ALGOMA UNIVERSITY EDI CLIMATE STUDY

PHASE I REPORT

September 30, 2021

HIGHER EDUCATION STRATEGY ASSOCIATES

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Algoma University (AU) has been increasingly focused on embedding equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) into everything it does. The University's long-term goal is to eliminate systemic barriers to inclusion experienced by underrepresented groups of employees and students, embedding EDI in all its structures and systems.

As the University moves forward with this work, AU commissioned Higher Education Strategy Associates (HESA) to conduct a comprehensive EDI Climate Study that includes an environmental scan, employment systems review and a comparative review. The project has essentially two foci: a student-focused component examining factors behind inequities in admission and student success, and an employee-focused component reviewing inequities in employment. HESA will study the climate at Algoma University with regards to EDI to understand aspirations for EDI at the University, assess how the university is performing relative to these aspirations, and to identify solutions to improve the University's performance. Ultimately, this work will inform a strategy and evidence-based action plan that will include accountability frameworks, the review and revision of relevant policies, and the development of new policies and processes.

This study will review various forms of inequities at Algoma University. We will focus especially on inequities based on:

- Ability
- Age
- Citizenship
- Ethnicity
- Gender
- Indigeneity
- Race
- Religion

- 2SLGBTQQIPA+
- Socio-economic status
- Urban or rural origins
- First-generation students (i.e. students whose parents did not attend higher education)
- First-generation immigrants

As part of Phase 1 of this project, HESA has conducted a preliminary environmental scan, a literature review, and preliminary key-informant interviews, which will inform further research instruments for implementation in subsequent phases. The literature review focuses on key EDI concepts and EDI dynamics in Canadian higher education more broadly, to put in context whatever challenges AU is encountering. HESA's environmental scan also included a preliminary review of existing EDI initiatives/promising practices.

The Phase I report is structured as follows. We start with a brief overview of the literature on equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) in Canadian higher education. The next section presents the current EDI policy context for post-secondary institutions in Canada. In the next section, we present early findings on EDI at Algoma

University based on our desk research and preliminary key informant interviews. We complete the report with a discussion of emerging promising initiatives across Canadian universities. These are preliminary findings, and our work will continue to evolve as we progress. We wrap up this report with an overview of deliverables in Phase I and next steps.

SETTING THE STAGE: EDI IN HIGHER EDUCATION

DEFINING EQUALITY, EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION

The shift towards mass higher education systems, which has occurred globally over the last fifty years, has required greater acknowledgement of the importance of diversity in respect of gender, class, ethnicity, abilities, sexuality, faith, age, and other identities. Diverse students have been transforming how universities operate. This transformation is not only about *who* institutions recruit for research, instruction, and support roles, but also *how* and *what* is taught and studied, and, most importantly, *how institutions support* students and employees to achieve their full potential. This goes to the true purpose of the university, which is clearly evolving from what it was 50 years ago, or even 10 years ago. Universities which unthinkingly prioritise majority groups in their operating policies and cultures will fail to take advantage of the ways in which difference can inform and enhance learning and the advancement of knowledge. Instead, universities should pay close attention to varied modes of implementing policies around diversity and embed equity, diversity, and inclusion principles within their organisational cultures.

Universities use varied terminology to define their commitments and actions around equality, equity, diversity, and inclusion.

The formal concept of **equality** is well established in law, linked to the idea that no one should suffer discrimination in employment, education or other context for reasons linked to their membership of a protected class. The aspiration to equality of outcomes, sometimes referred to as equity, requires more systemic evaluations of barriers to substantive equality and positive measures to address these (Barnard & Hepple, 2000).

Equity is most often associated with the concept of fairness. Many scholars see equity as a mechanism for recognizing systemic power and privilege in higher education (Brennan & Naidoo, 2008). Scholars point out that different understandings of equity lead to different education policy foci: equity as inclusion allows for organizations to change, so that all individuals can achieve the basic minimum, while equity as fairness allows for changes that can potentially secure the maximum success for equity-deserving groups (Clarke, 2014; Savage et al., 2013). However, a recent study at the University of Manitoba noted that "giving up privilege to support the maximum for equity-seeking groups seems to be the less frequently promoted implementation approach among the Canadian universities" (Tamtik & Guenter, 2019, p. 43).

The concept of **diversity** has become an increasingly popular term for values and policies previously addressed using the language of multiculturalism (Ahmed & Swan, 2006). A definition of diversity typically includes race, gender, age, sexual orientation, socio-economic class, and disability, with additional considerations of

religion, education, and family/marital status. Diversity is more than a set of categories. The concept should be extended to the principles of inclusion, recognition and valuing of difference, and the ability to participate equitably in society (Chan, 2005).

As a recent European Universities Association report noted, a university which has a diverse student and staff population may not be inclusive, because "inclusiveness refers to diverse backgrounds being valued in a group or by the institution which, as a pre-requisite, needs awareness about differences and privileges" (Claeys-Kulik & Ekman Jørgensen, 2018). **Inclusion** is defined as the practice of ensuring that all individuals are valued and respected for their contributions and are equally supported (Government of Canada, 2021d). Inclusion does not leave all the power with the asker, but empowers the 'askee', so they are choosing the music, participating in or leading the dance committee (Juday 2017).

