



November 15, 2024

**Re: CORE Perspectives Comprehensive Needs Assessment**

Dear campus community,

As you know, following numerous listening sessions, recommendations from the NWCCU accreditation body, and an analysis of the campus climate survey, it was the decision of President McMahan to charge Vice President of Student Affairs Dr. Lea Jarnagin to conduct an inclusive engagement process designed to elevate the voices and perspectives of all members in our community. The intent has always been to better support, celebrate, and harness the rich tapestry of diversity that is EWU and is grounded in our ongoing commitment to not only identify but also bridge systemic gaps in our institution, ensuring that every member of our community feels included, heard, and supported.

We are grateful to those who served on the DEI Investment Committee, as well as their perspective in reviewing the report released by CORE Perspectives. This letter serves to communicate with campus the Executive Leadership Team's initial review of the report and provide information on current activities and efforts being undertaken across the university that address many of the recommendations provided by CORE Perspectives.

**Data Analysis**

First, we would like to acknowledge that the qualitative data used for this report offers valuable insights into the experiences of the respondents, yet it represents only a small portion of our diverse campus community. Notably, the student responses gathered through the focus groups and survey results represent less than 2.0% of our entire student population. As an institution committed to fostering inclusiveness and equity, we take this feedback seriously, but we are also mindful that it should not be generalized to reflect the experiences or views of the entire student body.

Eastern Washington University represents a diverse population of students from across the region and beyond. EWU is proud to represent 42% of undergraduates who are first-generation college students, 36% historically underrepresented, and 41% Pell Grant recipients. In total, 69% of students belong to one or more populations systematically disadvantaged in higher education achievement.

The decision on implementing an organizational structure to fulfill our strong commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion requires that we utilize as much data as possible to best align our efforts with the aspirations of students, as well as faculty and staff. As we examine the report and reflect on the recommendations, we will be supplementing our conversations with the results from the 2024 Student Satisfaction Survey. Sense of belonging and community are two vitally important contributing factors to students' overall satisfaction in higher education. The 2024 Student Satisfaction Survey returned 1,508 responses (17% response rate) with 1,160 (77%) of those being undergraduate students, of which 379

(33%) were from historically underrepresented races or ethnicities. In all questions surrounding belonging, community, and experience, students from historically underrepresented races or ethnicities reported greater satisfaction. A combination of satisfaction in classroom interaction and community engagement led 80% of students from historically underrepresented races or ethnicities to report overall satisfaction with their experience at EWU.

We must continue to look at all data sources before we determine a final structure for implementation.

### **Current Initiatives and Activities**

We agree, as CORE Perspectives indicated, that many activities across the campus happen in silos. It is apparent through the interviews and focus groups that much of the great work happening at EWU to enhance DEI and belonging is not known by all. Understandably, this can occur through legal constraints in the case of personnel matters, location barriers, and a focus on one's own division work, so we would like to offer a review of activities currently taking place or in development that respond to some of the recommendations CORE Perspectives has made within their response to the project's questions.

#### *Question 1: How do current organizational structures support an institutional commitment to DEBI work?*

- Both the JLR Multicultural Center and the Eagle Pride Center received funding in the past two years to add staffing, including a program coordinator and student employees.
- In 2023-24, the funding for five signature cultural events coordinated by student cultural organizations was provided by the President (50% of event budget) and the Services & Activities Fee (25%). This is the first-time funding was guaranteed to support these important annual cultural celebrations.
- The EWU Student Emergency Fund is a frequently accessed resource by students who face unexpected financial challenges. Supported by on and off campus donors, this fund is collaboratively managed by the Dean of Students Office and Enrollment Services.
- Various mentoring programs exist at EWU, within departments, colleges, and support programs.
- Counseling & Wellness Services strives to attract, hire and retain mental health providers from diverse backgrounds, in part by investments made in diverse advertising publications.
- The Dean of Students manages a student focused Instagram account that is very active with the student population. This site is effective in reaching and sharing critical information with students.
- Support services are included in the new student orientation program.
- A website audit is an on-going project, including the use of an accessibility monitoring service to regularly scan sites to identify and address issues.
- We are in the process of engaging a campus planning firm to develop a new campus facilities master plan, ensuring access for all and removing barriers for students with disabilities, as well as identifying potentially dangerous areas such as poorly lit or isolated.
- Faculty Commons is working on increasing accessibility of course material with principles of universal design.

