointment. The figures show very clearly that women and visible minorities are disproportionately represented amongst the ranks of part-time university and college teachers. While the suspicion is that the situation is

TABLE 3: Race/ethnicity of faculty by academic rank, 2003, United States

| | White (%) | Black (%) | Asian | Hispanic | Native | More than one |
|------------|-----------|-----------|-------|----------|--------|---------------|
| Professor | 85.6 | 3.8 | 6.3 | 2.2 | 0.3 | 1.9 |
| Associate | 80.4 | 5.4 | 9.3 | 2.7 | 0.3 | 2.0 |
| Assistant | 75.4 | 6.6 | 11.9 | 3.4 | 0.5 | 2.3 |
| Instructor | 83.5 | 5.1 | 6.9 | 3.8 | 0.3 | 2.7 |

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2004 *National Study of Postsecondary Faculty*.

similar in Canada, there is however no reliable and up to date data available to show this.

Unlike the Census in Canada, the equity data collected in the United Kingdom and the United States are gathered at the institutional level, and therefore can be broken down by institutions. This allows for important equity performance comparisons between institutions that simply cannot be done in Canada.

Conclusion

Comparing the demographic data collected on academic staff in Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States, it is clear that the availability of reliable data on the status of equity seeking groups in the academy is poor in Canada (see Table 4). The

only major institutional survey, the UCASS, collects data only on full-time academic staff and includes only limited equity data — gender and citizenship status.

National-level data on other equity-seeking groups is available through the Census, but the reliability of the data and the frequency of the Census present serious limitations. There is no data available on disability status of academic staff in Canada. In all countries, there is no data on sexual minorities.

The absence of reliable equity data in Canada poses significant problems. It makes it difficult for policymakers, administrators and academic staff associations to grasp the full extent of the problem and, consequently, to develop the most effective tools to promote equity. ■

TABLE 4: Comparison of demographic variables collected in academic staff surveys, Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States

| | UCASS (Canada) | HESA (UK) | IPEDS and NSOPF (US) |
|-------------------------|----------------|-----------|----------------------|
| Full-time faculty count | X | X | X |
| Part-time faculty count | | X | X |
| Gender | X | X | X |
| Age | X | X | X |
| Citizenship/nationality | X | X | X |
| Race/ethnicity | | X | X |
| Disability status | | X | X |
| Religion | | | X |
| Sexual orientation | | | |

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