Fostering a sense of inclusion is challenging for organisations which, unknowingly, take on characteristics which favour and fit with those who are typically defined as majorities within the organisation. It is recognised that the challenges are even greater for those whose identity is intersectional, experiencing overlapping and interdependent identity categories that may each be subject to compounding inequities. Inequities affecting both students and employees arising from intersectionality have significant implications for both national and institutional policies (Nichols & Stahl, 2019).

Systemic barriers are defined as policies or practices that result in some individuals from underrepresented groups receiving unequal access to or being excluded from participation in employment, services or programs. These barriers are systemic in nature, meaning they result from institutional-level practices, policies, traditions and/or values that may be "unintended" or "unseen" to those who do not experience them, but that have serious and long-lasting impacts on the lives of those affected (e.g., on their career trajectories and/or mental and physical health) (Government of Canada, 2021d).

Thus, the best practices suggest that any institutional **EDI plan** should outline key EDI objectives and includes action items based on the needs of the institution and on known systemic barriers in it. It is important that the EDI plan be based on an understanding of the institution's specific challenges. Objectives should be SMART (specific, measurable, aligned with the wanted outcome, realistic and timely) (Government of Canada, 2021d).

EMPLOYMENT EQUITY

There is a wide body of literature that focuses on employment equity within higher education in Canada. This literature shows that inequities and unconscious bias within hiring, promotion, and retention are significantly impacting both the career

trajectories and earnings of individuals from equity-deserving groups (Henry, et. al., 2016). This section highlights existing wage inequities, the overrepresentation of equity-deserving groups in contract positions, and the lack of representation in senior leadership positions. Understanding and addressing these systemic barriers is key in fostering a workplace that is inclusive and representative of all.

Despite mandated employment equity policies and practices, wage inequities remain a challenge for Canadian universities. Evidence shows significant wage gaps between men and women, and between white, Indigenous, and racialized academic staff (CAUT, 2018). For example, CAUT (2018) found that full-time female professions continue to earn less than their male counterparts, with the gap increasing when part-time staff are considered. In Ontario's higher education sector, Momani et. al. (2019) found that on average, men were paid 2.06%, 2.14%, and 5.26% more than their female counterparts for all employees, university teaching staff, and deans respectively.

Research indicates that disparities in salaries exist beyond gender, and are similarly impacted by race (Li, 2012). Henry et. al. (2016), found that in Canadian universities, racialized and Indigenous faculty are both underrepresented and earn lower wages than their white counterparts, with the gap being most significant for racialized women (CAUT, 2018a). Factors that have been identified as contributing to gender wage gaps include age, seniority, collective agreement coverage and discrimination (CAUT, 2018a).

Within Canadian universities, there is an increasing number of academic staff working part-time, or on temporary and short-term contracts (CAUT, 2018b). Work as contract academic staff (CAS) is often "precarious […], characterized by income insecurity, exclusion from career development, and unrecognized and unremunerated contributions" (p. 5). In 2018, CAUT put out a report outlining their findings from a study intended to explore the experiences and working conditions of CAS in Canadian post-secondary institutions. Among 2,606 survey respondents, job security was a top priority concern, with most unable to rely on CAS employment alone. In line with wage gap trends, the survey found that racialized CAS were more likely than white CAS to be represented in lower income categories, and vice versa with regards to higher income categories. While their sample was not representative, it was noted that the percentage of racialized CAS in their survey was higher than the percentage of racialized full-time faculty in the 2016 census data. This points to the need for more research examining the possible overrepresentation of racialized faculty working in temporary, contract positions (CAUT, 2018b).

Within Canadian universities, there is a lack of diversity in senior leadership positions, with racialized people and people with disabilities being significantly underrepresented. In a Universities Canada (2019) survey, racialized people only accounted for 8% of senior leaders, despite accounting for 22% of the general

population, 40% of the student body, 31% of doctoral holders, and 21% of full-time faculty. Similarly, people with disabilities only accounted for 5% of senior leaders, while accounting for 22% of the general population and 22% of faculty. Indigenous people accounted for 3% of senior leaders, which is a lower percentage than the general population (5%), higher than the percentage of full-time faculty and doctorate holders, and roughly equal to the proportion of the student population. In terms of specific senior leadership positions, there are few racialized people, Indigenous people, and people with disabilities in president, provost/vice-president academic, vice-president research and other vice-president positions (Universities Canada, 2019).

The proportion of women in senior leadership positions is almost equal to that of men (49% compared to 51%). However, representation differs by position and field of study – with gender parity for deans in the arts, social sciences and humanities disciplines, but fewer women deans in health and STEM fields. Additionally, there are fewer women who are vice-presidents research, provost/vice-presidents academic and presidents (Universities Canada, 2019).

A substantial number of studies indicate that institutional climate influences employees' persistence and retention. Studies examining experiences of equity-deserving faculty populations – Including Black faculty (Griffin et al., 2011; Lynch-Alexander, 2017), international faculty (Kim et al., 2020; J. H. Lawrence et al., 2014; Stojanović & Robinson, 2021; Wang, 2021), racial and ethnic minority faculty (Haynes & Tuitt, 2020; J. A. Lawrence et al., 2021; Liera, 2020) – highlight the critical role of effective mentorship and workplace climate in the success, promotion, and retention of equity-deserving faculty.