- EWU has academic coaching through PLUS, where students work with a fellow peer to help develop academic skills to assist with classes.
- The EWU MESA program helps underserved and underrepresented students feel a sense of belonging and achieve success in STEM studies and careers.
- A comprehensive overhaul of advising is underway with tandem advising, leveraging technology, enhanced training, and regular check-in. Advisor-to-Student ratios are consistent with NACADA guidelines of 250:1.

*Question 2: How do disproportionately impacted/minoritized communities experience academic and social belonging and what are their success metrics?*

- Every report of faculty behavior is taken very seriously. Individuals are owed confidentiality and therefore outcomes are not shared.
- EWU annually invites the campus community to join our Facilities team in a campus night walk to identify campus lighting needs and areas where landscaping may create potential safety hazards.
- EWU offers trainings throughout the year to help increase student and staff awareness and strategies to ensure personal safety.
- The ODEI launched the Search Advocates program in fall 2022, training employees to serve on search committees to minimize the impact of cognitive and structural biases, and promote practices that advance diversity and social justice. We currently have 190 faculty, administrators, and staff certified as Search Advocates.
- Between 2021-2024, non-white faculty members have been retained at a higher percentage than white faculty members. Non-white staff members have also been retained at a higher percentage.
- Over the period from 2019 to 2024, the separation rate for white faculty was 7.6%, while the separation rate for non-white faculty was 6.6%.

*Question 3: What is the role of the various DEBI programs and offices on campus in fostering an inclusive learning environment for students and eradicating the racial equity gap in graduation rates?*

- Response structures, processes, and timelines for reporting incidents have changed significantly over the past year with several improvements, including promotion of online reporting. A cross divisional team monitors reports and responds within the same day. Although personnel matters can't be discussed, students are consulted regarding action steps and care is taken to ensure they feel supported, heard, and seen.
- Unless private donations are specifically designated for certain fields, EWU ensures equitable scholarship distribution across all fields of study. This is crucial to helping our most vulnerable students overcome a diverse range of challenges, enabling them to persist and succeed in their educational journeys.
- We leverage technology to reach students, including using Navigate push notifications and SwoopBot.

- A DFW (D, F, Withdraw) dashboard has been created to conduct analysis to determine specific areas where equity gaps exist.
- The Office of the Provost is starting a Course Redesign Initiative to provide grants to faculty members focusing on reducing DFW rates and integrating applied learning.
- EWU has hired more academic coaches and tutors this academic year.
- The Summer Bridge Program underwent revitalization.
- We joined the Complete College Accelerator in partnership with Complete College America and the Gates Foundation helping to identify structural barriers impacting the success of students who are under-resourced, first-generation, and/or BIPOC to create strategies to improve college-completion outcomes.

*Question 4: What strategies can the campus implement to enhance DEI capacity at individual, interpersonal and departmental levels for faculty, staff and students?*

- As required by SB 5227, ODEI conducts DEI and Anti-Racism training for all employees. As of Oct. 2024, 96.67% of full time employees had completed training and over 96% of tenured faculty had completed training. We added the implementation of DEI and Anti-Racism training for all current EWU students beginning in fall 2024 and to date, we have 2,088 students who have met the State requirement.
- ODEI had offered the Inclusive Leadership Program for the past five years. Since its inception, 133 EWU faculty, staff, administrators, and students have participated in the program. This included the Executive Leadership Team in 2024.
- Ongoing training for students on many topics related to DEI are built into online mandatory trainings required by the state, training for fraternity and sorority life communities, student employees, residents, athletes, and student leaders.
- The Students DEI Advisory Council began in 2023-2024 in conjunction with the ASEWU. Last years' group consisted of 19 student members.
- The ODEI funds the Board of Trustees Diversity Initiative Grants which provides up to \$2,000 each per year for promising and high-quality faculty, staff, and student projects, including research.
- There are five DEI-endorsed employee affinity groups: African American/Black Employees; American Indian/Alaska Native/First Nations Learning Circle Employees; Belonging Advocates; La Comunidad, Hispanic/Latinx; and LGBTQ+
- Since 2012, EWU hosts an annual Diversity & Inclusion Week, bringing over 1,500 faculty, staff, students, and community members to campus for events illuminating diversity and inclusion.
- EWU celebrates Disability Pride Month in July, as well as participating in Spokane's Pride Parade and Festival.
- In 2024, ODEI helped Africana Studies and the EWU Black Student Union with the Empowerment through Action: MLK Jr. Service Day Conference.

