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Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion on Canadian Universities: Where do international students fit in? Équité, diversité et inclusion dans les universités canadiennes : où se retrouve l'étudiant international ?

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Article abstract

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Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion on Canadian Universities: Where do international students fit in?

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Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion on Canadian Universities: Where do international students fit in?
Équité, diversité et inclusion dans les universités canadiennes: où se retrouve l'étudiant international?

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Abstract

Internationalization and equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) are both strategic priorities at Canadian universities. However, they are underpinned by different emphases and rationales, and their goals and associated activities may be contradictory at times. To explore how the discourses and activities associated with these two projects align or conflict, this article examines how international students are, or are not, included in EDI projects at two of Canada's largest English-speaking universities: the University of Toronto and the University of British Columbia. Our findings show that the discourses and activities associated with EDI and with international student recruitment have largely operated within organizational and discursive silos, representing a classic case of decoupling in the organizational studies literature. To move forward, we argue that definitions and initiatives related to EDI need to consider how institutions can include international students not only within their commitments to diversity, but also to equity.

Résumé

L'internationalisation et l'équité, la diversité et l'inclusion (EDI) sont toutes les deux des enjeux prioritaires pour les universités canadiennes. Pourtant, elles reposent sur différents points d'emphase et de logique, dont les objectifs, ainsi que les activités qui s'y rattachent, peuvent parfois être contradictoires. Afin d'explorer la façon dont les discours et les activités afférentes s'alignent, ou entrent en conflit à l'intérieur de ces deux projets, cet article lève le voile sur l'inclusion (ou pas) d'étudiants internationaux dans les projets EDI dans deux universités de langue anglaise parmi les plus importantes au Canada, l'Université de Toronto et l'Université de la Colombie-Britannique. Nous avons trouvé que les discours et les activités relatives à l'EDI et au recrutement d'étudiants à l'international s'opèrent en grande partie à l'intérieur de structures organisationnelles et discursives, en somme un cas classique de découplage dans la littérature portant sur l'étude organisationnelle. Pour aller de l'avant, nous avançons l'idée que les définitions et les initiatives relatives à l'EDI doivent faire l'objet d'une réflexion sur la façon dont les établissements peuvent inclure les étudiants internationaux dans leur engagement vis-à-vis non seulement la diversité, mais aussi l'équité.

Keywords: internationalization; international students; equity, diversity, and inclusion; higher education; decoupling

Mots clés : internationalisation; équité, diversité et inclusion; études supérieures; découplage

Introduction

Canadian universities frame themselves as welcoming spaces for all students and celebrate their diverse student bodies as a major strength (Jubas & White, 2017). The goal of enrolling and supporting students from traditionally underrepresented groups has been mapped onto broader initiatives to dismantle systemic racism in higher education. These initiatives are often grouped together under the label of “equity, diversity, and inclusion” (EDI) (Henry et al., 2017; Tamtik & Guenter, 2020; Tavares, 2021). Simultaneously, universities have increased international student enrollments in the name of creating global citizens and generating additional revenue (Buckner et al., 2020). Although universities often celebrate international students’ contributions to diversity, the vast majority of international students in Canada come from only two countries: China and India. The rising number of Asian students, in particular, has generated racist critiques in the media and society at large, pointing to a clear disconnect between discourses of EDI and the realities of international students’ experiences.

Prior studies find that universities’ EDI strategies rarely discuss international students, despite the fact that the majority of international students in Canada are non-White (Tamtik & Guenter, 2020). There is no doubt that international students, particularly those racialized as non-White, have a stake in the anti-racism work of EDI projects. Moreover, despite the tremendous diversity of international students, studies routinely find that international students are often grouped together under a single label and viewed as through a deficit lens. Many also experience stereotypes, microaggressions, and discrimination (Liu, 2017; Ruble & Zhang, 2013; Tavares, 2021). Yet, within institutions, the recruitment of international students is typically viewed as a distinct and parallel initiative to EDI, namely as part of internationalization, and little research has addressed how these two institutional projects intersect (Beck & Pidgeon, 2020; Tavares, 2021).

Recognizing this gap, this article examines how international students are conceptualized within institutional activities that aim to support EDI at the University of Toronto (UofT) and the University of British Columbia (UBC), Canada’s two largest universities by total enrollment. To do so, we adopt a case study approach that analyzes multiple forms of institutional discourses and activities, including presidential speeches, public-facing websites, policy documents and bureaucratic structures for EDI and internationalization. We ground our analysis in the organizational studies literature, which theorizes how complex organizations, such as universities, navigate the competing pressures they face (Greenwood et al., 2011; Pache & Santos, 2013). We show that the competing institutional logics associated with internationalization and EDI lead to challenges for universities’ organizational practices.