As universities are increasing their EDI efforts, employees from underrepresented groups are disproportionately called upon to do this work. This practice has been identified as 'cultural taxation', wherein additional responsibilities are placed on certain faculty because of their racial or ethnic background (Joseph & Hirshfield, 2011). For example, racialized and Indigenous scholars are frequently called upon to provide mentorship to diverse student populations (Henry et. al., 2016), which leads to these individuals shouldering a disproportionate amount of work. Other expectations include serving on diversity committees, giving public lectures on diversity, and getting called upon to speak on behalf of an entire racial or ethnic group (Joseph & Hirshfield, 2011; Social Sciences Feminist Network Research Interest Group, 2017). These additional expectations and responsibilities can impede an individual's career progression and impact their job satisfaction (Joseph & Hirshfield, 2011).

EDI FACTORS IN DETERMINING STUDENT SUCCESS

Student success – as measured by grades, retention, graduation, or employment statistics – continues to be a top priority for higher education institutions, governments, policy makers and practitioners. A growing literature suggests that low success rates are particularly concerning for equity-deserving groups of students, including indigenous students, racialized students (Denson & Chang, 2009), students with disabilities, LGBTQS2+ students, those from lower socio-economic backgrounds (Devlin, 2013), mature students, and first-generation students among others.

Indigenous students in Canada consistently face barriers – including racism, interpersonal discrimination and misrepresentation or total elimination of Indigenous culture(s) in the curriculum – which lead to frustration with the university system and feelings of isolation on campus (Bailey, 2016; Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018). Students with disabilities can also struggle to integrate into postsecondary environments due to academic and social barriers related to their impairments (Aquino, 2016; Vaccaro et al., 2015). Recent studies have indicated that international students similarly face challenges integrating into Canadian university life and culture (Guo & Guo, 2017; Jean-Francois, 2019; Robertson et al., 2015).

Student success is closely connected with student engagement in much of the literature (Krause & Coates, 2008). Yet, the term engagement is used differently in various contexts. For the purposes of this study, we approach student engagement as an individual student's psychosocial state: their behavioural, emotional and cognitive connection to their learning experiences (Kahu, 2013).

Transition theory has argued that problems of low retention rates for equity-deserving students result from insufficient skills. In other words, certain 'at-risk' cohorts, due to their demographic characteristics, have poorer literacy, numeracy and academic skills that cause them to drop out (Gale & Parker, 2014; O'Donnell et al., 2016). This perspective is too narrowly conceptualised – the difficulties many students face extend beyond a lack of skills and in fact 'speak to a cultural inequity' (Devlin & McKay, 2014). Researchers who situate equity-deserving groups as problems engage in "deficit thinking" by focusing on fixing people rather than fixing oppressive and disabling systems.

Another concept, known as an education interface, approaches the student experience and student engagement as an active process. Kahu and Nelson (2017) propose that individual student engagement occurs dynamically within an educational interface at the intersection of the student and their characteristics and background, and the institution and its practices. Their conceptual framework

suggests how and where the interactions between institutional and student factors occur, and also depicts the psychosocial mechanisms that facilitate students' connections or disconnections to their studies. It highlights mechanisms critical for engaging all students, and particularly non-traditional students.

Equity-deserving students also often belong to multiple groups and are more likely to have other characteristics such as studying part-time or lower academic entry scores.

IMPLEMENTING EDI MEASURES AT UNIVERSITIES

While many universities currently develop and implement policies and practices to advance equality, diversity and inclusion, there is a significant risk that such actions may only legitimate or mask the structures perpetuating inequalities (Scott, 2020). This risk may be even higher when universities adopt off-the-shelf solutions of policies and actions that conform to trends in other large organisations. The literature suggests that it is important for universities to understand and articulate their EDI values, when their leadership should undertake the myriad steps which bolster the implementation of strategic plans with supporting culture and governance.

In advancing EDI policies in higher education, a dialogic approach to address norms, practices and cultures is needed. This means those who are developing and implementing policies should do so in a way that challenges them to better understand the scale and nature of the problems by fully engaging with those who experience inequalities. This approach must include a recognition that the barriers to equality are systemic and structural. Eliminating these barriers requires a whole-of-institution strategy in which those leading the university must articulate the importance of the actions and the benefits for all members equally (including measures to correct historic and continuing inequalities) (Ash et al., 2020; Harper, 2017).

THE EDI POLICY CONTEXT OF CANADIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

The principles of diversity and inclusion are embedded in Canadian legal frameworks (Tamtik & Guenter, 2019). Institutional approaches to EDI are therefore guided by federal legislation, including the Canadian Multiculturalism Act (1988), the Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982), the Employment Equity Act (1986, revised in 1996), and the Canadian Human Rights Act (1977). Many universities have also subscribed to national initiatives that require them to follow specific guidelines. The following subsections outline federal and provincial policies and

legislation related to employment and research equity, accessibility, and sexual violence prevention.

EMPLOYMENT EQUITY POLICIES

The concept of employment equity was first introduced in Canada by the 1984 Royal Commission on Equality in Employment. Employment equity is intended to address barriers to entering the workplace and increase the representation of four designated groups: women, people with disabilities, Indigenous peoples, and visible minorities. The Federal Contractors Program (FCP) ensures that organizations doing business with the Government of Canada, including Canadian post-secondary institutions, are implementing employment equity within their workplaces. The FCP requires that organizations collect and maintain workforce information, set targets on equity hiring, produce progress reports, and make efforts towards a workforce that is representative of the four designated groups (Government of Canada, 2021c).