- The Talk it Out program within Student Rights & Responsibilities features a team of professional staff, graduate students, and undergraduate students working together to design and facilitate workshops and trainings that help students develop skills to navigate difficult conversations.
- EWU has publicly available dashboards with disaggregated indicators of student achievement including race/ethnicity.
- The Climate Survey is published and available for all to see on the university Inside EWU website.
- The Provost and VP of Student Affairs send a co-authored email to campus regarding free speech each year.
- Campus is notified about planned demonstrations that the university is made aware of ahead of time.
- Between 2021-2024, non-white new faculty hires have increased from 20% to 27.27%, while white new faculty hires have decreased from 80% to 72.73%. This was intentional by reviewing and refining position descriptions and initiating permanent residency status for international faculty.
- A student journey mapping project was launched to help EWU better understand how students experience the campus, both physically and culturally.
- Future renovation plans for Martin Williamson Hall include thoughtful consideration of co-locating resources and services most often accessed by students, as well as those services that work closely together to address wrap-around supports for students.
- The Provost hosts open Zoom hours to all Academic Affairs faculty and staff on the first Friday of every month.
- The Vice President for Student Affairs hosts open Zoom hours to all Student Affairs staff on the second Friday of every month.
- The Office of Alumni Relations builds affinity with Black Student Union which supports the efforts of our Black Alumni *Facebook* group.
- The Alumni Association Board of Directors partners with Eagle Career Network to strengthen relationships with the JLR Multicultural Center and the Eagle Pride Center to support LGBTQ+ Alumni Affinity and LatinX/Hispanic Alumni Groups.

In closing, EWU has made tremendous progress in striving to be a more welcoming and inclusive campus and, as stated in the strategic plan, will continue to make every effort to ensure students, faculty, and staff have a positive experience and sense of belonging while at Eastern. It is clear that communication of resources, programs, and progress remains a key area of improvement throughout campus in relation to activities and initiatives which are DEI-related. We look forward to receiving campus feedback on the recommendations for an effective DEI organizational structure that builds upon the hard work being done already by our dedicated faculty and staff.

In gratitude,

EWU Executive Leadership Team





CORE PERSPECTIVES LLC

# COMPREHENSIVE NEEDS ASSESSMENT

*Prepared by:*  
*CORE Perspectives, LLC*

For Eastern Washington University



September 2024



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## **Background and Purpose of Report**

In 2022, Eastern Washington University (EWU) embarked on a series of initiatives to assess and improve its campus climate, particularly focusing on diversity, equity, belonging and inclusion (DEBI) efforts. Newly appointed President Shari McMahan initiated listening sessions to gather feedback from the university community. These sessions revealed various concerns, including the need to reduce microaggressions and foster a more inclusive environment. Faculty and staff spoke about the need to make genuine connections with students, while improved mentorship and engagement were highlighted as crucial. There was a call for better student support, particularly through enhanced bootcamp programs, more in-person classes, and services for TRIO-eligible students. Faculty and staff concerns included classroom management, merit raises, and high staff turnover. Systemic changes were discussed, such as aligning departmental strategies, improving pathways oversight, and addressing equity issues.