We find that while diversity is celebrated and discrimination condemned at both institutions, EDI activities and offices tend to focus resources on combatting discrimination related to race and ethnicity, religion, and gender or sexual orientation, with few resources related to discrimination based on nationality or country of origin. Meanwhile, international student services are housed under student services and their resources focus on practical matters such as visas, postgraduate work permits, and health insurance. We argue that policies and activities related to EDI, international student recruitment, student services, and tuition and fees seem to exist within discursive and bureaucratic silos, representing a classic case of decoupling in the organizational studies literature, whereby different institutional logics predominate, in particular, organizational structures. However, we also note that student life offices seem to represent a space in the university where creative recombinations of discourses are occurring, as both institutions now ground their approaches to student services in holistic approaches to student life that recognizes students’ intersectional identities as potentially both international and racialized. Yet, gaps remain

in other areas of the institution. As a result, many intra-organizational discourses are incompatible and contradictory. In particular, we note that discussions of equity in relation to tuition remain almost nonexistent. In concluding, we argue that existing bureaucratic structures for EDI should be broadened to better reflect encompassing definitions of inclusion and equity.

EDI as an Institutional Project

Commitments to equity in Canadian higher education are based in broader federal and provincial policies that establish fundamental rights for individuals, including the freedom from discrimination (Chan, 2005). In recent decades, legal commitments to equity have become integrated into Canadian higher education in relation to employment and are also reflected in institutional commitments to creating inclusive campuses for all students, and particularly those from underrepresented backgrounds (Chan, 2005; Jubas & White, 2017; Henry et al., 2017). These efforts, which typically group together the concepts of equity, diversity, and inclusion under the term “EDI” have been institutionalized in official institutional rhetoric, policies, and organizational structures (Tamtik & Guenter, 2020).

Although grouped under the same umbrella term “EDI,” equity, diversity, and inclusion have distinctive genealogies and connotations (Tienda, 2013). Equity is best understood as a process of achieving justice by recognizing barriers that hinder students from accessing equal opportunities to succeed on campus (Clancy & Goastellec, 2007). While equity has often been discussed in terms of admissions, it also involves broader efforts in curriculum and student life to recognize and dismantle cultural, linguistic, and racial hierarchies (Brennan & Naidoo, 2008; David, 2007).

Meanwhile, diversity connotes the presence of sociodemographic difference in gender, race, class, ethnicity, culture, religion, and sexual orientation. It is often celebrated in higher education because it is thought to contribute to bringing different perspectives to campus to foster critical thinking, pluralism, and intercultural awareness (Ghosh, 2012; Gurin et al., 2002; Turner, 2013). In practice, diversity as an institutional project is often expressed numerically in terms of student and faculty demographics (Ford & Patterson, 2019).

Finally, the concept of inclusion implies respecting, acknowledging, and supporting students with different learning needs (Nunan, 2000; Strnadová et al., 2015). Inclusion implies that all students feel that they belong and are respected and do not experience marginalization through stigma, bias, and discrimination (Morgado et al., 2016). In terms of institutional practice, this entails institutional commitments to multiple teaching pedagogies and supports to accommodate students’ distinct needs and competencies (Mag et al., 2017).

Despite their distinct connotations, these three concepts are typically grouped together under the umbrella of EDI and championed as a major priority by universities and professional associations. For example, in 2017, Universities Canada, the major advocacy association for Canadian universities, established a 5-year action plan to support universities’ progress towards EDI (Universities Canada, 2017). While largely symbolic, these public stances signal universities’ desire to being diverse and inclusive educational communities. In line with these commitments, studies document an increasing number of diversity officers, departments, divisions, and offices established on university campuses to support EDI initiatives (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2007; Kwak et al., 2019).

Yet, despite these stated commitments, many studies find that institutional EDI projects have been superficial at best. One important critique of EDI projects is that they have made small inroads at dismantling structural racism. For example, in their in-depth study of racialized and Indigenous faculty at Canadian universities, *The Equity Myth*, Henry and colleagues (2017) find

that the goal of equity and social justice has been “consistently promised but persistently denied” (p. 3). Faculty of colour and Indigenous faculty remain significantly underrepresented at Canadian universities and face myriad forms of structural and interpersonal racism. Another critique of EDI is their focus on workplace management. The predominant understandings of EDI currently come from a legal perspective and are focused on underrepresented groups as defined by the Employment Equity Act, which limits the scope of EDI initiatives. In an analysis of EDI policies from 23 universities across Canada, Tamtik and Guenter (2020) find that institutional metrics for reporting on EDI focus on four specific equity-seeking groups: women, racialized minorities, Indigenous peoples, and persons with disabilities. They argue that this practice leaves out both gender and sexual minorities and international scholars (Tamtik & Guenter, 2020).

This absence of international students in most EDI policies is noteworthy because studies consistently find that enhancing campus diversity is a commonly stated goal for international student recruitment (Buckner et al., 2020; Ferreira et al., 2014). Yet, international students routinely encounter challenges integrating into Canadian university life on and off campus (Guo & Guo, 2017; Houshmand et al., 2014; Kenyon et al., 2012; Zhang & Zhou, 2010). They also often experience multiple forms of exclusion due to high tuition fees and living costs (Calder et al., 2016) as well as both implicit and overt racism. As such, international students clearly have a stake in the anti-racist work of EDI initiatives, as well as much to gain from policies and practices that make Canadian universities more accessible and welcoming.

