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DESIGNING AND VALIDATING A COMPREHENSIVE INSTITUTION-WIDE DEI NEEDS ASSESSMENT

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ABSTRACT

Aim/Purpose	Institutions with a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) must evaluate their praxes for equity, recognizing that campuses must be inclusive communities that celebrate diversity. Further, teaching and learning experiences should provide mirrors, windows, and doors, have cultural validity, afford multiple mechanisms for student success, be centered around the assets of students, build knowledge, extend perspectives, and foster empathy.
Background	A state university system, located in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States, has a strategic plan that prioritizes diversity, equity, and inclusion with goals that include the conduct of research on DEI, promoting best practices to enhance inclusion and endorse equity, and nurturing DEI education that encourages students to be informed and engaged citizens and social change agents in our democracy. A minority-serving institution located in this system has also prioritized justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI) with activities that include evaluating and assessing current programming and services; introducing a JEDI institutional learning goal and supporting general education requirement; using surveys to measure faculty, student, and staff perceptions; and exploring culturally responsive practices throughout teaching and learning. Accordingly, in 2024, a quality improvement project was proposed that involves the development, delivery, and reporting of a comprehensive JEDI needs assessment of the community using a mixed methods approach.

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Methodology	This paper outlines the process by which a mid-Atlantic HBCU has engaged in a comprehensive JEDI needs assessment. More specifically, thirteen specific steps are discussed: 1. Identification of goals 2. Establishment of research questions 3. Review of literature and existing tools 4. Consultation with experts 5. Identification of Methodology 6. Preparation of draft instruments 7. Check of readability and face validity 8. Expert panel review 9. Institutional Review Board review and approval 10. Pilot study 11. Distribution and data collection 12. Analysis and reporting of findings 13. Internal validity testing and use of results
Contribution	The instruments prepared as a result of this endeavor are shared in this paper and are available for adoption and customization with approval and attribution.
Findings	The surveys were closed in December of 2024. Internal validity testing was conducted via the application of Cronbach's alpha. The Cronbach's alpha analysis results indicated high internal consistency and reliability.
Recommendations for Researchers	It is hoped that by sharing processes and instrumentation, more institutions will decide to engage in similar comprehensive climate studies.
Impact on Society	It is the goal of the authors that this paper contributes to the body of literature on DEI in higher education.
Future Research	The survey results will be reported and included in a future paper, and the information gathered will be used to inform qualitative assessment measures.
Keywords	DEI, JEDI, diversity, equity and inclusion, culturally responsive teaching, CRT, HBCU, inclusion, intersectional theory, decolonization, inclusive education, critical pedagogy

INTRODUCTION

As the world becomes increasingly more diverse, it is crucial that we identify and address disparities on our campuses and use diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives to challenge biases, misconceptions, and barriers; encourage critical thinking; help students develop a compassionate global orientation that recognizes and respects people of varied backgrounds; expand opportunities; and strengthen our campuses. While more students than ever have access to higher education, many students find themselves immersed in schools that continue to maintain oppressive systems like racism, sexism, transphobia, and ableism within their institutional culture and classrooms. The result is that minoritized students often feel alienated, tokenized, and misrepresented in environments that claim to champion diversity but fail to do so in practice (Buzzetto-Hollywood, 2023).

JEDI stands for justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion, and represents an expansion of DEI serving as a framework for practices that promote the fair treatment and full participation of all people. In contrast, justice in higher education means acknowledging and dismantling barriers to resources and opportunities so that all community members feel safe and secure to succeed (Searle Center, 2024). Equity refers to fairness in treatment and opportunities (McKinsey & Company, 2022). Diversity re-

fers to the representation of people from many communities, identities, races, ethnicities, backgrounds, abilities, cultures, lifestyles, and beliefs, including those who may be historically excluded or underrepresented (Arsel et al., 2022). Inclusion refers to the degree to which all members of a community are recognized and able to use their talents (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2023).

DEI is currently a subject of heated debate and tremendous vitriol in the United States, which has created unprecedented stress across higher education and increased friction between conservative factions within the U.S. and most institutions of higher education. Many campus DEI offices have been shuttered and programs canceled, resulting in employees leading DEI efforts and providing resources to students experiencing layoffs or job reassignments. In January 2025, an executive order signed by President Trump declared that DEI policies and programs adopted by colleges, universities, and others can violate federal civil rights laws and directs federal agencies to “combat illegal private sector DEI preferences, mandates, policies, and activities.” This action was followed by the Department of Education’s Dear Colleague Letter (DCL). The Dear Colleague Letter explains that facially neutral programs, such as the elimination of standardized testing requirements when done so as to increase racial diversity, would prohibit discrimination. Further, the DCL states that institutions may not use “personal essays, writing samples, participation in extracurriculars, or other cues” to determine a student’s affiliation with a historically marginalized group to favor that student. Finally, the DCL explains that DEI programs that “stigmatize” students based on group affiliation are a form of discrimination that “deny students the ability to participate fully in the life of a school.” Such stigmatizing programs could include “DEI programs, for example, [that] frequently preference certain racial groups and teach students that certain racial groups bear unique moral burdens that others do not” (Trainor, 2025).

To date, over 50 universities are under investigation as part of the Trump Administration’s anti-DEI crackdown, with several seeing cuts in funding. Conyers and Wright Fields (2025) propose that “anti-CRT and anti-DEI policies represent an administrative response to undermine and paralyze organizational DEI efforts, thereby maintaining existing power structures and inhibiting progress toward equity and inclusion.” Further, Vissing (2025) asserts that because DEI is supported and attacked for promoting what is considered liberal ideologies focused on promoting human rights through understanding of their current and historical roots, attacks on DEI represent an attack on human rights, which elevates the discourse beyond that of a pedagogical debate. Finally, McGowan et al. (2025) explain that the current challenge lies not only in defending DEI efforts but also in reimagining them so as to maintain efficacy and resilience during these ‘politically volatile times.’

This paper reviews the history and evolution of DEI in higher education in the United States, discusses culturally responsive teaching and campus climate studies, recognizes the major theories that relate to DEI, addresses the role of HBCUs (Historically Black Colleges and Universities) in DEI, introduce a comprehensive JEDI needs assessment study at a mid-Atlantic HBCU, and avail the instruments prepared to conduct the aforementioned study. The goal of the authors is for this paper to contribute to the literature by encouraging other institutions to engage in similar DEI climate studies. The instruments included in this paper can be adopted and used upon the expressed consent of the authors and with full attribution.

LITERATURE REVIEW

DEI, A GLOBAL CONCERN

DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) initiatives, while a topic of great focus and discussion in the United States, are nonetheless a global priority, but interest, focus, and implementation vary significantly across cultures and regions, with some areas prioritizing gender equity while others address issues like caste, religion, and socioeconomic backgrounds (Brin, 2022; WERC Staff, 2024). For example, the World Economic Forum, which has published annually the Global Gender Gap report since 2006, reports slow but steady progress in Latin America and the Caribbean when it comes to closing

the gender parity gap (World Economic Forum, 2023). Meanwhile, the EY European DEI Index, a survey of 1,800 individuals across nine European countries, found that just 7% of organizations are “concretely and genuinely” building a diverse and inclusive culture inside their organizations, with many failing to take adequate measures to improve cultural diversity, diversify leadership, embrace the disability community, or take action on LGBTQIA+ diversity (EY Global, 2024).