Concurrently, EWU underwent an accreditation visit by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU). The accreditation report highlighted EWU's strong emphasis on equity, social justice, and community engagement as positive aspects. However, it also identified a concern regarding redundancy in DEI programs across different university departments. The NWCCU recommended a review of these efforts to reduce overlap and increase support for closing equity gaps.

Following these events, in spring 2023, EWU conducted a campus climate survey to further evaluate conditions around DEI and overall satisfaction. The survey results indicated lower overall satisfaction with the campus climate and sense of belonging compared to peer institutions. This finding corroborated the feedback received during the President's listening sessions, particularly regarding employee satisfaction and morale.

The outcome of these three interconnected processes highlighted EWU's ongoing commitment to addressing DEI concerns. However, they also elevated points of opportunity that if addressed could advance equity and enhance overall campus satisfaction. Based on those insights, EWU initiated a search for a climate research partner in Fall 2023 to further analyze identified concerns and develop a plan for implementing necessary changes.

In November 2023, EWU contracted with Core Perspectives, LLC. The effort was coordinated through the Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs. Three senior-level consultants worked closely with the EWU campus leadership, faculty, staff, students and community stakeholders to address the following objectives outlined in the original request for proposals:

1. How do current organizational structures support an institutional commitment to DEBI work? How do we address redundancies noted in the accreditation report? Do our current programs and services integrate efforts to support communities of color among our students, faculty and staff?
2. How do disproportionately impacted/minoritized communities experience academic and social belonging and what are their success metrics?

3. What is the role of the various DEBI programs and offices on campus in fostering an inclusive learning environment for students and eradicating the racial equity gap in graduation rates?
4. What strategies can the campus implement to enhance DEI capacity at individual, interpersonal and departmental levels for faculty, staff and students?
5. What is an effective model for aligning the various DEBI programs and offices to best center and meet the needs of underrepresented students at EWU?

A comprehensive policy, document review, and qualitative needs assessment was completed to answer these questions.

### **Purpose of Report**

Per its mission, vision, and values, EWU is committed to the general prosperity of all its constituencies. The institution challenges its members with its “ALL IN” creed to exemplify traits of grit, grace, gratitude, and greatness in all aspects of its experience and beyond. As an institution positioned in the homelands of the Spokane People, EWU purports itself as a learner of the land and has sought to increase this responsibility since its inception in 1882. To foster ongoing growth as a learning institution, EWU wanted to assess its climate by evaluating the perceptions of students, faculty, staff, and administrators regarding their academic and co-curricular experiences.

This needs assessment identified themes from focus groups, interviews, and an online survey concerning EWU's current circumstances. The analysis is offered to guide campus leaders in identifying structures and systems that effectively promote positive climate transformation, while aligning with EWU's mission and core values. Effective interpretation and use of these findings, along with other data can foster more meaningful dialogues across campus, enhancing mutual understanding and refining expectations for engagement and communication among diverse groups. Moreover, by applying these insights, the university can develop guiding principles that inform institutional policy, fiscal allocation decisions, and recruitment and retention accountability. In addition, these principles can help the university develop a diversity, equity, belonging, and inclusion administrative infrastructure empowered to positively influence campus administrative, academic, social, and community structures.

### **Needs Assessment**

The questions that emerged from the EWU documents review helped inform the questions posed in the needs assessment. A comprehensive needs assessment and data analysis process was used to gain a deeper understanding of the strengths as well as potential inequities within the EWU community. This data-driven approach provided the foundation for the recommendations that will be discussed in more detail later in this report.

## Method - Focus Groups, Interviews, Surveys

### *Participants*

**Twenty-three one-on-one interviews** were conducted primarily with EWU stakeholders (i.e., administrative leadership team, unit and academic department leads, Board of Trustee members, and community stakeholders). There were **31 focus groups** which consisted of between two to ten participants and the Core Perspectives facilitator(s). The focus group participants included faculty, staff, and community members with various roles at, or investment in, the institution, as well as students from constituent groups, including but not limited to those identifying as Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian, first-generation, LGBTQIA2+, and “non-traditional students.” The focus groups included 167 participants and, combined with the interviews, resulted in **face-to-face contact with 190 participants**.