In line with FCP requirements, most Canadian universities established employment equity programs in the 1990s, which were aimed at removing structural barriers that impeded the recruitment, hiring, tenure, and promotion of underrepresented faculty (Henry et. al., 2016). That being said, the FCP has historically had limited regulatory function, as program requirements were not consistently being monitored or reported on (Henry et. al., 2016). Despite federal mandates, employment and wage inequities remain prominent challenges among Canadian higher education institutions.

RESEARCH EQUITY POLICIES

The "Tri-Agency" refers to the three primary federal research funding agencies: Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR); the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC); and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC). In recent years, the Tri-Agency has undertaken a variety of initiatives to foster a more equitable, diverse, and inclusive research environment in Canada. The Tri-Agency's current Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan, 2018-2025 outlines "measures to increase equitable and inclusive access to granting agency funding opportunities" and "details how the granting agencies can influence the achievement of an inclusive post-secondary research system and culture in Canada" (Government of Canada, 2018b). In collaboration with Indigenous peoples, they have also co-developed "an interdisciplinary research and research training model that contributes to reconciliation" (Government of Canada, 2019) titled Setting new directions to support Indigenous research and research training in Canada, 2019-2022.

Overall, portions of funding have been tied to EDI targets. For example, in May of 2017, the Canada Research Chairs Program (CRC) launched its Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan, requiring all institutions with five or more research chairs to develop and implement EDI action plans in order to receive funding (Government of Canada, 2018a). Tying funding with EDI targets/actions supports the EDI goals of both the CRCP and the broader Canadian research community.

While the Tri-Agency has implemented EDI expectations across all of their programs, additional resources are required to support researchers as they develop the knowledge and skills to meet EDI expectations (al Shaibah, 2020). The Tri-Agency continues to face additional challenges in establishing appropriate quantitative demographic goals, accounting for intersectional identities, and identifying qualitative information that may reflect progress on advancing EDI goals.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND RESPONSE POLICIES

In recent years, there has also been considerable policy momentum related to sexual violence prevention and response. Various pieces of government legislation and related initiatives establish university obligations and imperatives to prevent and respond to campus gender-based violence, including sexual harassment, sexual assault, and intimate partner violence.

In 2009, the Ontario government introduced Bill 186, the Occupational Health and Safety Amendment Act (Violence and Harassment in the workplace), which sought to strengthen protections for workers from workplace violence and harassment. The policy requires employers to have policies and programs in place to address and manage instances of workplace violence, harassment, and domestic violence.

In 2016, the Ontario government passed Bill 132, the Sexual Violence and Harassment Actional Plan Act (Supporting Survivors and Challenging Sexual Violence and Harassment), which was designed to protect employees and students against any sexual violence and/or harassment in the workplace/on campus. It included university reporting requirements in relation to campus sexual violence prevention and response.

Finally, in 2018 the Government of Canada committed $5.5 million over 5 years for Women and Gender Equality Canada to work with provincial and territorial stakeholders to develop a framework for addressing and preventing gender-based violence at post-secondary institutions. The result was the Courage to Act program, which is a national initiative that aims to develop tools, create resources, and share strategies to act on gender-based violence on campuses.

ACCESSIBILITY POLICIES

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA, 2005) exists to recognize and address the history of discrimination against persons with disabilities in Ontario. The act develops, implements, and enforces accessibility standards related to goods, services, facilities, accommodations, employment, buildings, structures, and premises.

In 2018, the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) released a Policy on accessible education for students with disabilities, which replaces the 2004 OHRC Guidelines on Accessible Education. This policy is designed to help education providers fulfill their obligations under the Ontario Human Rights Code, specifically related to inclusive physical spaces, responding to accommodation requests, and effectively addressing complaints related to disability (OHRC, 2018).

OTHER EDI INITIATIVES

In recent years, both the Canadian government and organizations within Canada have developed additional pan-Canadian initiatives to promote and advance EDI at higher education institutions. This section outlines those initiatives, and their intended impact.

In June of 2015, Universities Canada released [new Principles on Indigenous Education](#), encouraging universities to enact education-related recommendations emergent from the Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2012/2015) and aligned with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). The 13 principles "recognize the importance of greater indigenization of university curricula and of Indigenous education leadership within the university community, as well as the essential work of creating resources, spaces and approaches that promote dialogue and intercultural engagement between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students" (Universities Canada, 2015).

To complement their Principles on Indigenous education, Universities Canada released [seven Inclusive Excellence Principles](#) in 2017, followed by an [Action Plan](#) to advance EDI on campuses and in society. A significant focus of their action plan is encouraging institutional transparency with regards to providing public access to EDI-related data and best practices.

The Dimensions program is a federal initiative supported by the Tri-Agency to promote and support higher education institutions focused on increasing EDI within their environments and across their research systems. There are two primary components of Dimensions: the [charter of principles](#) and a [pilot program](#).

While voluntary, all Canadian post-secondary institutions are welcome and encouraged to endorse the charter to demonstrate their commitment to advancing

EDI. By endorsing the charter, institutions commit to adopting its principles throughout their practices and culture.

The primary objective of the pilot program is to foster transformational change by "identifying and eliminating obstacles and inequities in the research ecosystem to support equitable access to funding opportunities, embed EDI-related considerations in research design and practices, and increase equitable and inclusive participation." There were 17 participating institutions in the first cohort. Coinciding with the programs' launch, the Tri-Agencies distributed a limited number of EDI Capacity Building Grants, primarily to small institutions seeking to develop their EDI infrastructure and capacity.