Yet, the institutional rationales for international student recruitment are not identical to those of EDI, and in fact, are often contradictory. International student recruitment in Canada is overwhelmingly based on neoliberal discourses that view international students as a source of revenue for public universities and often characterize students as markets (Stein & de Andreotti, 2015; Buckner et al., 2022). Meanwhile, EDI is ultimately grounded in calls to advance justice and equity through education. The presence of multiple and conflicting priorities within organizations creates challenges and tensions for universities (Greenwood et al., 2011). The goal of this article is to closely document how the simultaneous implementation of EDI and international student recruitment manifests. To do this, we examine how international students are included, or not, in the EDI rhetoric and activities at two Canadian universities with large numbers of international students.

Conceptual Framing

To theorize our analysis of how international students fit into EDI initiatives, we draw on a rich sociological tradition concerned with how organizations respond to pressures from their environment. In the field of organizational studies, scholars recognize that organizations are embedded within environments and must maintain legitimacy in the eyes of other actors and peers in their field. To do this, they need to be seen as aligning to their field’s dominant logics. Yet, scholars have long recognized that organizations are embedded within heterogeneous fields, characterized by multiple, sometimes contradictory, logics (Greenwood et al., 2011). More recent empirical studies have pointed to the growth of complex institutional environments characterized by multiple ways to define legitimacy. This has led to the emergence and growth of hybrid organizations, which seek to simultaneously respond to contradictory logics (Pache & Santos, 2013). In this study, we conceptualize Canada’s public research-intensive universities as hybrid organizations in that they simultaneously seek to be selective and highly ranked globally, while also being perceived as equitable, inclusive, and accessible. More specifically, in the case of EDI and internationalization, we see clear evidence of competing logics. On one hand, Canadian

universities' international student recruitment activities are based within market logics that generate revenue while EDI initiatives are based on logics of equity, fairness, and social justice, in ways that are largely incongruous with market logics.

In the presence of competing logics, organizations often project alignment with legitimizing discourses, but fail to implement such practices fully. The disconnect between organizations' stated policies and their actual practices is a concept known as decoupling (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Decoupling has historically implied an intentional and often rational gap between rhetoric and practice, whereby organizations engage in symbolic compliance without changing their core practices due to resource constraints or resistance. Uncertainty about how to implement a new practice and the existence of competing institutional pressures also make decoupling more likely (Rasche & Gilbert, 2015). In our study, attempts to incorporate international students into EDI efforts may be particularly likely to exhibit decoupling because there is some ambiguity over their status: international students are not a federally recognized equity-seeking group, leading to some uncertainty over the extent to which they should be included in EDI activities.

Hybrid organizations typically adopt two strategies to manage contradictory logics. First, they may compartmentalize contrasting discourses, keeping them within separate parts of the organization by creating silos or buffers (Greenwood et al., 2011). Yet, this separation can be hard to maintain in the face of internal and external pressures calling for change (Boxenbaum & Jonsson, 2017). Therefore, a second strategy involves reconciling competing logics internally, often by selectively coupling aspects from each discourse. For example, they may make partial changes in practice to maintain an acceptable level of support from all actors (Oliver, 1991). Or they may find ways to combine seemingly incompatible discourses under new discursive frameworks. A good example of this is how UofT's Scarborough campus has combined imperatives to be both selective and accessible under the banner "Inspiring Inclusive Excellence" in its new strategic plan (UTSC, 2022). In this study, we explore how these possible responses—decoupling or reconciling—occur in the cases of UofT and UBC.

Data and Methods

Case Selection

Our analysis focuses on UofT and UBC, two research-intensive universities that both recruit large numbers of international students (see Table 1). As shown in the table, UofT and UBC enroll almost twice as many international students as the next largest university in their province. Moreover, they both have recruiting offices in China and India in order to recruit students from these countries.

Table 1: International Undergraduates in Toronto and Vancouver, by Institution

Province	Institution	Enrollment (2020)	International (N)	International (%)
BC	UBC (Vancouver)	45516	12215	27%
	Simon Fraser University	25700	5453	21%
	Kwantlen Polytechnic	20795	5630	27%
Ontario	UofT (All Campuses)	63127	16928	27%
	York University	55000	8500	15%
	Ryerson University	37575	2564	7%

UBC and UofT are also similar in their large numbers of international students, particularly from Asia. Tables 2 and 3 show the percentage of all international students at each university from China, India, and South Korea between 2014–2020. By 2020, Chinese students accounted for 64.7% of all international students at UofT and 42.5% at UBC. Meanwhile, Indian and Korean international students represent a smaller percentage of international students at both institutions, with Indian students comprising 6.4% at UofT and 13.6% at UBC. The proportion of Korean students at both institutions has actually declined as the universities enroll a greater proportion from China and India respectively.