Six hundred and sixteen (616) individuals opened the **Qualtrics survey**, among which 585 answered the question concerning their affiliation with the university (students = 271, staff = 190, faculty = 122, alums = 2). After excluding surveys with missing data, **351 were included in the final sample** (students = 123, staff = 141, faculty = 85, alums = 2). Roughly 57% of the participants provided their demographic information. Of those, 30% indicated African/Black/African American; Hispanic/Latino/ Latina/Chicana; Jewish, Native American; Pacific Islander/Hawaiian, more than one race, and 70% identified as White/Caucasian. One-quarter identified as LGBTQIA2+, 70% as female/women, and the mean age was 31.17 ( $SD = 14.84$ ). Sixty-two percent of the students were undergrads and 73% of the faculty were assistant/associate/full professors. There were quite a few responses to the biopsychosocial questions, where 37% indicated a mental health concern and 16% identified as neurodivergent. Also asked was whether there was another identity or social group that affected their experiences at EWU. There was an extensive and interesting range of responses, including veterans, running start graduates, parents, passport program/foster youth, vegan, first and second-generation students, lower/middle income, military spouses, locals, introverts, Atheists/Agnostics, Christians, bilingual, Pagans, and athletes.

### *Materials*

Open-ended focus group, interview, and survey questions were developed based on insights from the EWU documents review, the consultants' knowledge of best practices, and feedback from EWU leadership. The semi-structured focus group/interview guide can be found in Appendix A. The survey questions were tailored to students, staff, faculty, and alumni experiences (Appendix B). Students and alums answered five open-ended questions whereas faculty and staff answered eight, with three of the questions overlapping between the four groups.

### *Procedure*

EWU leadership recruited participants for focus groups, interviews, and surveys through email invitations and fliers. From May 2024 through June 2024, focus groups and one-on-one

interviews were conducted in a face-to-face or virtual meeting space. Each session lasted approximately 30 to 90 minutes and was facilitated solely by Core Perspectives' senior consultants. All participants were asked to verbally acknowledge their understanding of the purpose of the focus group and/or interview, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their understanding of the guidelines. Sessions were recorded with participants' consent using Otter.ai, an AI meeting note taker and real-time transcription service. Every effort was made to ensure confidentiality, including discouraging focus group members from sharing discussions outside of the focus group, as well as conducting interviews and in person focus groups in closed spaces. In addition, themes and sentiments were reported in aggregate and not attributed to specific participants to protect the identity of the reporter.

The online Qualtrics questionnaire was available to EWU students, staff, faculty, and alums from May 14, 2024 through to August 1, 2024.

### ***Data Analysis***

After completing the focus groups and interviews, recordings and transcripts from 54 focus groups and interviews were coded. A deductive and inductive approach was used in coding themes to allow flexibility in the analytic process. First, thematic categories were created based on the objectives and focus of the needs assessment as outlined in discussions with EWU: Institutional Climate and Culture/Belonging; Closing Equity Gaps; Improving Retention – Especially Marginalized Students; Freedom of Expression; Safety; and DEIB Support Services. In order to be open to other patterns, categories, or themes in the data, transcripts were closely examined to determine the frequency of certain words, phrases, or concepts that appeared in the transcripts. Based on those frequencies, additional subthemes were identified (See Appendix C). For example, concerns about student support services were mentioned frequently enough to warrant their own subtheme. Semantics (positive, negative, and neutral) were also coded and, where appropriate, latent semantics (fear, hurt, anger).

Two analysts separately annotated four focus groups, selecting participants' statements tied to the research questions, as well as those that identified other themes. There was approximately 82% congruency between the coders' selected statements. From there, they collaborated and developed a more comprehensive coding framework, which was reviewed by a senior consultant. Cohen's  $\kappa$  was run to determine agreement between their coding on four different focus groups, indicating substantial agreement,  $\kappa = .796$  (95% CI, .67 to .90),  $p < .001$ . Google Spreadsheets were used to code and aggregate data for interpretation.