When it comes to education, all countries face issues of educational equity. Ainscow (2020), who conducted a comprehensive review of the literature, highlighted the major challenges facing education systems around the world as they seek to make education more equitable and inclusive, including funding, special needs programs, and enforcement.

Focusing on developing intercultural competence, social responsibility, and critical thinking among students, Karikari (2025) examined the role of diversity and inclusion (D&I) initiatives in fostering global citizenship in West African institutions of higher education. Karikari established global citizenship as the framework for preparing students to address complex global challenges. While the D&I initiatives positively influenced students’ intercultural understanding and sense of civic duty, limited funding, irregular policy implementation, and cultural resistance were hindrances.

Sánchez-Gómez et al. (2024) conducted a study in Latin America and the Caribbean that investigated how to promote gender equality in higher education, specifically the significant challenges engineering education presents. The study concluded there was a critical need for teacher training in DEI within the context of STEM education in Latin America and the Caribbean. Faculty also expressed a strong desire to learn “how DEI intersects with other minority groups, such as Black communities, natives, Hispanics in the United States, and LGBTQIA+.”

In 2023, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), whose goal is to promote worldwide economic and social well-being, published *Equity and Inclusion in Education: Finding Strength through Diversity*. This report examines five key policy areas: governance, resourcing, capacity building, school-level interventions, and monitoring and evaluation (OECD, 2023).

- Education systems need to develop policy frameworks that link key areas for equity and inclusion, including curricula design, teaching practices, teaching staff capacity building, data collection, and monitoring of student outcomes. Additionally, fostering student well-being, achievement, and emphasizing the role of schools in the development of inclusive environments is important.
- Education systems should leverage both main allocation mechanisms and targeted distributions of resources to support all students. They should also be designed with the explicit goals of fostering equity and inclusion in education.
- Incorporate diversity, equity, and inclusion within initial teacher education and continuous professional learning throughout the teaching life course to address the diverse needs of students
- Promoting equity and inclusion through school-level interventions.
- Monitoring and evaluating equity and inclusion in education.

While DEI is certainly a global topic, there is no country where it is a topic of greater contention and debate than the United States. Accordingly, this literature review is purposefully framed to contextualize the DEI crisis that is currently happening in the United States and is organized as follows: a history of segregation and desegregation in the United States; benefits of JEDI; culturally responsive teaching; campus climate studies; and theories related to DEI; and the role of HBCUs in furthering DEI and culturally responsive teaching practices.

HISTORY OF SEGREGATION, DESEGREGATION, AND ORIGINS OF DEI IN UNITED STATES HIGHER EDUCATION

The United States has a legacy of segregation in education, although they are not the only nation. For example, both South Africa's apartheid system and the United States' Jim Crow laws enforced racial segregation, impacting education, housing, and other aspects of life, with apartheid creating a legal system of racial separation and Jim Crow laws institutionalizing segregation through state and local laws (Ocampo, 2004).

In the U.S. following the Civil War, public support for higher education for Black students was reflected in the enactment of the Second Morrill Act in 1890, which required racially segregated public higher education systems to provide a land-grant institution for Black students whenever a land-grant institution was established that restricted access to just white students. Passage of the Second Morrill Act resulted in the creation or redesignation of 16 land-grant Black serving institutions, all of which are now counted among our nation's Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).

The U.S. Supreme Court's 1896 decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* further and formally established a "separate but equal" doctrine in public education validating segregation. It was not until 1954 that segregation was invalidated with the Supreme Court's landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, which granted African Americans the formal right to study alongside their white peers in primary and secondary schools (Office for Civil Rights, 1991).

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was another landmark piece of legislation that outlawed discrimination in the United States based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. The Civil Rights Act served as a catalyst for seismic change in higher education, increasing access, admission, and enrollment among students from historically marginalized backgrounds. It encouraged institutions to develop programs and policies in compliance with the legislation so as to make institutions more equitable, inclusive, and diverse. According to the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education (NADOHE, 2024a), "The advancements in diversity, equity, and inclusion made possible by the act have not only enriched the academic experience for all students but have also contributed to the cultivation of a more diverse and inclusive society."

Despite the obvious merits of the Civil Rights Act, it was not warmly received by all academic institutions. Accordingly, activists were pressed and successfully sued the federal government for failing to enforce the integration plans required of colleges under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act. The result of this caused Universities in 10 states to enter into a consent decree, requiring them to increase the number of Black students on campus or risk losing federal funding, an action that resulted in the number of minority students at predominantly white institutions increasing modestly throughout the 1970s (Charles, 2023).

Concurrently, further progress occurred with the 1972 passage of Title IX legislation which was designed to eliminate gender-based discrimination in educational institutions that received federal funding. Title IX prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex, which includes requirements for institutions to prevent and address sexual assault and harassment on campus. Title IX also mandates fair treatment in admissions, course offerings, and financial aid. This watershed legislation allowed women to gain access to fields of study that were historically dominated by men and set the tone for broader cultural shifts that would occur in time. The origins of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in higher education are often traced back to student activism that occurred during this time, whereas one in five student protests demanded an end to racial discrimination on campuses, which resulted in the creation of African American studies departments with the first founded at San Francisco State College in 1968 (University of Michigan, 2021).

The 1990s marked a significant shift in DEI programs as they progressed from simply focusing on racial and gender issues to being inclusive of a broader spectrum of diversity. During that time, institutions of higher education began to appoint diversity officers to oversee compliance with the Civil

Rights Act and Title IX as well as address the needs of various identity groups, including ethnic, religious, and LGBTQIA+ communities (Charles, 2023). The National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education (NADOHE) was formed in 2006 and is a membership organization comprised of higher education diversity officers, which exists to lead the national and international conversation on diversity, equity, and inclusion in postsecondary education. Its goal is to investigate, influence, inform, and transform institutions of higher education to adopt and embrace inclusive practices (NADOHE, 2024b).

DEI efforts have grown in popularity since 2010, becoming a strategic imperative in 2020 when social and political movements such as #MeToo, #BlackLivesMatter, and #StopAAPIHate raised the public consciousness about the need for a greater commitment to social justice (Golden, 2024). These increased efforts have resulted in a backlash from conservative groups in America, marked by the U.S. Supreme Court vote to ban affirmative action, to severely limit LGBTQIA+ protections, and to progress with States such as Florida, Texas, and Utah among the handful whose legislatures have approved bans on DEI efforts in higher education and public service organizations (Asare, 2023). More recently, the United States Department of Education, under the orders of President Trump, ordered institutions to cease DEI activities or face possible loss in funding (Trainor, 2025).

BENEFITS OF JUSTICE, EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION (JEDI)

Diversifying organizations can lead to a number of beneficial outcomes, including increased productivity, performance, and commitment (Cho & Mor Barak, 2008; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2009; Sabharwal, 2014; Sabharwal et al., 2018). Studies find that more inclusive environments are critical predictors of higher productivity and organizational commitment (Cho & Mor Barak, 2008; Sabharwal, 2014; Sabharwal et al., 2018) that improve decision quality and performance (Pitts & Towne, 2015; Sabharwal et al., 2018). More specifically, the research has found that JEDI efforts are positively associated with psychological safety and authenticity, as well as engagement and satisfaction (Fletcher & Marvell, 2023; Huffman et al., 2021; Hur, 2020; Perales et al., 2022).