In Fall 2020, more than 3000 members of Canada's higher education community came together for the [National Dialogues and Action for Inclusive Higher Education and Communities](). The 2020 Dialogues and Action focused on sharing experiences and ideas, exploring and learning best practices, and contributing to the formulation and implementation of concrete actions to resolutely reject anti-Black racism. The activities also focused on how to drive meaningful, enduring Black inclusion within individual universities and colleges and in our communities. Emerging from this forum was a commitment to a unified approach to fighting structural racism. Since then, a collective plan of action has been drafted in a document called the [Scarborough National Charter on Anti-Black Racism and Black Inclusion in Canadian Higher Education: Principles, Actions, and Accountabilities](). Consultations across partner institutions for feedback is underway. It is expected that the Charter will be signed in Fall 2021.

ABOUT ALGOMA UNIVERSITY

This section outlines AU's institutional commitment to EDI, its guiding mandates and strategies, and the current state of EDI at AU based on initial discussions with members of the community.

INSTITUTIONAL COMMITMENT TO EDI

As an institution moving towards healing, reconciliation and creating safety, AU has developed an EDI portfolio spearheaded by the President's Office. EDI work at AU is guided by the university's EDI mandate, its special mission, and its EDI committee and working groups.

Creating and accepted in 2021, AU's EDI mandate states:

> *"Algoma University (AU) commits to embedding equity, diversity, and inclusion to foster a welcoming environment on our campuses. EDI values must be transversal in the entire organization to fulfil Algoma University's commitment to undoing systemic and institutional discrimination and to be publicly transparent and accountable. We also acknowledge that racism and discrimination exists and affects the five targeted designated groups in disproportionate, distinct and complex ways (women, Indigenous, Black and other racialized persons, persons with invisible and visible disabilities, and 2SLGBTQQIPA+ persons)."*

AU is located on the site of the former Shingwauk Residential School and is seeking to actively address its subsequent responsibility as an institution. This unique history guides their Special Mission to:

> *Be a teaching-oriented university that provides programs in liberal arts and sciences and professional programs, primarily at the undergraduate level, with a particular focus on the needs of Northern Ontario; and*

> *Cultivate cross-cultural learning between Aboriginal communities and other communities, in keeping with the history of Algoma University College and its geographic site."* (Algoma University, n.d., pg. 6).

In line with this, AU has undertaken transformational efforts to move healing and reconciliation forward by teaching the truth about both the site and residential schools in Canada. The university also continues moving forward with Chief Shingwauk's vision for education on the site, centering cross-cultural learning and teaching through partnerships with Indigenous and other groups and organizations.

AU's is also guided by its commitment to the principles of equity, diversity and inclusion through the practice of the Seven Grandfather Teachings of their region: Nibwaakaawin (wisdom), Zaagidiwin (love), Mnaadendimowin (respect),

Aakodewewin (bravery), Gwekwaadiziwin (honesty), Dibadendizawin (humility) & Debwewin (truth).

In June of 2021, AU further demonstrated its commitment by making EDI a standalone objective in its 2021-2023 Strategic Plan Extension. The objective is as follows:

> ***"Equity, Diversity and Inclusion:*** *EDI values are embedded across the organization to fulfill Algoma University's commitment to undoing systemic and institutional discrimination and to be publicly transparent and accountable."*

As the 2021 Strategic Plan and Academic Plan are updated, AU's EDI Action Plan and Strategy development will play a prominent role. This work is carried out by AU's Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Committee (EDIC), which was spearheaded by the President's Office in 2017. Their work is centered around investigating, informing, developing, and recommending best practices in regards to equity gaps at AU. They are guided by five working groups:

1. Accessibility, Policies and Procedures Advisory committee
2. EDI Education Awareness and Events
3. AU's Special Mission
4. Anti-Racism and Discrimination
5. Canada Research Chairs Program

To build additional capacity, the university has hired its first EDI Manager, and appointed a three-year EDI Academic Lead. It also created and filled a new Vice-President position called Nyaagaaniid (meaning 'leader' in Anishinaabemowin), who is responsible for university-wide student success, EDI, and Anishinaabe Initiatives, including leading the university to fulfill its Special Mission.

Otherwise, Algoma has pursued a number of initiatives with partners to support progress on EDI. In 2015, AU endorsed Universities Canada's New Principles on Indigenous Education which led to their response to the TRC's Calls to Action and more recently Honouring Our Commitment. This further committed AU to enhancing educational opportunities for Indigenous students and fostering reconciliation with Indigenous communities. More recently, AU signed on to the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Dimensions Charters and Universities Canada's Principles on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion. By endorsing the Dimensions Charter, AU has committed to adopting eight EDI principles across its practices and culture, and to ongoing engagement with the community. The commitment to Universities Canada's seven principles on EDI signals a desire to be an active EDI champion, to attract and retain students and employees from diverse backgrounds, and to foster an environment where everyone has the opportunity to succeed.

WHAT WE'VE HEARD SO FAR: KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

Phase 1 of this project involved key informant interviews with institutional representatives who exercise leadership with regards to EDI, both on the student success side and the employee side, on all three AU campuses. The purpose of these interviews was to help the HESA team understand EDI within the context of AU, including successes, challenges, and efforts that are already underway. This section highlights the information gathered from these interviews, and discusses strengths and weaknesses in terms of EDI, the most common barriers that accompany this work, and outlines what AU's EDI champions would like to see prioritized moving forward. These are preliminary findings only, and may be subject to change.