For the survey, data was coded utilizing SPSS and the Text iQ function in Qualtrics. The themes from the survey were closely aligned with those from the focus groups and interviews. One of the questions, which was answered by all four groups (faculty, staff, students, and alums), was selected to assess intercoder reliability. There was substantial agreement between the two coders,  $\kappa = .729$  (95% CI, .68 to .78),  $p < .001$ .

There are a few constraints that should be kept in mind when interpreting the results of the needs assessment. For instance, the focus groups and interviews, while providing valuable

insights, were potentially influenced by factors such as interviewer or coder bias, availability sampling, and the self-selection of participants comfortable with in-person sharing. Additionally, some participants may have been motivated by specific agendas, whether positive or negative, regarding the university.

To address these limitations and broaden the scope of input, an anonymous survey featuring open-ended questions was implemented. The survey, available for approximately two months, aimed to capture candid responses from faculty, staff, students, and alums. While this approach expanded the range of voices heard, it's important to note that it may not fully represent the entire EWU population.

Despite these constraints, the research sample was substantial and diverse, including a wide array of university constituents. The combination of focus groups, interviews, and the survey yielded a rich dataset with significant depth, breadth, and reliability. This multifaceted approach allowed for meaningful interpretation and provided a nuanced understanding of the EWU environment.

## **Findings and Responses to Questions**

In responding to the questions outlined in EWU's request for proposals, we leveraged the rich insights gained from our qualitative analysis of the provided data. The themes that emerged from this analysis formed the foundation of our responses to EWU's specific questions. By closely examining the feedback from President McMahan's listening sessions, the NWCCU accreditation report, and the campus climate survey results, we were able to identify key areas of concern and opportunity within EWU's diversity, equity, belonging, and inclusion (DEBI) efforts. These data-driven insights allowed us to tailor our proposed strategies and recommendations to address the unique challenges and strengths of EWU's campus community.

### **1. *How do current organizational structures support an institutional commitment to DEBI work?***

The findings for this question emerged from the analysis of three major themes and their associated subthemes. Under the major theme of ***Advancing Equitable Opportunity***, relevant insights came from examining ***Unique Supports***, ***Sustainable DEI***, ***Organizational Structure***, ***Resource Allocation***, ***Cultural Sensitivity Training***, and ***Representation***. The analysis also drew from the ***Fostering Inclusive Climate and Culture*** major theme, specifically through its subthemes of ***Institutional Climate and Culture***, and ***Spaces and Places***. Additional understanding came from exploring the ***Retention and Turnover*** and ***Student Supports*** subthemes, which fell under the ***Addressing Equity Gaps*** major theme. Details regarding these themes and subthemes, including the number and sentiment of responses can be found in Appendix C.

EWU has established key offices, such as the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (ODEI) and the Multicultural Center (MCC), which provide resources, programming, and support for

marginalized groups. Many students described the Multicultural Center (MCC) as a central hub for student support and community building, offering a welcoming environment where students can socialize, access food resources, report biased incidents, and find safety and support. The ODEI was praised for its comprehensive approach to DEI initiatives. It was noted for organizing employee affinity groups, providing effective training programs (including Title IX), and collaborating with other campus entities like the MCC and Pride Center. The ODEI's efforts to offer resources in multiple languages, host diversity-focused events, bring diverse speakers to campus, and provide an open, inclusive environment were particularly appreciated.

While students acknowledged EWU cultural centers for their ability to support students and help them connect with the university, they also noted that the centers were often under-sourced and understaffed. In addition, students expressed confusion about the roles and responsibilities of various DEBI offices, highlighting a need for clearer communication. There's a perceived misalignment of DEBI responsibilities across university departments, with concerns raised about the funding structure for cultural events and centers.

Many participants acknowledged the need for improved interdepartmental collaboration to break down silos, unite campus groups, and enhance the effectiveness of DEBI efforts. For example, student experiences of "Eastern Eagleship" varied widely, often correlating with their specific roles or identities within the EWU community. Athletes reported feeling disconnected from the broader student body, with limited opportunities to interact outside their sports circles. Similarly, student members of the LGBTQIA communities, and ethnic minority groups expressed a sense of isolation from the wider campus community.