In higher education, JEDI embedded within a campus culture and content built within a curriculum has been explained in the literature to help engender solidarity between staff and students with mutually responsible citizenship values (Baker et al., 2006); expand perspectives (Kayyali, 2022) and raise consciousness (Hooks, 2000); aid students in the development of an awareness of their responsibility to support JEDI initiatives that they can take with them when they graduate (Keshtiban et al., 2023); create spaces, materials and programs that are welcoming and facilitate wellness (Lierman et al., 2023); increase access to opportunities by students from historically marginalized groups (Kayyali, 2022); and facilitate transformative interventions (Tzanakou & Pearce, 2019). Further, these efforts are found to be particularly effective for historically marginalized students (Bhopal, 2018; Keshtiban et al., 2023).

The Student Experience Project (2022) engaged 295 faculty to utilize DEI practices in their classrooms in order to cultivate belonging and inclusion. The project collected feedback from 10,000 students each semester about their experiences, finding a 10.5% overall increase in students reporting positive experiences. Further, efforts were most strongly associated with improved experiences for Black, Latina, and Native American women, who reported an overall positive experience increased by approximately 25% over the course of the project. Finally, the rate of students earning Ds, Fs, or withdrawing decreased by 26%.

According to Insight Into Academia (2019), DEI initiatives account for less than one percent of institutional spending and yet result in outsized benefits for institutions in terms of student recruitment and retention, faculty hiring and retention, fostering a positive climate for learning and working, and workforce preparation for graduates. This sentiment has been echoed by the Institute for Higher Education Policy (2024), which highlights the role of student experience and belonging in college student success.

Han et al. (2017), who looked at 1,400 first-years at a diverse research university, found that students who scored highly on belonging measures had among the highest retention rates, and a study of first-year Latinx students at a large public university found that participation in a DEI program resulted in significant improvement in GPA that reduced the GPA gap between White and Latinx students.

Moon et al. (2024) explored the impact of integrating learner-informed DEI training, discussion, and self-reflection prompts into a peer-reviewed clinical documentation activity for pharmacy residents. The research found that the project resulted in increased self-awareness and knowledge and measurable changes in patient care documentation.

A study of 8,616 undergraduates at 49 colleges and universities found that rare or moderate diversity interactions were associated with no growth in leadership skills, psychological well-being, and intellectual engagement; however, frequent diversity interactions were strongly associated with considerable growth. No differences were found when students' race and institutional characteristics were considered (Bowman, 2013). Similarly, research by Milem et al. (2005) found that DEI initiatives contribute significantly to enhanced educational outcomes for students from various backgrounds.

Keshtiban et al. (2023) concluded that collaborative extracurricular JEDI projects can galvanize micro-activism between staff and student partners towards JEDI causes. They further explain that JEDI efforts should be long-term and embedded consistently in institutional practices and cultural discourse through all aspects of daily work.

Grossman et al. (2023) studied graduating seniors' perceptions of DEI at a large state university. While many participants were satisfied with the number of DEI activities, criticisms noted a lack of diversity among students and faculty, as well as a lack of representation in examples in classes. The authors recommended future research include students from historically excluded backgrounds to see if their perceptions differ.

First-year bioengineering students at the University of Pennsylvania were part of a pilot program of offering an introductory foundation course on JEDI-related scholarship to provide the students with concrete knowledge, historical context, and analytical skills to recognize and address JEDI issues, challenges, and opportunities as they relate to bioengineering practice. The students participated in meaningful dialogue about topics, including the intersection between bioengineering practice and social justice. The instructors demonstrated to the students the importance of JEDI, the need for productive dialogue, and the design of equitable and just biotechnologies. Based on the student feedback, the fall 2020 pilot program to introduce engineering ethics material, including JEDI-focused modules, was considered informative and well-received (Shields, 2023).

Finally, Walton and Cohen (2011) examined the impact of an intervention designed to improve first-year students' sense of belonging in college by framing social adversity as a common and temporary experience. According to their findings, Black students saw significant academic and health benefits over three years following participation.

The body of literature is clear that DEI initiatives result in positive benefits to educational institutions, with many asserting that DEI is not a one-time initiative but rather something that should be embedded into meaningful and ongoing work that transforms campus culture by eliminating inequitable systems and structures where a commitment to JEDI should be part of the college's strategic plan (Kezar et al., 2023; Rankin & Reason, 2005).

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING

Culturally responsive teaching is commonly associated with DEI. Culturally responsive teaching is one strategy that is recognized for helping educational institutions work towards decolonization, indigeneity, and interculturalism (Chetty, 2018; King, 2006; Owens & Njoku, 2021). Culturally responsive teaching is also known as culturally compatible, culturally appropriate, culturally congruent, and/or culturally relevant teaching (Irvine & Armento, 2001). Gay (2000) describes culturally responsive

teaching as multidimensional, empowering, and transformative. She refers to culturally relevant pedagogy as the use of “... cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frame of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning more relevant. It teaches to and through the strengths of the students. It is culturally validating and affirming” (p. 29). Gay (2002) further explains that CRT is about “using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively” (p. 106). According to Lynch (2011) culturally responsive instruction is “a student-centered approach to teaching in which the students’ unique cultural strengths are identified and nurtured to promote student achievement and a sense of well-being about the student’s cultural place in the world.” Further, Lynch (2011) expounds that CRT is a set of practices intended to extend and incorporate students’ cultural and linguistic backgrounds in the teaching and learning process.

Byrd (2016) explains that CRT empowers learners because “culturally relevant teachers raise students’ critical consciousness. They encourage students to identify problems in their communities and to seek ways to address them. They acknowledge societal oppression and encourage students to notice how those dynamics are evident in their everyday lives” (p. 2). Byrd further explains that CRT practices align with and complement constructivist pedagogical ideas of teaching in a way that is student-centered, authentic, active, and reflective (Byrd, 2016; Yilmaz, 2008).

There are many benefits associated with culturally responsive teaching, including increased expectations (Hollins & Oliver, 1999; Nieto, 2010; Stemberge, 2019); the ability to better address the needs of learners (Buzzetto-Hollywood, 2023); increases in student motivation (Bui & Fagan, 2013; Ensign, 2003); increased student engagement (Au & Kawakami, 1994; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995); learner empowerment (Byrd, 2016); enhanced cultural competencies (Banks & Banks, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Martell, 2013); positive student performance (Boggs et al., 1985; Cabrera et al., 2012; Christianakis, 2011; Ensign, 2003; Gutstein, 2003; Milner, 2011); improved learners’ self-efficacy or the positive perception students have in themselves as capable students (Christian, 2017; Gay, 2000; Hubert, 2013); remedying disparities and barriers in classrooms (Buzzetto-Hollywood, 2023; Gay, 2000); and learners encouraged to recognize, understand, and critique current and social inequalities (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

CAMPUS CLIMATE STUDIES

How do institutions know whether they need to increase DEI programs, whether their curriculum is culturally responsive, and which campus community members may not be experiencing a sense of belonging and inclusion? The answer is campus climate studies, whereas many colleges and universities have used campus climate studies to gain a better understanding of diversity and multiculturalism issues (Hart & Fellabaum, 2008; Hurtado et al., 1998). Peterson and Spencer (1990) defined campus climate as the current perceptions, attitudes, and expectations that define the institution and understanding of campus climate and culture

Kolluru et al. (2023) reviewed best practices for DEI committees at United States Colleges of Pharmacy and acknowledged that the diversity among students and faculty in Colleges of Pharmacy did not represent the communities being served. The researchers recommended that DEI committees play an important role “in ensuring colleges of pharmacy prioritize DEI principles and values in their strategic goals, operations, and outreach.” They concluded that DEI best practices should be an integral part of the university, supported at all levels, and participated in by the entire university.