Table 2: Undergraduate International Students at UofT, by Citizenship (% Total International)

	2014– 2015	2015– 2016	2016– 2017	2017– 2018	2018– 2019	2019– 2020	2020–2021
Chinese	54.6%	60.5%	63.5%	65.1%	64.7%	64.6%	64.9%
Indian	3.5%	3.7%	3.6%	4.2%	5.1%	5.6%	6.4%
Korean	4.7%	3.9%	3.5%	3.1%	3.0%	3.1%	2.8%

Table 3: Undergraduate International Students at UBC, by Citizenship (% International Total)

	2014– 2015	2015– 2016	2016– 2017	2017– 2018	2018– 2019	2019– 2020	2020–2021
Chinese	32.5%	35.6%	38.0%	39.3%	41.9%	40.9%	42.5%
Indian	3.1%	4.3%	5.1%	6.5%	8.0%	9.9%	13.6%
Korean	5.5%	4.8%	4.1%	3.9%	3.7%	3.7%	3.8%

UofT and UBC are also comparable in terms of the high tuition fees they charge their international students. Table 4 shows the average tuition fees for domestic students and international students at three other universities in each of Ontario and British Columbia for various programs. The table shows that tuition fees for international students vary from 3.5 to 9.3 times their corresponding domestic student tuition fees. They also charge international students much more than other institutions in the same city. For example, UofT charges international students \$20,000 more per year than York University for a general arts program. Moreover, a comparison of past tuition for UofT shows changes in the tuition fees increased by \$20,000 from 2014 to 2020 for international students whereas the domestic student tuition fees, which are regulated provincially, increased by less than \$200 in the same period (University of Toronto, 2014; University of Toronto Planning & Budget Office, 2020). As such, the tuition gap between international students and domestic students has increased significantly over the years. The large and increasing tuition differential does not suggest that either institution prioritizes creating more equitable tuition policies for international students.

The fact that both UofT and UBC have simultaneously committed to EDI while also charging international students much higher tuition creates organizational tensions for the two universities, as many stakeholders both inside and outside the university find these two facts to be problematic. In the next section, we outline our methodological approach to analyzing how this tension plays out in different spaces within the university.

Table 4: Tuition Fees in Canadian Dollars for Domestic and International Students 2020/21

	Institution	Unit	Domestic (\$CDN)		International (\$CDN)		I:D Ratio	
			Arts	Business	Arts	Business	Arts	Business
BC	UBC (Vancouver)	Per credit	184	272	1319	1707	7.2	6.3
	Simon Fraser	Per credit	196	261	979	1157	5.0	4.4
	Kwantlen Polytechnic	Per credit	158	158	718	718	4.6	4.6
Ontario	UofT (All Campuses)	Per year	6100	15900	57020	57020	9.3	3.6
	York University	Per year	7037	9619	32416	33875	4.6	3.5
	Ryerson University	Per year	7062	9488	28971	33305	4.1	3.5

Data Collection and Analysis

Both EDI and internationalization are multifaceted organizational projects, which affect universities' policies, structures, and discourse. Therefore, we adopted a multipronged strategy for data collection. We conducted environmental scans of the publicly available documents and online resources for both universities to collect a set of predetermined policy documents, official statements, and annual reports, including internationalization strategies, strategic plans, and enrollment reports, and official statements related to international students, particularly those of Asian backgrounds. The environmental scans also collected information on institutional websites, including EDI office pages and international student offices.

For our analysis, we closely examined institutional documents and policies by considering both the symbolic statements, organizational structures, and policies. Our analysis focused on (1) where international students fit into EDI discourses and activities, and (2) what types of resources related to EDI were targeted towards international students. Following the model of Ahmed (2006), who distinguishes between universities speech acts and their subsequent actions, we first examined official statements related to EDI and international student recruitment, to understand how international students and EDI were discursively linked, and whether there was evidence of competing discourses or institutional logics between the two initiatives. We then examined the formal policies and organizational structures in place for implementing EDI and international student supports. Our analysis was iterative: we first described each institutions' rhetoric and organizational structures related to EDI individually and then compared the two institutions to identify similarities and differences. Because we found more similarities than differences, in the sections below, we focus on overarching patterns across the two institutions.

Speech Acts: Formal Statements on Diversity and Anti-Discrimination

Both UBC and UofT make explicit commitments to being diverse and inclusive campuses on their public-facing websites and strategic plans. UBC presents their commitment to diversity through public statements such as "UBC has a robust strategy for raising awareness of our commitment to and the benefits of equity, diversity and inclusion" (Office of the Provost & Vice-President Academic, n.d.) and "UBC is deeply committed to the principles of equity, diversity, inclusion and maintaining a respectful environment, both among students, faculty and staff and in our commitment to educating future leaders" (Ono, 2019), among many others. Similarly, UofT publicly states that it seeks "to advance an inclusive, diverse and equitable U of T, where everyone belongs" (The Division of HR & Equity, n.d.), and that "[d]iversity, inclusion, respect, and civility are among the University of Toronto's fundamental values" (Gertler, n.d.).