The overall sentiment is that AU has made positive strides in terms of EDI. Five years ago, there was very little focus on EDI at AU. It lacked the drive and infrastructure to create meaningful change in this area. In recent years, the university has made progress through the activities we outlined earlier. Yet, there is still a lot more work to be done. Among AU's strengths is its special mission, which demonstrates the institution's strong commitment to truth and reconciliation in partnership with Indigenous elders and communities. Another strength is institutional willingness to focus on EDI. As shown in the previous section, AU has a strong team of leaders committed to EDI and embedding EDI into every aspect of the institution. Their work is supported by members of the President's office, who have been responsive to recommendations, including adding EDI as a standalone priority in the university's strategic plan. AU's small size can also be viewed as a strength in terms of moving meaningful EDI work forward.

While the above strengths provide an important foundation for EDI at AU, the university continues to face a variety of challenges and barriers in implementing EDI strategies and activities. A lack of resources is the most oft-cited barrier. For AU to successfully move forward with EDI targets, the EDI office should be equipped with the necessary financial resources and personnel. As of right now, most individuals involved in this work do not have EDI embedded into their job portfolios. Instead, this work relies on employees and students voluntarily taking on additional responsibilities. Unfortunately, this has often placed an added burden on individuals from equity-deserving groups.

The general lack of both financial resources and personnel has contributed to a variety of challenges, including difficulties in supporting and retaining employees and students from equity-deserving groups. On the employee side, AU has made progress with equity-targeted hiring, but it lacks resources and infrastructure to

provide culturally responsive resources and support to those employees. On the student side, there is a lack of safe spaces for communities of equity-deserving groups, and a lack of culturally responsive resources to support their success. Generally, there is also a need to improve physical access to spaces (i.e., campus buildings and facilities), and to develop inclusive washroom facilities.

AU faces additional challenges because it does not have demographic data on their employee and student populations. Without knowing the makeup of the community, it is challenging to make targeted improvements. Another issue is that AU does not have a formal structure in place to report EDI-related issues, which limits its ability to adequately address issues impacting members of equity-deserving groups. For students and employees, the lack of a reporting structure is compounded by a lack of resources about how to manage/navigate EDI-related concerns or issues.

A lack of EDI training for employees and students was another theme during the initial consultation process. While some training does exist, it is not mandatory and not specific to individuals' positions within the institution (i.e., student, faculty, administration, etc.). There is an overall sentiment that there needs to be more investment in training opportunities and in resources to help people address EDI-related topics and/or concerns within their environments. For example, faculty should receive training and tools to discuss EDI with their students and embed it into their teaching practices. Broadly, education and training can help individuals address conscious and unconscious biases, and understand different identities and how to respectfully acknowledge them.

As AU is currently in the beginning stages of its EDI work, several policies and collective agreements need to be updated to include inclusive and decolonized language and practices. This work is central to removing systemic barriers for underrepresented groups, improving the overall organizational culture, and supporting community members working to advance EDI on AU campuses.

Our interviews identified several areas that employees would like to see prioritized moving forward. This includes:

1. Mandated EDI education and training for both students and employees;
2. Equity-targeted hires;
3. A focus on employee retention, specifically the retention of members of equity-deserving groups;
4. Updated policies, procedures, and collective agreements;
5. The intentional use of pronouns and the elimination of dead names;
6. The creation of safe spaces for members of equity-deserving groups;
7. Greater accessibility of spaces including physically accessible buildings and facilities, and gender-neutral washrooms;
8. Culturally responsive resources for students and employees;
9. Increased financial investment into EDI; and
10. Clear communication about how AU is moving their EDI objectives forward.

EMERGING PROMISING PRACTICES

The environmental scan has demonstrated several promising initiatives emerged across Canadian universities recently. Our work in exploring these practices will be evolving over the project course, and this section presents preliminary findings from Phase I.

Thus, we will present an overview of EDI-specific strategies and action plans, evolving practices of self-identification data collection, employment equity initiatives, and new EDI-focused programs to support student access to and success in post-secondary education.

EDI-SPECIFIC STRATEGIC/ACTION PLANS

Strategic/action plans are useful in guiding institutional efforts to address underrepresentation of equity-deserving groups (Government of Canada, 2018). They are also useful in promoting a culture of accountability, wherein institutions are publicly responsible for reporting both their EDI objectives and progress over time.

While EDI strategic/action plans at Canadian institutions must in some cases follow specific requirements, of equal importance is the development of plans that reflect community concerns and priorities. For example, the [Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design's (ECU) Action Plan](#) is updated regularly to reflect the ongoing evolution of EDI work. Another good example is [OCAD's Presidential Task Force on the Under-Representation of Racialized and Indigenous Faculty and Staff report,](#) which focused specifically on addressing the under-representation of racialized and Indigenous faculty and staff. The report was put together by a task force, whose mandate was to raise the percentage of racialized and Indigenous employees and subsequently increase diversity within curriculum. This report clearly laid out objectives, provided context on the problem through community consultations, and made specific recommendations that targeted areas of concern based on the experiences and sentiments of their community.

A positive approach is to incorporate an accountability lead, implementation timeline, and progress status with each specific recommendation/action/initiative. This promotes a culture of accountability, wherein someone or a group of people are publicly responsible for implementation and progress. This also allows community members to see how their institution is progressing in terms of EDI.

