

(text of an email sent to Brian Lee Crowley of the MacDonald Laurier Institute on September 2, 2026)

Dear Brian,

I am writing to you and your board with respect to the publication [*"The equity excellence trade-off: A study of EDI in the Canada Research Chairs programs"*](#) which appeared on September 1. It is, quite simply, the worst piece of social science I have ever seen published by a Canadian think tank and you need to retract it immediately.

The paper makes the following observation about Canada Research Chairs: *"The average h-index of publication impact for Black or Indigenous chairs is 18, for female chairs is 28, and for White or Asian males is 38."* Leaving aside issues about how the researchers assigned ethnicity/indigeneity, based on this observation, the paper says that *"EDI hiring resulted in lost productivity equivalent to 10 to 15 per cent per "equity-deserving" (female, Black, Indigenous) Canada Research Chair between 2016 to 2025"* and that *"Across the wider tri-council agencies, EDI in the form of hiring discrimination and scholar-activist content costs the government an estimated \$100 million per annum."*

The logic here seems to be as follows:

- H-index is a useful and appropriate measure of individual scholar quality
- "Equity-deserving" CRCs have lower H-index scores than others
- Any move to hire groups with lower H-index scores is a deliberate loss of quality whose value can be measured
- Hiring more "equity-deserving" CRCs is costly and reduces quality.

Note, though, that this entire construction is predicated on point one – the H-Index is an appropriate metric by which to compare individual professors' scholarly output - being true. However, as anyone with the tiniest amount of experience in bibliometrics will tell you, it is not. There are many reasons for this but let me just give you the two most important ones.

An H-index, as you perhaps know, is a single-integer measure of scholarly output: a researcher has an H-index of h if they have published h papers that have each been cited at least h times. As should be blindingly obvious, H-index is inextricably correlated with age. An individual's H-index ceiling is simply the number of papers published. Older scholars have had more time to accumulate publications than younger ones, therefore their H-index ceiling is higher. *Ceteris paribus*, given two scholars of identical talent and publication habits, the older one is *always* going to have a higher H-Index. Comparing two groups of scholars would therefore only be appropriate if i) the two groups were identical in terms of age distribution or ii) age differences are explicitly controlled for. The paper provides no evidence that the latter happened, and there are very good reasons to believe that the first is not true either. Which means the comparisons made here are utterly meaningless.

Surely your authors knew this. What business would they have publishing a bibliometrics paper if they did not? But then, if they did know, why did they not mention this as a limitation in the article?

There is a second massive problem with using H-index to compare individual scholars is that different scholarly cultures produce different patterns of scholarly publication. In the humanities, for instance, scholars are more likely to communicate via monographs (not captured by standard bibliometrics) than by articles. Scholars in the humanities are also much less likely to cite other scholarly works than the sciences; in history, for example, most citations will be to primary documentary sources than to other articles on a given subject. Something similar is at work in fields like architecture. Scholars in the hard sciences, on the other hand, also tend to publish shorter articles more frequently, and do so in larger teams. These tend to drive up both publications and citations in these fields.

The result of these different scholarly cultures translates directly to H-indices. Back in 2012, my firm did an analysis of the H-indices about 60,000 full- and part-time faculty members at Canadian universities (see the article [Back to Bibliometrics](#), published on June 11, 2012). It showed that the mean H-index for all scholars in the humanities was 2.3, in social sciences 5.2 and in the sciences 10.6 (and some sub-fields – like physics and astronomy – much higher still). This is all bibliometrics 101. It is why most major international rankings field-normalize all their publication and citation measures. Using H-indices (or any citation-related measure for that matter) without taking account of field of study simply is not measuring apples-to-apples.

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Let me spell this out: if you do not control for age and field of study, comparing H-indices is completely meaningless. Demonstrating that one group of scholars (e.g. white male CRCs) has a higher average H-index than another (e.g. Black CRCs) proves absolutely nothing on its own. The much more obvious conclusion to draw from this observation, in fact, is simply that white male CRCs are a) older and b) more likely to be employed in the sciences than racialized faculty.

And yet, either through malice or ignorance, the conclusion your authors chose to draw from this methodological atrocity was not that female and racialized scholars who receive CRCs are a) younger and b) less likely to be in hard sciences than their white male counterparts, but rather that they were weaker scholars. This is not just gutter social science: it is a drive-by smear. Some people would call it clearly racist and sexist. You can count me among them.

It is truly amazing to me that a think-tank of MLI's reputation would consider publishing research this bad. At a minimum, MLI needs to i) withdraw the paper, ii) very seriously consider its system of research quality-control and iii) issue an apology to the female and racialized scholars of the country.

Yours, Alex