Notably, these commitments extend to discussions of their diverse international student bodies. Both universities publicly celebrate diversity by listing the number of countries their international students represent each year. UofT writes, “[t]he University’s excellent international reputation attracts students from 166 countries and regions” (University of Toronto Planning & Budgeting Office, 2021, p. 7). Similarly, UBC reports, “[a] total of 155 countries were represented by 16,098 international students on the Vancouver campus in 2019/20” (Mukherjee-Reed & Szeri, 2020, p. 37). Scholars have found that this is a common practice in discussions of international students, where the number of countries represented seems to serve as a proxy for diversity (Buckner et al., 2021; Buckner & Stein, 2020).

UofT’s academic strategic plan, *Towards 2030* specifically links international students to the idea of diversity, stating: “International students not only add diversity and dynamism to our campuses. They also offer the University—and Canada—a network of ambassadors and champions across the world and create a virtuous circle for ongoing recruitment of outstanding international students” (University of Toronto, 2008, p. 37). Similarly, UBC’s 2019 enrollment report states that “[i]nternational students contribute a rich diversity to both campuses” (Mukherjee-Reed & Szeri, 2020, p. 41). Such statements celebrate international students for their diversity in ways that are highly compatible with recruiting more international students, and from more countries.

In addition, in line with their commitments to equity and inclusion, the presidents of both universities have vocally denounced discrimination. Most recently, they made specific speeches in the wake of racist attacks against Asian populations during the COVID-19 pandemic on their Office of the President web pages. President Gertler of UofT wrote on March 19, 2021:

To all members of the diverse Asian communities on our three campuses, please know that we stand in solidarity with you at this very difficult time ... Let us remember that of course we still have work to do in combatting racism, and let us commit to calling out hate whenever we witness it, and redouble our efforts to combat discrimination and violence on every level (Gertler, 2021).

Similarly, President Ono of UBC stated on March 20, 2021:

To my Asian community members—students, faculty, staff and alumni—I stand by you. I share in your grief and want you to know that I see you and share in your pain. ... It is my hope that the recently established Anti-Racism and Inclusive Excellence Taskforce will provide recommendations on how best to address racism at UBC. It is only by working together across racial lines that we can stand in solidarity to succeed in our struggle against all forms of racism, including anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racisms (Ono, 2021).

These presidential speeches contribute to portraying inclusive campus environments that actively combat discrimination. They recognize discrimination and racism as real and highlight institutional commitments against anti-Asian racism and violence. Indeed, when it comes to public commitments to diversity and anti-racism, there is little evidence of decoupling; instead, diversity discourses suggest both universities can combine EDI and international student recruitment under their broad commitments to being diverse institutions formally committed to dismantling racism and discrimination.

However, when we examined an alternative source of university speech, namely international student recruitment policies, we found very different emphases. In particular, recruitment policies express concern over a lack of geographic diversity of the international student population. As shown in Tables 2 and 3, the vast majority of all international students at both institutions are from China: Chinese international undergraduates make up 65% of all

undergraduate international students at UofT and 43% at UBC. The high proportion of students from China is framed as a problem. For example, at UofT, the high proportion of international students from a small number of countries is framed as a risk that exposes the university to economic vulnerabilities. In 2015, President Gertler (UofT) stated:

Over-reliance on a small number of sources elevates our vulnerability to sudden changes in circumstances, triggered by political or economic shifts, one-time-only events and other unforeseen circumstances ... Our first order of business should be to undertake a strategic review of the target countries in which we recruit, with two aims: first, to reduce our reliance on our largest source countries, and second, to identify promising emerging markets (Gertler, 2015, pp. 16–17).

Similarly, in its strategic plan, *Towards 2030*, UofT also states, “[w]e cannot achieve our objective of diversification if international students are recruited from a small number of nations or regions, or if they are concentrated in a small number of programs or divisions” (University of Toronto, 2008, p. 39). Official reports from UBC have also signaled a desire to recruit students from different countries. Its 2020 enrollment report reports success, stating: “the focus toward greater geographic diversity is showing results” (Mukherjee-Reed & Szeri, 2020, p. 41).

On one hand, these recruitment documents may seem to emerge from a largely economic logic—given the extent to which both universities are reliant on revenues from international students, having students come from many countries may reduce financial impact of a financial shock. However, what these statements are also undeniably implying is simple: “we don’t want too many students from China.” In fact, although Gertler’s (2015) report states that UofT does not want an over-reliance on “a small number of sources”—the second largest source of international students at UofT, India, comprises only 6.4% of all undergraduate students, suggesting that at UofT the real concern is over-reliance on China in particular. Although the language used in recruitment strategies seems objective, using the terms one would use to discuss an investment portfolio, it nonetheless circulates in a society that has a long history of anti-Chinese bias. Concerns over Canada becoming “too Chinese” has deep roots (Wu et al., 2021). Moreover, contemporary manifestations of such bias target higher education admission policies in particular: international students from China have been accused as competition for spots in public university from domestic students in popular media (Stein & de Andreotti, 2016; Singh, 2017).