Rowan University, a large Carnegie R2 research university, conducted an equity audit to analyze patterns of inequity in the experiences and outcomes of different groups using academic library resources and services (Lierman et al., 2023). After discovering there were inequitable experiences for specific demographic groups. Immediate action was taken to increase the promotion of library services and resources, especially to marginalized communities, to services for LGBTQ+ and disabled users, and to create spaces and offer materials that facilitate wellness and stress relief for users (Lierman et al., 2023).

Schuff Zimmerman et al. (2024) reported the University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC) College of Pharmacy comprehensive inventory and evaluation of JEDI activities. A 148-item wish list of ideal components in a JEDI inventory was developed, containing 32 components for Justice, 41 components for Equity, 30 components for Diversity, and 45 components for Inclusion, folded into 5 assessment groupings. The authors took a participatory approach so that all people involved had opportunities to cultivate growth individually, as well as help to advance the structures, processes, and resources of the college. While many of the components were subjective and could not be quantified, the survey produced much useful information for analysis and application towards making JEDI improvements within the college.

The National Assessment of Collegiate Campus Climates (NACCC) is a peer-reviewed quantitative survey that has been purchased and administered at over 160 colleges since 2019. Overall, the results have concluded that DEI efforts on American college campuses need to increase with significantly more, not fewer, DEI professionals needed to help fix racial problems at United States colleges and universities.

JEDI RELATED THEORIES

Most educational movements are influenced by theories. The theories that align most with JEDI/DEI are social cognitive theory, critical theory, multiple minority stress theory, intersectional theory, and psychological safety theory.

Social Cognitive Theory, introduced by Albert Bandura, explains that people use perceptual shortcuts and categorization in order to simplify, process, and compartmentalize information, and when considering people, these are often done by the most visible characteristics such as race, sex, age, and name (Nickerson, 2024). Social identity theory (SIT) provides a framework for explaining intergroup behavior and intergroup communication based on the values that humans place on group affiliations and their desire to view groups in which they hold membership in a positive light, which can result in intergroup prejudice and conflict manifested as in-group and out-group bias (Harwood, 2020). Introduced by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the 1970s, Social Identity Theory explains that individuals derive a portion of their self-concept from their membership in social groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The research on SIT suggests that we see our groups as heterogeneous, with values and ideals similar to our own, and our groups as homogeneous (Goldberg, 2005). Similarity-attraction theory is a related concept that posits that individuals are attracted to others with whom they share attitude similarity (Byrne, 1971), with studies finding that individuals are more drawn to institutions whose recruitment literature includes statements and images that reflect their own identity group. More specifically, research by Liu et al. (2023) found that exposure to historically underrepresented groups helps the majority of students see certain underrepresented populations as peers and capable leaders, while for underrepresented populations, it helps to increase learners' self-efficacy.

Paulo Freire's work, particularly his concept of "critical pedagogy" and "conscientização" or awareness, significantly informs research and practice in multicultural education, emphasizing the importance of dialogue, social justice, and empowering marginalized communities to critically examine and transform oppressive systems. According to Akkari and Mesquida (2008), Freire's legacy varies based on cultural context. In Europe, he is known for adult literacy education, whereas in the Americas, his concepts are used to address educational inequalities. Critical pedagogy posits that issues of social justice and democracy are not distinct from acts of teaching and learning and that education serves as a tool for social transformation, encouraging critical thinking and dialogue to challenge oppressive structures and empower individuals to become active agents of change (Giroux, 2007).

Developed by Meyer in 2003, multiple minority stress theory is a concept that describes the compounding stress that people experience when they belong to multiple marginalized groups and face discrimination and prejudice on the basis of more than one identity. It was introduced to help build an understanding of the social, psychological, and structural factors accounting for mental health inequalities facing sexual minority populations (Meyer, 2003). Similarly, the intersectional theory asserts

that people are often disadvantaged by multiple sources of oppression, such as their race, class, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, and other identity markers, “creating a complex convergence of oppression” that influences experiences, perceptions, and beliefs (YW Boston Blog, 2017). The term intersectionality was first coined in the late 1980s by Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw of Columbia University to describe how race, class, gender, and other individual characteristics “intersect” with one another and overlap (Crenshaw, 1989).

Psychological safety theory focuses on the importance of creating an environment where members of organizations feel safe to express their opinions and take risks without fear of punishment or humiliation in order to increase positive outcomes (Newman et al., 2017). In the world of JEDI and DEI it is recognized that psychological safety is a foundation for open discussions about DEI issues. More specifically, research by Bresman and Edmonson (2022) found that psychological safety appears to help organizations realize the potential of diversity for both performance and well-being.

Critical theory, multiple minority stress theory, intersectional theory, and psychological safety theory wield tremendous influence at American Historically Black Colleges and Universities, better known as HBCUs, which are minority-serving institutions primarily formed in response to the Second Morrill Act in 1890, which required states to admit Black Americans to their existing institutions or provide funding for new institutions. Today, there are 99 HBCUs in existence, with the majority located in the mid-Atlantic and southeastern United States (Hatfield & Anderson, 2024).

HBCUs, JEDI, AND CRT

Historically Black Colleges and Universities were almost exclusively founded before the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to provide educational opportunities that might otherwise be denied to historically marginalized populations (Buzzetto-Hollywood & Mitchell, 2019; Schexnider, 2017). Accordingly, HBCUs were forged from the fire of colonization and racialization and have as their missions to engage and uplift students who are often from underserved groups (Lomax, 2006; Seymour & Ray, 2015).

It is impossible to deny the success of American HBCUs. While they comprise less than 3% of America’s colleges and universities, they produce almost 20% of all African American graduates and 25% of African American graduates in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (Buzzetto-Hollywood, 2023). Further, 50% of public-school teachers of African-American descent and 70% of Black doctors and dentists attended HBCUs (United Negro College Fund, 2015). As institutions of higher education, HBCUs are found to provide deeply supportive educational environments that are unparalleled elsewhere in the United States, with Black graduates of HBCUs more likely than Black graduates of majority-serving institutions to be thriving – a phenomenon largely attributed to their highly supportive student-centered culture (Buzzetto-Hollywood & Mitchell, 2019; Seymour & Ray, 2015). In fact, a 2015 Gallup poll (Seymour & Ray, 2015) found that graduates of HBCUs overwhelmingly cited supportive faculty and mentors as contributing to their success and, when compared to non-HBCU graduates, were 33% more likely to strongly agree that their professors cared about them and 23% more likely to have felt supported.