SELF-IDENTIFICATION DATA COLLECTION

To identify and address barriers for equity-deserving groups, it is critical to collect demographic data. These data can help institutions to target their EDI actions, and track when they are making a measurable difference. In terms of best practices, the

University of Calgary has created an [EDI dashboard](#) that presents available institutional EDI data in an easily digestible format. The dashboard is particularly useful as it allows users to visualize changes over time and identify where there are existing inequalities. The data are updated annually and based on self-reported administrative data for students and employees, as well as an Employee Equity Survey. In terms of limitations, the dashboard does not yet allow an intersectional analysis of those who are part of more than one equity-deserving group and does not reflect the personal experiences of individual members of their campus community. Moving forward, the University of Calgary is working to expand the dashboard's data tracking abilities to provide more detailed information about their institution's demographics.

EMPLOYMENT EQUITY

Recruitment is a common theme across the EDI documents/strategies that we examined, as institutions are similarly focused on how they can facilitate inclusive recruitment processes for potential faculty and staff. OCAD has an extensive plan for addressing barriers to recruitment for equity-deserving groups, which includes the following actions:

1. That a trained group of faculty and staff be assembled and serve as employment equity representatives on hiring committees, peer review committees, and performance review/job evaluation committees;
2. That all job postings and OCAD websites reflect the institution's commitment to EDI;
3. That OCAD implement an applicant tracking process to monitor applicant pool diversity and subsequently identify existing barriers;
4. That anyone participating in employee recruitment and selection processes receive training related to equitable hiring; and
5. That qualified racialized and/or Indigenous candidates be part of all short lists for hiring.

As shown in the literature review, members of equity-deserving groups have been and continue to be underrepresented within higher education. In trying to address this problem, universities have started implementing equity-targeted hiring initiatives to tackle this problem. This section highlights promising initiatives undertaken by universities in Canada.

The University of Waterloo has announced it will take a step in addressing the systemic underrepresentation of Indigenous and Black faculty through the launch of new cluster hiring initiatives that will see the addition of 10 new Indigenous and 10 Black faculty members. As restricted hiring opportunities, the cluster hiring initiatives follow Ontario Human Rights Commission provisions for a special program, and recruitment for these new positions is open and will continue until all

positions are successfully filled. Wilfrid Laurier University is taking a significant step toward Indigenization and reconciliation and equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) by hiring no less than six new Indigenous faculty members and six Black faculty members, under the "Inclusive Excellence" cohort hiring initiative. Meanwhile, the new three-year collective agreement for faculty at York University includes clauses that commit the university to hiring six new Indigenous faculty members during the agreement's three-year term, as well as to undertake an equal pay exercise. The agreement also secured increases to the Trans Health fund and improved parental leave provisions. These provisions represent a commitment to supporting a diverse workforce of university faculty at York.

Within the hiring process, some institutions are making a concerted effort to increase the number of employees with experience in EDI. The CRC best practices guide recommends requiring a track record related to EDI as part of job criteria (Government of Canada, 2021a). There are several institutions, including Ryerson University and UNCSA who have implemented EDI experience requirements into their hiring guidelines. UNCSA recommends embedding EDI responsibilities into all current and future position descriptions (UNCSA, 2021). Ryerson's *Recruiting & Hiring Diverse Faculty Guidelines* recommends identifying and incorporating EDI selection criteria into every stage of hiring processes, including the job posting, interview questions, and other assessment tools (Ryerson University, n.d.). For reference, the guidelines include:

> *(1) Demonstrated ability to provide expertise, support and advice on inclusive curriculum and pedagogy, including Universal Design for Learning (UDL), critical perspectives, decolonizing the classroom and more.*

> *(2) Demonstrated ability to engage and make learning accessible and inclusive for undergraduate and graduate students of different genders and races; with different cultures and religions; gender identities and sexual orientations; and mobility, mental health, learning, sensory and other disabilities.*

> *(3) Demonstrated ability to include diverse perspectives and experiences, and work with diverse communities, related to scholarly research and creative activities.*

> *(4) Demonstrated experience creating opportunities, such as teaching or research assistant positions for students from under-represented groups and amplifying the voices of scholars from under-represented groups in the field.*

STUDENT SUCCESS

Universities Canada (2019) identified the following promising practices related to EDI factors in student success:

- Partner with businesses and community groups on outreach, recruitment and student support activities.
- Target scholarships, bursaries, loans and tuition waivers for non-traditional students.
- Improve college-university transfer pathways.
- Offer pre-university preparatory programs.
- Provide early offers of admission to students from underrepresented groups.
- Create safe spaces on campus for sharing experiences and community building that respect race, gender, sexual orientation and different abilities, including spaces for equity-promoting student clubs.
- Provide gender neutral washrooms.
- Hold events to celebrate student diversity and advance EDI (e.g. events to celebrate International Women's Day, the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination).
- Provide student supports such as an Indigenous student centre, a Black student support coordinator, accessibility and academic advising centres.

There are a host of different initiatives underway at universities across Canada, well beyond our ability to document. Instead, we will here simply provide examples of different initiatives.

Several universities have introduced aboriginal outreach programs. For example, Lakehead University's Aboriginal Outreach and Recruitment office supports learners in the transition to post-secondary education and beyond. Through one-on-one visits, as well as participation in the Aboriginal Post-Secondary Information Program, Lakehead meets with Aboriginal learners from senior elementary and high school, as well as mature students and members of the community. At the same time, it supports Aboriginal students at Lakehead in their quest to achieve their educational goals, find jobs and build careers.