There is a clear disconnect between these two forms of university speech, which is a classic case of decoupling. In one area of operations, the institution wants to celebrate how international students contribute to diversity and learning experiences of all. In line with its EDI initiatives, it acknowledges anti-Asian bias in the larger world and its implications for students. In another area of its operations, it wants its recruitment strategies to be interpreted purely through the logic and lens of its business operations, ignoring the surrounding society’s legacies of anti-Chinese bias. Our findings suggest that EDI and international student recruitment are treated as separate areas of activity which operate within discursive silos. In the decoupling literature, we can view institutional silos as one way the university is managing competing institutional pressures of a need for resources and its commitment to EDI, facilitated by the ambiguous status of international students in EDI projects.

University Actions: EDI Activities and Resources

We now turn to examine what Ahmed (2006) calls *actions*, meaning what types of activities and resources are carried out under the name of EDI and where international students fit into these initiatives. As with university speech acts, we document institutional *siloing*. EDI activities and offices offer numerous resources to address and combat discrimination related to race and

ethnicity, religion, and gender or sexual orientation. In contrast, there are almost no resources related to discrimination based on nationality or country of origin. Meanwhile, international student services are housed within student services and focus their resources on practical matters such as orientation, visas, postgraduate work permits, mental health, and health insurance. While EDI services are citizenship ambivalent, financial aid policies are explicitly differentiated by citizenship status, and huge inequalities in tuition policies are tersely justified.

EDI Offices' Mandates and Activities

In line with prior studies on the proliferation of diversity offices in the United States and Canada (Kwak et al., 2019; Tamtik & Guenter, 2020), we found that both universities have established offices that specialize in supporting and advancing EDI. At UBC, this office is called the Equity and Inclusion Office (EIO) and is a stand-alone office that coordinates resources across the institution and reports to three distinct offices, including the Provost and Vice President, Students.

At UofT, an EDI office dates back to 1993 when a permanent office was established called Race Relations and Anti-Racism Initiatives Office (RRARIO). In 2005, its mandate was expanded, and the office was renamed the Anti-Racism and Cultural Diversity Office (ARCDO). Since its founding, ARCDO has been housed under the Division of Human Resources and Equity, which was renamed Division of People Strategy, Equity and Culture in 2021. Although ARCDO now espouses a broader mandate, which includes students, the Division of People Strategy, Equity and Culture remains essentially a division focused on human resources and workplace. Its mandate is “to attract world-class faculty and staff” and so the needs and experiences of students are not central to their work. As a result, ARCDO’s workshops have tended to focus primarily on issues of human resources and workforce management. This finding is in line with prior work that shows equity policies in Canadian universities have tended to be viewed as related to workforce management (Henry et al., 2017). In fact, in 2021–2022, only two workshops were targeted to students, and they were advertised as a new pilot program.

At both UBC and UofT, EDI offices adopt broad definitions of inclusion, stating that they work towards a campus “free of discrimination and harassment based on race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship and/or creed (faith) and as they intersect with other social identities” (University of Toronto ARCDO, n.d.). Such an equity strategy closely mirrors federal legislation such as the *Employment Equity Act* (Hildyard, 2010). They offer a range of workshops, training and community spaces which meant to advance EDI on their campuses. Examples of such workshops include ones on racial discrimination and harassment in the work environment and microaggressions. UBC offers a workshop that suggests a focus on students from immigrant backgrounds titled: “But where are you really from? Building a welcoming and inclusive campus.” Additionally, UofT sponsors a series of meetings for wellness and dialogue targeted at specific groups, namely Muslim, Jewish, Asian, Queer and Trans, Black, Indigenous and People of Colour. Some of these communities are open and relevant to many international students, and we note that there is one particularly for Asian students at UofT. However, it is worth pointing out that these spaces target all students, domestic and international alike, and are therefore likely implicated in the racialization international students experience on Canadian campuses, in which they become racialized as “Asian,” potentially for the first time.

In short, although discourses of EDI are framed as intended to support all students and personnel, in practice, we find that the mandates of dedicated offices focus primarily on combatting racism and discrimination based on gender, race, ethnicity, and religion. To the extent that international students are part of EDI offices’ activities, it is by virtue of other aspects of their

identity (e.g., race or religion), not their status as international students. Moreover, although both offices endorse a broad definition of their mandates—stating their campuses should be free from discrimination based on place of origin and citizenship status—international students are not mentioned as a specific category or equity-seeking group on either website. Similarly, there was almost no evidence of workshops or training related to discrimination based on country of origin or that focus on other types of bias that are common to many international students’ experiences.

International Student Centres and Services

In contrast to EDI initiatives, whose services seem largely ambivalent to citizenship or country of origin, international student offices and advisors provide targeted resources and services for incoming and current international students based explicitly on their visa status. These international offices are typically housed in student life and student services department. For example, UofT has an international student office at each of their three campuses—Centre for International Experience at St. George, the International Student Centre in Scarborough, and the International Education Centre in Mississauga. UBC has an International Student Advising office located under the UBC Student Services division.