While the challenges that existed during Reconstruction and Jim Crow no longer persist in the United States, educational inequities, underfunding of minority-serving schools, and the legacy of racialization, colonization, and otherization continue to impact higher education (Buzzetto-Hollywood, 2023; Hatfield & Anderson, 2024). Accordingly, American HBCUs are at the forefront of JEDI and culturally responsive teaching (Buzzetto-Hollywood, 2023). A research study that examined culturally responsive practices in higher education found that despite decades of underfunding, being perceived by others with a deficit mindset, and a legacy of marginalization, HBCUs are unmatched when it comes to implementing culturally sustaining practices in a comprehensive manner (Brock & Slater, 2021, p.32) explaining “HBCUs channeled the effects of that exclusion in constructive directions by focusing on inclusivity and by specializing in programs, such as STEM, in which white institutions

struggle to retain Black students.” The authors further pointed out that HBCUs have cultivated “humanistic” environments for student learning where students recognize that they are valued. The authors specifically identified the sense of belonging felt by students, the meaningful relationships between faculty and students, and the commitment to equity.

Recognizing the important role that HBCUs play in the American education system and their history and missions, the United Negro College Fund produced a report titled *Culturally Relevant Practice: Implementation Among Historically Black Colleges and Universities*. In this report, four principles for grounding culturally responsive teaching at HBCUs were presented, which included: (1) leveraging lived experience to mine meaning, (2) assessing knowledge claims through dialogue, (3) caring as an act of educational responsibility, and (4) centering cultural experience as an act of resistance in research (Owens & Njoku, 2021).

While Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) is becoming increasingly better known in higher education, HBCUs (Historically Black Colleges and Universities) are considered a model for this work. Herr-Perrin (2021) explains that this is because “HBCUs have been JEDI masters existing in plain sight all along.” Simply put, HBCUs serve significant populations of low-income students of color, the majority of whom are the first generation in their families to attend college, and HBCUs are known for accepting students at far higher rates than traditionally white institutions (TWIs) from more challenging environments and who are more likely to have been subjected to a deficit mindset and colonizing treatment (Buzzetto-Hollywood, 2023; King, 2006).

Herr-Perrin (2021) points out that despite being designed as ‘sanctuaries of inclusivity in the midst of an otherwise hostile society,’ HBCUs are not flawless JEDI models and are also impacted by such issues as discrimination towards LGBTQIA+ students and other threats to inclusion and belonging which should be addressed. Nevertheless, she explains that HBCU graduates exhibited an unparalleled sense of belonging, which most serving institutions can learn from. Further, this framing to study, share practices, and make continuous improvements inspired the comprehensive institution-wide JEDI needs assessment at an American HBCU that is being discussed in this paper and whose processes will be outlined in the following methodology section.

METHODOLOGY: DESIGNING A COMPREHENSIVE INSTITUTION-WIDE JEDI NEEDS ASSESSMENT

BACKGROUND

Established in 1886, the University of Maryland Eastern Shore (UMES) is a Historically Black, 1890 land grant institution. It is a member of the University System of the State of Maryland and primarily serves first-generation, low-income, and minority learners. The student population is approximately 3,100 as of the fall of 2024, with an 88% minority student enrollment. UMES was ranked in the top twenty (14th) among Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in 2024 and in the top 10 (6th) among public HBCUs according to U.S. News and World Reports (University of Maryland Eastern Shore, 2022). The acceptance rate for applying students is approximately 61%, with the majority of students coming from the mid-Atlantic region, more specifically, the Baltimore and Washington D.C. urban centers. UMES has a long history of providing academic programs and services for ethnically and culturally diverse students and, toward that end, offers programs and assistance that attract, serve, retain, and graduate many first-generation college students (Buzzetto-Hollywood et al., 2024; Buzzetto-Hollywood & Mitchell, 2019).

The University System of Maryland’s strategic plan has goals related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. These include: “Goal 4.9: [Develop a] research initiative on diversity, equity, and justice ... that includes an examination of the role that race, identity, and systemic racism may play in those areas; Goal 5.2: Seek out and promote best practices to enhance inclusion and promote equity; and Goal

5.4: Educate our students to be informed and engaged citizens and social change agents in our democracy” (University System of Maryland, 2021).

The University of Maryland Eastern Shore has five institutional priorities as outlined in the institution’s strategic plan: Priority 1 – Academic Excellence and Innovation; Priority 2 – Access, Affordability, and Achievement; Priority 3 – Workforce and Economic Development; Priority 4 – Research and Community Engagement; and Priority 5 – Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. Priority 5 (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) involves promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion in our policies, practices, and endeavors and instilling appreciation and support for fairness, open-mindedness, and service to others in our students. Each priority has a standing committee that includes faculty, staff, students, and administration, which generates reports and recommendations.

A consultant was contracted to conduct a self-study as part of the UMES application to the Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI) Grant Initiative, Driving Change. The goal of Driving Change is to “effect genuine and lasting culture change on research university campuses so that undergraduate students from all backgrounds, particularly those who belong to historically excluded groups, will excel in STEM and graduate from college well prepared to pursue advanced degrees and eventually assume leadership roles.” Through the self-study, HHMI encourages institutions to explore the strengths and challenges of their campuses to determine ‘where you are’ and ‘where you want to be’ as it relates to diversity and inclusion in STEM. While the ultimate purpose of the self-study was diversity, equity, and inclusion as they relate to supporting STEM programs, the scope of the study encompassed the climate for DEI efforts and for positive change as a whole. Qualitative interviews were conducted via Zoom and in person with 150 participants. The findings identified three important themes:

- *Leadership*: Knowledgeable and credible administrators who will communicate a shared and realistic vision with the UMES community while providing the necessary resources to achieve it.
- *Infrastructure*: Documented and adherence to policies and procedures.
- *Cultural identity*: Appreciation of the HBCU culture while being inclusive of others (UMES, 2022).

The report was one of the factors that resulted in the identification of strategies for supporting priority five, which include evaluating and assessing current programming and services; introducing a JEDI institutional learning goal and supporting general education requirements; using surveys to measure faculty, student, and staff perceptions; and exploring JEDI infusion and practices throughout teaching and learning. Accordingly, in 2024, a quality improvement project was proposed that involves the development, delivery, and reporting of a comprehensive DEI needs assessment of the UMES community using a mixed methods approach, which includes quantitative measures with support from follow-up qualitative focus groups.

IDENTIFICATION OF GOALS

The goals of the project under discussion are as follows:

- (1) Assess the current campus community culture in terms of JEDI
- (2) Identify obstacles and barriers to inclusion
- (3) Elicit meaningful suggestions from constituencies about how to better cultivate a culture of belonging
- (4) Evaluate classroom instruction for JEDI and culturally responsive teaching practices
- (5) Use findings to make informed recommendations

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

A series of research questions guided the design process that were identified by the UMES JEDI Committee.

- Do all community members experience a culture of belonging?
- Do all community members consider the campus inclusive?
- Do individuals from historically marginalized groups feel safe on campus?
- Are there adequate supports for all students to succeed?
- Is the UMES campus environment free from strain related to individual or group differences?
- Do faculty and staff differ in their perceptions of students?
- Do faculty exhibit culturally responsive teaching practices?

