

# Improvement in gender diversity at top US, UK, and Canadian universities fails to match promises

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An analysis of the 15 highest ranked social sciences and public health

universities in the U.S., U.K., and Canada show that clear gender and ethnic disparities remain at the most senior academic positions, despite numerous diversity policies and action plans in place at these universities.

With very few policies linked to specific goals or outcomes, the authors suggest that university ranking tables, which impact decisions of students, funders and prospective employees, should encompass gender and ethnic diversity of staff.

The study is published as part of a special issue of *The Lancet* on advancing women in science, medicine and global health.

Publicly available data on 8801 staff from 10 U.S. universities (Harvard University, Johns Hopkins University, Stanford University, University of Michigan, University of Washington, Columbia University, University of California LA, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Yale University, University of California Berkeley), 4 U.K. universities (University of Oxford, University of Cambridge, University College London, London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine) and 1 Canadian university (University of Toronto) was collected and analysed. Equality policies on gender and ethnicity at all 15 universities were also analysed.

Overall, the proportion of men and women across all [academic positions](#) was mostly equal, and about a third of men and women were from an [ethnic minority](#). However, women were concentrated at junior positions and men at senior positions; in all universities, representation of women declined between middle and senior academic levels, despite women outnumbering men at the junior level (senior 34% vs junior 56%).

There was a magnified absence of ethnic minority [women](#) working in senior positions—ethnic minority academics constituted a small

proportion of junior level positions (19%) and their representation declined along the seniority pathway to 9%. The proportion of ethnic minority men at the junior level was also low but did not decline across the seniority levels in the same way.

In contrast, non-ethnic minority men represented about 25% of junior staff, and their representation sharply increased from mid to senior levels, reaching 46%.

While a few universities reported having some strategic action plans focused on the recruitment, retention, and development of diverse faculty with detailed goals (eg, University of Washington, University of California, Los Angeles), most focused on less tangible goals such as raising awareness both of issues surrounding gender and equality, as well as awareness of the policies in place to address these issues.

Only four universities had specific programmes in place to address ethnic disparity (Johns Hopkins University, University of Oxford, University College London and University of Michigan).

"Ultimately, strategies or actions will only be useful if they have a measurable impact, and impact can only be assessed through regular and transparent monitoring. Tracking and publicly reporting gender on ethnicity statistics could therefore catalyse action to improve diversity. Since university ranking tables generate healthy competition and influence universities' reputations, we urge Times Higher Education and US News to consider academic staff diversity when scoring universities, and for universities to make this data public," says author Dr. Mishal S. Khan, London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (UK).

**More information:** *The Lancet* (2019).

[www.thelancet.com/journals/lan ... \(18\)32609-6/fulltext](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lan... (18)32609-6/fulltext)

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