Both universities maintain dedicated websites with resources for different stages of international student life, including arrival, housing, visas, work permits, health insurance, taxes, and postgraduate work permits. For example, UofT has a dedicated Resource Hub specifically for international students that lists 84 different resources, including legal advice, health insurance, visas and immigration, numerous supports for mental health and well-being, housing, COVID vaccine information, tuition payment, and academic supports. There are even two videos on winter, including a “Winter 101” that discusses layering, boots, and how to stay safe, and a second called “Winter Facts: How to Love Winter in Canada.” However, in this extensive library, we did not find a single resource dedicated to helping international students understand racial and ethnic diversity in Toronto, the experience of racialized minorities in Canada, or what resources are available to international students who believe they have experienced discrimination. This absence is notable, given the many other types of supports offered, including those on mental health, the Multi-Faith Centre, and the Academic Success Centre. The absence of initiatives dedicated to EDI on the international student resource page is somewhat surprising, given the fact UofT has a whole series of workshops and seminars related to EDI called the EDI Education Series for students, which covers topics such as creating inclusive environments, understanding and responding to microaggressions, and anti-oppressive practices. While international students certainly have access to these resources, our point is simply that there is a lack of targeted resources. The existence of these institutional silos seems to be related to the ambiguity of international students within EDI projects; while the institution affirms that no individual should face discrimination or bias based on national origin, EDI offices nonetheless focus their activities and efforts on the more clearly defined and widely recognized identity categories of gender and race.

However, this institutional siloing may be changing in their newest iterations. The newest guiding documents for student life and student services at both institutions include international students within a broader commitment to equity and inclusion for all students. In 2021, UofT’s St. George campus released a new Student Life strategy that explicitly recognizes students’ multiple and intersectional identities. The introductory section states that the Student Life division aims to support all students and commits to breaking down historical systems of oppression. In an important commitment, the strategy states:

Breaking down structures involves acknowledging the truth of our histories and current context, and then identifying, addressing, and adapting our work in ways that challenge colonial and oppressive structures and discrimination, and proactively engages and creates opportunities for members from communities who have been affected by systemic exclusion—including (and recognizing intersectionality) Indigenous, Black, Asian, racialized staff and students, LGBTQ2S+, people with disabilities, international individuals, students with family responsibilities and all equity-deserving communities. (UofT Student Life, 2021 p. 5)

This newly articulated focus on all students and their intersectional identities is one way that the Student Life division is able to include international students explicitly within its broader commitments to equity. We interpret this commitment as an attempt to address internal decoupling: the internationalization activities that viewed international students as economically privileged source of revenue and EDI as targeting supports to traditionally underrepresented domestic students have now been combined within a new framework of addressing all forms of systemic exclusions students face. This unified discourse offers promise as a lens to promoting deeper inclusion. However, we also note that this is occurring primarily within the Student Life division, and not the revenue generating areas of the organization, the point to which we now turn.

Tuition Fees and Policies

A third important aspect of *university action* concerns tuition and fee policies. Individuals cannot become and remain members of the self-proclaimed diverse and inclusive university community without paying tuition. However, as shown in Table 4 both UBC and UofT charge international students very high tuition that is increasingly divergent from domestic student tuition, and there is no evidence of policy change on this point, such as moderating international student tuition for students from lower-income countries in the name of equity.

On their websites, both institutions clearly state that aid based on financial need for international students is rare. For example, the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section of UofT's website states: "The University of Toronto is a publicly-funded institution and because of that cannot offer financial aid to international students" (University of Toronto, "Finances", n.d.). This statement implies that financial aid refers to provincially funded loan programs (i.e., OSAP in Ontario), and therefore, is not available to international students. However, the university also has its own need-based grant program for domestic students (i.e., UTAPS), which helps cover gaps between costs and expected resources available. UTAPS is funded directly by the UofT, through its endowment and revenue streams. International students are one of many groups, including domestic students in professional degree programs, who are simply not eligible for these grants. Nonetheless, the university webpage specifically uses the word "cannot offer financial aid" instead of "does not," a strategic but inaccurate word choice.

While need-based aid is extremely rare, both institutions do offer a limited number of scholarship programs for international students. For example, UofT has created a competitive scholarship program called the Lester B. Pearson Scholarship, which is a fully funded scholarship granted to roughly 37 out of roughly 4,000 entering international students each year. On its website, UBC celebrates the scholarships and other forms of support it provides to international students, stating the university devotes over \$30 million a year to international students through various avenues. It also advertises four merit-and-need-based scholarships, for students who could not attend UBC without significant financial assistance.

A close reading of UBC's webpage makes it clear that different discourses undergird discussions of financial aid for international students and domestic students. The university's main financial aid webpage states that, "UBC is strongly committed to ensuring accessibility for domestic students." Meanwhile, a parallel statement regarding international students states that, "UBC recognizes the academic achievement of outstanding students from around the world by devoting more than \$10 million annually" to financial aid for international undergraduates (UBC, "Financial support options," n.d.). The contrast between these statements is clear: the institution seeks to be accessible to domestic students, while seeking to reward the merit of international students. At both institutions, merit-based financial aid helps attract high-performing international students who will support the "reputational arms race" of elite research universities (Khoo, 2011, p. 344).