REVIEW LITERATURE AND TOOLS

A literature review was conducted that also included the collection and review of a number of JEDI/DEI reports and evaluation tools. Several themes emerged, including the importance of JEDI/DEI needs assessments and that, despite many articles pointing out that HBCUs are exemplars for inclusivity, relatively little research exists. Further, it was noted that many of the DEI studies in the literature do not focus on the teaching practices of faculty.

In terms of the research instruments examined, a number came from consulting companies commonly hired to engage in these types of assessments; some were self-developed by institutions of higher education, a couple were created by consortiums, and a series of questions (several of which were ultimately adopted) are part of a pilot initiative being conducted by the National Association Diversity Officers in Higher Education. It was determined during this process that budgetary limitations and a desire to have questions that covered classroom instruction necessitated the development rather than the adoption of a new instrument.

CONSULTATION WITH EXPERTS

A number of experts in DEI, as well as individuals representing various historically marginalized communities, were contacted and asked to provide guidance with respect to question and survey design. It was also during this process that the lead investigator submitted a proposal to the University System of Maryland Elkins Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Fellowship Program. While financially modest, these fellowships support a systematic investigation of teaching, learning, and/or other campus initiatives, with priority given to those in line with the USM strategic plan. In particular, projects examining some aspects of diversity, equity, and inclusion were especially encouraged. While several of the 10 projects awarded touched on services that support diverse learners, this was the only funded project that involved a JEDI needs assessment. Participation in the yearlong Elkins Cohort provided valuable input, guidance, and peer support, and it was especially valuable during the early stages of the project.

METHODOLOGY IDENTIFIED

During this early consultation process, it was also decided that a mixed-method approach should be taken that includes the creation of two surveys (one for faculty and staff and a separate survey for students) followed by the conduction of follow-up focus groups to gather additional, more in-depth information. Finally, this methodology identification stage helped inform the distribution process, including the marketing and promotion tactics that were to be utilized.

DRAFT INSTRUMENTS PREPARED

Questions for two draft surveys were created. The faculty and staff surveys were purposed to explore the campus climate with respect to JEDI; participant demographics, affiliations, and intersecting identities; engagement in JEDI activities; infusion of JEDI concepts into the teaching and learning process; and culturally responsive teaching strategies for teaching faculty; recommendations, and needs. The student survey was designed to explore the campus climate; participant demographics, affiliations, and intersecting identities; engagement in campus JEDI activities, resources, and services;

reflections on their courses; perspectives and experiences related to their work, study, and participation in the campus community; the identification of obstacles and barriers to inclusion; and recommendations, and needs. The draft questions were placed in the Survey Monkey system, and a variety of question types were explored. The draft survey included a combination of dichotomous, Likert-scaled, multiple response, ratio, short answer, and contingency questions. The questions fell into the following categories:

- Demographics
- Campus Climate
- Sense of Belonging
- Supports
- Experience with Discrimination
- Experience with Harassment
- Classroom Experiences (JEDI, Culturally Responsive Teaching, Academic Supports)
- Satisfaction with Resources and Multicultural Opportunities
- Training(s) Participants Would Like to See Offered
- Two Short Answer Questions “How do you feel that ##### can better cultivate a culture of inclusion and belonging? What specifically could ##### do to improve Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) on our campus?”

READABILITY AND FACE VALIDITY

The Flesch Kincaid Reading-Ease, and the Flesch–Kincaid Grade Level assessments are widely used formulas that evaluate how difficult a passage in English is to understand. The formulas use the same core measures (word length and sentence length) but have different weighting factors. The Flesch Kincaid tests were applied to ensure readability for the populations under consideration, including adults ages 18+ who have completed a high school level of education.

Next, a basic psychometric review of the survey was conducted by a group that included an assessment expert, an attorney, two subject matter experts, and a survey methodologist.

EXPERT PANEL REVIEW

Over the course of several months, an expert panel was formed. The panel included multiple subject matter experts; several individuals with experience conducting needs assessments of historically marginalized populations; faculty with expertise teaching DEI/JEDI; higher education diversity professionals; members of various Maryland commissions such as the Maryland Commission for LGBTQIA+ Affairs, Maryland Commission for Indian Affairs, Maryland Commission on Disabilities, etcetera; undergraduate and graduate students; individuals affiliated with multiple diverse communities; and higher education administrators. Over forty people were identified and sent a formal letter of invitation to participate in the expert panel, and in the end, 28 individuals agreed to participate. Overall, the panel was diverse in terms of age, ability status, race, religion, gender and gender identity, backgrounds, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status.

Expert panelists were required to agree to an informed consent statement and were provided with instructions. They were asked to review questions grouped topically and were provided prompts following each question group where they could provide feedback as they analyzed and assessed the quality of the question and survey design, response options, structure, and overall methodology to ensure the instrument effectively captured the intended data and avoided biases. Expert panelists were also prompted to provide feedback on improvements needed before the survey was administered to a larger group of respondents.

The panel review occurred over a six-week period, and once closed, the responses were exported and reviewed into an MS Excel spreadsheet. Each and every comment and suggestion were considered by

the co-investigators. Meetings were held to review and respond to the panel feedback, and revisions were made to the instruments and questions.

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD REVIEW AND APPROVAL

The revised instruments were submitted as part of the proposal to the institution's institutional review board, which examines research studies involving human subjects to ensure they adhere to ethical standards and adequately protect the rights and welfare of participants, typically by reviewing the research protocol, informed consent documents, and other relevant materials before the study can begin; essentially acting as a gatekeeper for ethical research practices. The IRB provided feedback, and revisions were made to both the instruments and the distribution process.

PILOT

Piloting a survey is the process of testing and refining a survey before its full launch. It's an important step in the research process that helps ensure the survey is working as intended and that it will collect accurate data. A small pilot was conducted with 24 individuals who completed the survey and then participated in focus groups where they reflected upon and provided feedback on the instruments. More specifically, participants were asked to analyze the questions and question flow, assess how well the survey will meet expectations, reflect upon the length of the questionnaire, consider instances where there may be confusion, etc. Response time was also examined and compared to what had been previously estimated by the Survey Monkey system. As a result of the pilot, some clarifying information was provided in the surveys, the estimated time to completion was adjusted, and the wording of a question was altered.

DISTRIBUTION

The student survey was launched first and occurred over three weeks in the Fall of 2024. The distribution included flyers with a URL and a QR code, a one-time mass email sent to all students at the university, and the dispersal of several hundred free promotional t-shirts. In total, 405 students completed the survey, representing a response rate of 15%.

For the faculty and staff survey, human resources provided a list of all current faculty and staff emails which were loaded into the Survey Monkey system, and the Email Invitation Collector was utilized. The Email Invitation Collector lets users send customized email invitations to surveys, send follow-up reminders or thank you emails, monitor email analytics, and track who responded. Accordingly, invitation emails were sent along with two reminder emails. A distribution limitation was identified; however, the faculty and staff surveys were being sent to many users' quarantine folders due to the university having recently switched from Gmail to Outlook. The university information technology department was contacted, and the quarantined emails were released; however, by the time this occurred, the semester was in its final days. When duplicate emails were removed from the list provided by human resources, a total of 737 individuals were sent emails, with 104 individuals completing the survey, representing a 14% response rate.