At McGill, the Faculty of Medicine conducts outreach to increase the number of applicants from underrepresented groups, including from Indigenous and Black communities and from rural and low-income backgrounds. Every year since 2009, McGill has invited high school students from underrepresented groups to their Explore! Careers in Health Camp. The student-led bilingual camp helps participants learn about medicine, nursing, dentistry, physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech-language therapy, genetics and pharmacology.

UBC has developed Aboriginal Access Studies to provide support for Indigenous students in their efforts to access higher education such as special admissions policies for Indigenous students, Indigenous-specific awards, and culturally unique programs and services for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students. University of Manitoba offers a free Access program for Indigenous peoples, residents of

Northern Manitoba, low-income earners, and newcomers that prepares and transitions learners into degree programs at universities.

Cape Breton University developed a youth mentorship program "Business" that supports students in Grades 10, 11 and 12 planning on attending a community college or university with an interest in potentially studying business, which attracts youth from across Atlantic Canada. The University's Unama'ki College provides outreach and support for Indigenous learners, and has supported the successful graduation of nearly 1,000 Indigenous students in recent decades. Unama'ki College is currently developing a significant scholarly research capability anchored in health, environment and well-being and a new undergraduate program based on the concept of 'two eyed seeing' to build on the positive experience of Integrative Science programming.

Some faculties have adopted diversity admission policies. For example, the University of Ottawa's Faculty of Law has created admission categories to diversify incoming classes of students with regard to age, Indigenous and immigrant status, and socio-economic circumstances. The University of Manitoba's Faculty of Education has developed a diversity admission policy for their teacher education program with enrollment targets under five diversity categories.

In 2021, Western University made a one-time investment of $1 million to support EDI curriculum development across the university. Spearheaded by the Centre for Teaching and Learning, the EDI Pathways program aims to enhance instructors' skills across three domains of inclusive education: foundational, pedagogical and curricular. The Office of Indigenous Initiatives will create a library of resources accessible to all faculty and programs and a new Indigenous curriculum developer role will be created to facilitate the respectful integration of these resources into courses. An Indigenous curriculum grant to support change at the program level is expected to launch this fall.

Wilfrid Laurier University is currently reassessing and relaunching student leadership training in core principles of EDI and reconciliation in an anti-racist and anti-colonial framework. Another actions include providing culturally competent counselling services and supports for students, including access to racialized and Indigenous counsellors trained in anti-racist and anti-oppression frameworks, and revising the existing non-academic student code of conduct to address racism directly. Providing resource and support spaces for Black, racialized and Indigenous students.

At Brandon University, the Indigenous Education Senate Sub-Committee has undertaken extensive consultation to develop guidelines and policies for respectful engagement. While these are under development, they include:

- Respectful engagement with knowledge-keepers and elders

- The Kairos Blanket Exercise – Checklist - a 90-minute experiential activity that aims to foster understanding of the shared history and nation-to-nation relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada.
- Guidelines for Indoor or Outdoor Indigenous Ceremonies – the Province of Manitoba's The Non-Smokers Health Protection and Vapour Products Act permits smudging and the use of tobacco in pipe ceremonies indoors. Brandon University has recognized that smudging and pipe ceremonies are a part of many Indigenous Peoples' traditional ways of life and are therefore permitted on campus.

Emily Carr University has created the [Aboriginal Gathering Place](#) to provide culturally appropriate support for Aboriginal students in a centre that reflects their community and traditions. Designed in keeping with Aboriginal philosophies and values, the Gathering Place offers Aboriginal students a space to develop and strengthen their identities in a supportive and safe environment. In addition to showcasing both traditional and contemporary Aboriginal art, it is a valuable resource to access traditional materials and supplies and to find information about Aboriginal funding and scholarships.

The University of Regina runs the Neekaneewak Living-Learning Community is a home away from home for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. In addition to attempting to offer a great place to live, the Community offers academic support, mentorship, cultural events and leadership development opportunities. It aims to help students gain knowledge and wisdom from both traditional and emerging ways of knowing.

Finally, in 2018, the University of New Brunswick opened the 203 Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity, which offers LGBTQIA2S+ (lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgendered, queer, intersex, asexual, two-spirit) students, faculty, and staff a safe space for gathering and socializing. The Centre is run by an advisory board made up of students, faculty, and staff and aims to improve the mental and physical health of the LGBTQIA2S+ community at UNB.

STUDY PROGRESS AND MOVING FORWARD

HESA and Algoma University engaged in Phase I of the EDI climate study from June to September 2021. During this phase, HESA provided the following project deliverables

- The final project work plan.
- The communication plan.
- Project presentations to the senior leadership team & the EDI committee.
- The EDI study town hall.
- Data collection instruments, including student and faculty & staff surveys. Interview guides, town hall presentations.
- The literature review and environmental scan.
- The preliminary key informant interviews (14) and desk research.
- The preliminary report.

In the next phase, the consultations phase, HESA is focusing on the following deliverables: survey administration and monitoring, key informant interviews, and student success-related discussion group sessions. Subsequently, HESA staff will analyse the employee survey results before hosting employee discussion group sessions. This phase should culminate with HESA providing to Algoma University a summary of consultation results.

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