Yet, the vast majority of international students must pay the full cost of attendance. The high costs of attendance likely lead to self-selection among students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. Our extensive analysis of institutional discourse found no mentions to the value of equity regarding international student tuition. In short, in official discourse concerning the cost of attendance, both institutions focus on reducing barriers that traditionally underrepresented domestic groups face, with no mention of what equity means or would look like for international students. We view this as strategic segmentation of discourse: institutions emphasize equity and accessibility for domestic students and compulsory fees and merit-based aid for international students. This represents a clear case of decoupling, whereby universities have buffered themselves from the pressure to apply the same logic of accessibility to all students (Heusinkveld et al., 2013).

Discussion and Conclusion

In this article, we examine how two large and influential public universities in Canada, UofT and UBC, are—or are not—discussing international students within the framework of their EDI efforts, focusing on international students from Asia, who make the majority of international students at both campuses. On one hand, international students are viewed as highly compatible with diversity discourses that celebrate demographic diversity and condemn overt acts of discrimination. Scholars of prior research have found that Canadian universities commonly justify internationalizing their institutions in the name of diversity (Buckner et al., 2020), and these two universities were no exception. Thus, when it comes to celebrations of diversity, we found that international student recruitment and EDI discourses aligned at both universities. Yet at the organizational level, we find that both universities frame diversity as largely numerical and therefore have expressed concern about the over-reliance of international students from very few places, one of which is China. These concerns are apparent in the very different discourses used in public-facing commitments compared to those in targeted organizational planning documents regarding student recruitment.

By all accounts, our findings suggest that one of the factors driving decoupling is not resistance to EDI generally, but rather ambiguity concerning where international students fit into EDI projects. Equity in the Canadian context has traditionally meant pursuing justice by dismantling barriers and expanding access for groups traditionally underrepresented in Canadian higher education, including rural, first-generation students, Indigenous students, students of colour, and students with disabilities (Tamtik & Guenter, 2020). Although the EDI umbrella has evolved from its founding as a human resource strategy, international students are still not viewed

as a specific equity-seeking group. As our study shows, what counts as equitable access to provincially supported universities is still bounded by citizenship.

A second important finding is that discourses and activities related to EDI are organizationally siloed from those related to international student supports, international student recruitment policies, and tuition policies. Both UofT and UBC tend to conceptualize initiatives related to inclusion and equity as primarily oriented towards traditionally underrepresented groups of domestic students. As a result, international students were largely invisible in official EDI structures and workshops, at least at the time of our data collection in 2020. Discussions related to international students, including national origin, were rarely included on webpages or other offices devoted to EDI. Instead, we find that the mandate of creating a welcoming campus for international students has taken shape in specific bureaucratic structures, including international student offices and support services. Yet, offices for international students seem to mainly address logistical issues for international students such as arrival and housing. This finding aligns with prior research that found international students were rarely included within EDI policies (Tamtik & Guenter, 2020); in our study, we show how this lack of consideration extends to organizational structures, including EDI office activities, as well. That said, we did see examples of change in the newest Student Life policy issued by UofT St. George in 2021, whereby a newer discourse of dismantling barriers for all students successfully includes international students under the EDI banner. However, it is important to note that this new discourse originates in the Student Life office and is not necessarily pervasive throughout the institution.

Additionally, our analysis finds that organizational policies related to international student recruitment and budgetary frameworks related to tuition and fees are conceptualized as separate from those related to EDI. The large and increasing gap between domestic and international student tuition is hard to reconcile with discourses of equity and accessibility, and there is little attempt to do so. Rather than trying to make them compatible, it seems that for now, institutions are happy to permit tuition policies and EDI policies to exist within separate lanes, address different aspects of university operations, target different audiences, and draw on different underlying logics. This organizational and discursive siloing reflects the decoupling between discourses of equity and inclusion and the lived realities of many international students on Canadian campuses. Indeed, prior research has found that classroom-level dynamics, particularly when coupled with an unequal tuition structure, makes many international students feel marginalized or like second-class members of the campus community (Guo & Guo, 2017). Although the large literature on decoupling finds that organizations often face significant pressures to reconcile incompatible discourses either from external or internal stakeholders, particularly over the long term (Pache & Santos, 2013), in the case of unequal international student tuition fees, it is not clear that Canadian stakeholders—whether internal to the university or external—are engaged in pressuring universities to adopt more equitable tuition policies.

Overlooking international students in EDI initiatives has important implications for students and institutions alike. The rise of anti-Asian sentiments in these cities during the pandemic illuminates that diversity is not always welcome (Guo & Guo, 2017; Scott et al., 2015). While we understand that the EDI framework is a work in progress, universities should have clearer direction of how EDI can address the multidimensional nature of the student body. Recoupling the rhetoric of EDI as a campus-wide commitment with international students' reality could start with more conscious efforts to conceptualize international students within the umbrella of EDI, particularly in domains of recruitment and tuition. This will likely require the purposeful broadening of current definitions and conceptualizations of EDI.

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