ANALYSIS, REPORTING, AND NEXT STEPS

The surveys were closed in December of 2024, and internal validity testing was conducted using Cronbach's alpha application. The Cronbach's alpha analysis indicated high internal consistency and reliability. Initial analyses were also conducted, and the results were included in a public report. Additional correlation analyses are being conducted presently, and a paper is being prepared that will address the research questions that guided this study. Additionally, themes worthy of further exploration are being identified, which will inform the focus group prompts with focus groups scheduled to be conducted in the 2025-2026 academic year.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Cronbach's alpha, also known as tau-equivalent reliability or coefficient alpha, is a reliability coefficient and a measure of the internal consistency of tests and measures. Cronbach's alpha is a way of assessing reliability by comparing the amount of shared variance, or covariance, among the items making up an instrument to the amount of overall variance. The idea is that if the instrument is reliable, there should be a great deal of covariance among the items relative to the variance. Cronbach's alpha considers the correlation between the answers in a questionnaire and can take values between 0 and 1. The higher the average correlation between items, the greater the internal consistency of a test, whereas:

- *Excellent*: A Cronbach's alpha of 0.9 or higher is considered excellent
- *Good*: A Cronbach's alpha between 0.8 and 0.9 is considered good
- *Acceptable*: A Cronbach's alpha between 0.7 and 0.8 is considered acceptable
- *Questionable*: A Cronbach's alpha between 0.6 and 0.7 is considered questionable
- *Poor*: A Cronbach's alpha between 0.5 and 0.6 is considered poor
- *Unacceptable*: A Cronbach's alpha below 0.5 is considered unacceptable

The student survey instrument comprised eight distinct non-demographic question sets, including satisfaction with the campus climate, reflections on the campus experience, belonging, support, representation, culturally responsive teaching, adequacy of resources, and interactions. The question sets ranged in composition from two questions to eight questions, and Cronbach's alpha was examined using the Statistical Program for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 29. The standard Cronbach's alpha, which calculates reliability based on the average shared variance between items, and the Cronbach's alpha based on standardized items, which calculates reliability based on the average inter-item correlation, were conducted. The analyses found all question sets to be in either the acceptable, good, or excellent range, with results presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Cronbach's alpha for student question sets

Question set	Cronbach's alpha	Cronbach's alpha based on standardized items	Number of items
Satisfaction with Campus Climate	.714	.718	2
Reflections on the Campus Experience	.842	.845	6
Belonging	.781	.782	3
Supports	.937	.938	8
Representation	.732	.733	2
Culturally Responsive Teaching	.946	.946	8
Adequacy of Resources	.928	.928	5
Interactions	.785	.797	3

The faculty and staff survey instrument comprised seven distinct non-demographic question sets, including satisfaction with the campus climate, reflections on the campus experience, belonging, support, representation, culturally responsive teaching practices (for faculty respondents only using skip logic), and opportunities and encouragement. The question sets ranged in composition from 2-16 questions, and Cronbach's alpha was examined using SPSS version 29. The standard Cronbach's alpha, which calculates reliability based on the average shared variance between items, and the Cronbach's alpha based on standardized items, which calculates reliability based on the average inter-item correlation, were conducted. The analyses found all question sets to be in either the acceptable, good, or excellent range, with results presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Cronbach's alpha for faculty and staff question sets

Question set	Cronbach's alpha	Cronbach's alpha based on standardized items	Number of items
Satisfaction with Campus Climate	.787	.787	2
Reflections on the Campus Experience	.865	.861	7
Belonging	.802	.802	2
Supports	.937	.938	8
Representation	.745	.746	2
Culturally Responsive Teaching	.963	.965	16
Opportunities and Encouragement	.743	.747	2

When choosing an instrument or developing a new instrument to be used for a study, researchers have an obligation to consider the quality of the instrument and the relevance of the instruments under consideration in terms of how they relate to the research questions that will be explored (Shavelson & Towne, 2002). According to Taber (2013), quality in research design is understood in terms of such notions as validity (the extent to which an instrument measures what it claims to measure rather than something else) and reliability (the extent to which an instrument can be expected to give the same measured outcome when measurements are repeated). Cronbach's alpha is, simply put, the statistic most commonly used by researchers to demonstrate that tests and scales intended to measure attitudes and other affective constructs are valid, although they cannot be considered infallible (Taber, 2018). Nevertheless, the Cronbach's alpha scores achieved during this assessment provide a strong indication that the instruments under discussion are valid and reliable for conducting a JEDI climate assessment in institutions of higher education.

CONCLUSION

This paper has outlined how a mid-Atlantic HBCU engaged in a comprehensive JEDI needs assessment. Thirteen steps were discussed and are listed below and expressed in Figure 1.

1. Identification of goals
2. Establishment of research questions
3. Review of literature and existing tools
4. Consultation with experts
5. Identification of Methodology
6. Preparation of draft instruments
7. Check of readability and face validity
8. Expert panel review
9. Institutional Review Board review and approval
10. Pilot study
11. Distribution and data collection
12. Analysis and reporting of findings
13. Use of results and follow up



Figure 1. JEDI climate study steps

This paper reviewed the history and evolution DEI in higher education in the United States, discussed culturally responsive teaching and campus climate studies, identified the major theories that relate to DEI, addressed the role of HBCUs in DEI, and introduced a comprehensive DEI needs assessment study survey conducted at a mid-Atlantic HBCU.

The Appendix includes copies of the two instruments that were prepared and delivered in support of this assessment. They were administered in the fall of 2024, and preliminary analyses were conducted in SPSS. Cronbach's Alpha tests were performed, showing high internal consistency and reliability an indication that the instruments presented are valid and reliable for conducting a JEDI climate assessment in institutions of higher education.

Preliminary analyses have found that participants express that community members experience a culture of belonging, that the campus is inclusive, that the campus environment is free from strain related to individual or group differences, and that faculty engage in culturally responsive teaching practices. The initial survey results have been reported, and additional correlational analyses are currently being conducted. The full results and additional correlations will be included in a future paper, and the themes identified as being worthy of further exploration will inform the focus group prompts, with focus groups scheduled to be conducted in 2026.

It is the goal of the authors that this paper contributes to the body of literature on DEI in higher education. It is also hoped that by sharing processes and instrumentation free of charge, more institutions will decide to engage in similar comprehensive climate studies.

