

Statistics Canada wants *you*- for a new survey on faculty diversity

The survey, which closes December 6, aims to address the lack of data on equity, diversity and inclusion in the postsecondary sector.

BY MOIRA MACDONALD | NOV 13 2019

Did you get an email or letter in the mailbox from Statistics Canada recently? You may be among the 100,000 postsecondary faculty and researchers randomly chosen by Canada's chief data collector to participate in a new online survey. The [Survey of Postsecondary Faculty and Researchers](#) is designed to fill in gaps in our understanding around the level of equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) at Canada's colleges and universities so that policies for addressing EDI can be improved.

The survey stems from a federal government commitment in Budget 2018 to collect better data on postsecondary faculty and researchers in support of greater diversity among those receiving funding from the country's three research granting councils: the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council, and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. The budget specifically mentioned improving support for women, underrepresented groups and early-career researchers.

The survey results are expected to help federal policymakers "better understand the career experiences, as well as the challenges and barriers that exist throughout the academic pipeline," Martin Magnan, Statistics Canada's manager of media relations, wrote in an emailed response.

Participants are asked a series of questions covering their experiences around employment, research activities and funding, bias and discrimination, harassment, opportunities for learning and development, as well as questions addressing their identity and the state of equity, diversity and inclusion at their institutions.

Invitations to participate in the survey were sent starting October 7 to full- and part-time faculty, postdoctoral fellows, doctoral students, as well as college instructors – and follow-up reminders were sent at the end of the month. Invitees were randomly chosen from a pool of 800,000 eligible individuals identified through census, tax and university administrative data. They have until December 6 to complete the survey.

"People need to participate so that we can have the data we need to take the action to really remove systemic barriers facing underrepresented groups within the academy," said Pam Foster, director of research and political action for the Canadian Association of University Teachers, one of several groups consulted regarding the survey's design and scope.

A 2018 CAUT report on equity and diversity among postsecondary teachers found employment and pay gaps among different groups within the academic workforce. However, it also noted that available data on the topic was “limited.” StatsCan’s [University and College Academic Staff System](#) collects some data annually, but it is currently restricted to full-time university faculty.

“There is no other data out there that will address some of the issues in this survey,” said Ms. Foster, such as questions about workplace violence and harassment, specific barriers to advancement and other forms of discrimination.

In addition to consulting with the tri-council, Statistics Canada also conferred with Universities Canada, Colleges and Institutes Canada and Polytechnics Canada during the survey’s development. All groups are encouraging their members to complete the survey if they were invited to do so.

The findings will complement results from Universities Canada’s own EDI survey of senior university administrators that was released on November 4, part of the commitment the association made under its [Inclusive Excellence Principles](#), adopted by its members in 2017.

The Universities Canada survey, sent to members this past spring, reveals that 77 percent of universities currently reference EDI in their strategic plans or long-term planning documents. Nevertheless, the survey shows “that the higher education community, like many sectors, must continue to do more to advance EDI and demonstrate progress over time,” said the report on the survey results. A key challenge identified by respondents is a lack of resources.

“Together, you start to get a composite picture of some of the dynamics around equity, diversity and inclusion that are part of the university ecosystem,” said Wendy Therrien, director of external relations and research for Universities Canada. “The more complete the picture can be, the better we can understand the dynamics [and] the more we can support our membership in making progress.”

Besides what the surveys may reveal about overall representation or underrepresentation of diverse groups within the university system, they may also show how that plays out as members of the university community have tried to advance through the system and how the situation might differ from one discipline to another, Ms. Therrien said.

Numbers, however, “don’t tell the whole story,” said Ms. Therrien. Individual institutions need to “look at what they’re doing on their campus and how the aggregate data can inform or be reflective in the strategies they undertake.”

The new Statistics Canada survey is estimated to take about 10 to 15 minutes to complete and is only open to those invited to participate. Results are expected to be released throughout next spring and summer.

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