

CANADA - INCLUSIVE DISTANCE EDUCATION: Experiences of Four Canadian Women

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ABSTRACT

Women's participation in higher education in Canada has changed over the past two decades and no longer is the gender gap in university attainment in favour of men. Today young women are graduating from university in higher numbers than are men. Even those women who, for one reason or other, are unable to attend traditional universities are also choosing to participate in higher education. Women not only make up the majority of university graduates they also make up the majority of distance education users. Online and distance education enables many adult women, particularly those who assume multiple roles as mothers, professionals, caregivers and academics, to continue their formal learning. In this paper, framed within the context of feminism, we share with you the stories of four ambitious and successful professional Canadian women studying at a leading Canadian online university.

A review of the literature is also conducted, largely from a US and Canadian view. Canada proves to be a country that values the complexity of the multiple roles that women assume daily and inclusively supports women's choice to pursue post-secondary education or graduate work. We examine the organization of tertiary education in Canada, consider the vast geography of one of the most richly diverse countries in the world, and factors that govern both a woman's decision to seek higher education and; assist in learner satisfaction and retention rates for women in tertiary education. Four experiences of graduate women confirm that Canada's inclusive approach creates satisfied life-long learners.

Keywords: Women and higher education, online and distance education, Canada.