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APPENDIX

Student JEDI needs assessment instrument
Inclusivity
How inclusive would you rank the campus community
Satisfaction with Campus Climate
Thinking about your experience at UMES as a whole, including the academic/professional climate, social climate, and racial climate, what is your level of satisfaction with the overall climate of the university?
Overall, the campus environment is free from strain related to individual or group differences.
Reflections on the Campus Experience
I am satisfied with the campus experience and environment regarding diversity.
I am treated fairly on campus.
I regularly interact with people who are different than me at UMES.
If I experienced or observed an act of discrimination or harassment at UMES, I know who to contact to report the incident.
UMES senior leadership demonstrates a commitment to justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion.
All individuals at UMES are treated equitably.
Belonging
All members of the campus community experience a sense of belonging.
UMES frequently has events designed to promote a sense of belonging for underrepresented members of the campus community.
Availability of multicultural events at UMES
Supports

Student JEDI needs assessment instrument	
There are adequate supports specifically for disabled people at UMES.	
The UMES campus is easy to navigate for people with physical disabilities.	
Buildings at UMES are adapted so that they easily accommodate people with disabilities.	
There are adequate supports specifically for underrepresented ethnic minorities at UMES.	
There are adequate supports specifically for non-Christians at UMES.	
There are adequate supports specifically for LGBTQIA+ people at UMES.	
There are adequate supports specifically for transgender people at UMES.	
There are adequate supports specifically for indigenous people at UMES.	
Students with disabilities at UMES receive adequate supports	
Representation	
There is adequate representation of different cultural groups at UMES.	
There is an adequate representation of the Indigenous people who once made their home on the land that is now our UMES campus.	
Culturally Responsive Teaching	
I am treated fairly and equitably in classrooms and classroom settings (e.g., labs, lectures, clinical environments, etc.).	
UMES faculty seem committed to promoting justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion	
Overall, I feel respected by UMES faculty	
UMES faculty respect students from diverse backgrounds	
Curriculum at UMES recognizes the cultural wealth and lived experiences that students from diverse backgrounds bring to the classroom	
Teaching and learning at UMES makes available adequate support services to ensure all students can succeed	
Curriculum at UMES includes teaching practices that include multicultural content and references	
Courses at UMES provide opportunities to explore social justice issues	
Adequacy of Resources	
Resources for LGBTQIA+ individuals at UMES	
Resources for religious minorities at UMES	
Resources for disabled people at UMES	
Resources for cultural minorities at UMES	
Resources for foreign born people at UMES	
Interactions	
Interaction with non-academic support offices at UMES	
Interaction with campus police	
Interaction with academic support services at UMES	
Experiences	
I have personally experienced discrimination at UMES	
I have witnessed discrimination against someone else at UMES	
I have personally experienced harassment at UMES	
I have witnessed harassment against someone else at UMES.	
If you have witnessed or heard someone, make an insensitive or disparaging remark about a person or people based on their age, race, ethnicity, gender identity, or disability status from where did it come? Select all that apply.	
Faculty	☐
Students	☐
Staff	☐
Administrator	☐
Local community Member	☐
Bias refers to prejudice in favor of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another, usually in a way considered to be unfair. If you have experienced or witnessed bias against any person or group at UMES, who was it against. Select all that apply.	
LGBTQIA+ People	☐
Disabled People	☐
Veterans or People in the Military	☐

Student JEDI needs assessment instrument	
People based on Religious Affiliation	
People who are not Religious	
People based on Race	
People based on Ethnicity	
Foreign Born People	
People based on Gender	
People based on Gender Identity or Expression	
What trainings would you like to see offered to the UMES community?	
Safe Spaces	
Justice, Equity, Diversity, & Inclusion	
Microaggressions/Unconscious Bias	
Anti-Bias	
Accessibility	
Social Justice	
Decolonization	
Fostering a culture of belonging & inclusion	
Bystander Intervention	
Cultural Competency	

Faculty and staff JEDI needs assessment instrument
Inclusivity
How inclusive would you rank the campus community
Satisfaction with Campus Climate
Thinking about your experience at UMES as a whole, including the academic/professional climate, social climate, and racial climate, what is your level of satisfaction with the overall climate of the university?
Overall, the campus environment is free from strain related to individual or group differences.
Reflections on the Campus Experience
I am satisfied with the campus experience and environment regarding diversity.
I am treated fairly on campus.
I regularly interact with people who are different than me at UMES.
If I experienced or observed an act of discrimination or harassment at UMES, I know who to contact to report the incident.
I feel safe in my workspace, department, or office
UMES senior leadership demonstrates a commitment to justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion.
All individuals at UMES are treated equitably.
Belonging
All members of the campus community experience a sense of belonging.
UMES frequently has events designed to promote a sense of belonging for underrepresented members of the campus community.
Supports
There are adequate supports specifically for disabled people at UMES.
The UMES campus is easy to navigate for people with physical disabilities.
Buildings at UMES are adapted so that they easily accommodate people with disabilities.
There are adequate supports specifically for underrepresented ethnic minorities at UMES.
There are adequate supports specifically for non-Christians at UMES.
There are adequate supports specifically for LGBTQIA+ people at UMES.
There are adequate supports specifically for transgender people at UMES.
There are adequate supports specifically for indigenous people at UMES.
Representation
There is adequate representation of different cultural groups at UMES.
There is an adequate representation of the Indigenous people who once made their home on the land that is now our UMES campus.

Faculty and staff JEDI needs assessment instrument	
Culturally Responsive Teaching	
My classes incorporate the use of the Starfish early alert systems	
My courses include varied forms of assessment	
The courses I teach provide opportunities to explore social justice issues	
My classes include multicultural content and references	
I am familiar with culturally responsive teaching practices which are strategies in which the students' unique cultural strengths are identified and nurtured to promote student achievement and a sense of well-being	
My curriculum is designed to recognize the cultural wealth and lived experiences that students from diverse backgrounds bring to the classroom	
My classes include opportunities for students to share their stories and mine meaning from lived or learned experiences	
My courses have been examined to ensure that they do not promote dominant culture values (dominant culture is a cultural practice that is dominant within a particular political, social, or economic entity, in which multiple cultures co-exist. It may refer to language, religion or ritual practices, social value and/or social custom)	
My courses have been examined to ensure that they do not promote heteronormative values (heteronormative refers to denoting or relating to a world view that promotes heterosexuality as the normal or preferred sexual orientation)	
My courses have been examined to ensure that they do not promote cisgender values (cisgender refers to people whose gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth)	
My courses have been reviewed for ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) compliance	
I have a diversity statement in my course syllabus	
I teach Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) concepts in at least one of my classes	
I am committed to promoting justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion in my classrooms	
Opportunities and Encouragement	
There is adequate professional development opportunities related to culturally responsive teaching	
I feel encouraged by the University to embrace Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) practices in my work	
Experiences	
I have personally experienced discrimination at UMES	
I have witnessed discrimination against someone else at UMES	
I have personally experienced harassment at UMES	
I have witnessed harassment against someone else at UMES.	
If you have witnessed or heard someone, make an insensitive or disparaging remark about a person or people based on their age, race, ethnicity, gender identity, or disability status from where did it come? Select all that apply.	
Faculty	
Students	
Staff	
Administrator	
Local community Member	
Bias refers to prejudice in favor of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another, usually in a way considered to be unfair. If you have experienced or witnessed bias against any person or group at UMES, who was it against. Select all that apply.	
LGBTQIA+ People	
Disabled People	
Veterans or People in the Military	
People based on Religious Affiliation	
People who are not Religious	
People based on Race	
People based on Ethnicity	
Foreign Born People	
People based on Gender	
People based on Gender Identity or Expression	

Faculty and staff JEDI needs assessment instrument	
What trainings would you like to see offered to the UMES community?	
Safe Spaces	
Justice, Equity, Diversity, & Inclusion	
Microaggressions/Unconscious Bias	
Anti-Bias	
Accessibility	
Social Justice	
Decolonization	
Fostering a culture of belonging & inclusion	
Bystander Intervention	
Cultural Competency	

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