Various campus entities were identified as playing crucial roles in acclimating students to the EWU experience and DEI commitment. However, participants noted that these groups - including academic units, admissions, athletics, community agencies, multicultural units, and Student Affairs - often conveyed inconsistent messages to incoming students. The approach seemed to vary based on students' entry circumstances rather than focusing on their universal need to integrate and thrive in their new environment. This inconsistency in messaging and support potentially created disparities in how different student groups adapted to and engaged with the EWU community, highlighting a need for a more unified and inclusive approach to student orientation and integration across all university departments and affiliated organizations.

Suggestions for improvement frequently focused on reorganization, with a common call for a unified governance structure under high-level leadership. However, there was no clear consensus on the specific form this structure should take. Some propose integrating DEBI work more closely with Human Resources or Student Affairs, while others advocate for a more independent office with direct reporting lines to top university leadership.

*How does EWU address redundancies in DEBI services noted in the accreditation report?*

Cultural centers (i.e., Multicultural Center, Pride) and ODEI, as well as the identity studies programs (i.e., Africana, American Indian, Women's Gender, and Sexuality, and Chicana/o/x Studies) were identified throughout the assessment as providing a safe and supportive

environment for marginalized students on campus, reportedly contributing to their success. However, the overlapping functions they serve at EWU were confusing for many students. Creating a centralized DEBI infrastructure could help with this issue. The DEBI executive could help to clearly outline the functions of each office, program, and center, and make this information easily accessible to all members of the university community.

To reduce overlap, it may be helpful for cultural centers, affinity groups, and student organizations to take primary responsibility for fostering a sense of belonging and community among students. These entities could focus on creating inclusive spaces, organizing cultural events, facilitating peer support networks, and promoting intercultural dialogue. They could also serve as hubs for students to connect with their cultural heritage, explore diverse identities, and build relationships across different groups on campus. On the other hand, identity studies programs and departments could concentrate on supporting the academic progress and success of students from diverse backgrounds. These academic units could be responsible for developing and implementing targeted academic support services, mentoring programs, and a lecture series for example that address underrepresented students' academic experiences. They could also focus on integrating diverse perspectives and scholarship into their respective disciplines, conducting relevant research, and preparing students for academic and professional success. This delineation of responsibilities aims to reduce duplication of efforts, maximize the impact of university resources, and provide clearer pathways for students to access community support and academic assistance.

Finally, a comprehensive framework for DEBI at EWU, which will be described in more detail in the implementation plan could also help to clarify responsibilities, reduce overlap, and increase seamless collaboration among the DEBI entities at EWU.

*Do our current programs and services integrate efforts to support communities of color among our students, faculty and staff?*

EWU has made progress in creating programs and services that are designed to support communities of color across its campus. At the heart of these efforts is the Multicultural Center (MCC), which serves as a vital hub for students of color. The MCC provides cultural programming, community-building activities, and support services that are crucial for creating a sense of belonging and identity. Complementing the MCC are academic identity studies programs and resource centers, such as Gender, Women's & Sexuality (GWSS), Africana, Chicano, and American Indian studies. These academic programs play a pivotal role in providing comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the experiences, histories, cultures, and contributions of various identity groups.

Student-led organizations are another key component of EWU's support system for communities of color. Groups like the Black Student Union and Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (M.E.Ch.A.) offer peer support, organize events, and advocate for the needs of their respective communities. These organizations not only create important spaces for community building but also provide opportunities for students to develop leadership skills, raise awareness



about the challenges faced by communities of color, facilitate dialogue on social justice issues, and support the personal and cultural development of students from diverse backgrounds.

In addition, to create a more inclusive campus climate, EWU has implemented DEI training programs for faculty and staff. These initiatives aim to increase awareness and understanding of issues impacting communities of color, helping to educate the broader campus community on the challenges faced by students, faculty, and staff of color.

While EWU offers a range of programs and services designed to support and empower students of color and foster a more inclusive campus environment, the integration of these efforts is inconsistent, and there are gaps that must be addressed to ensure more comprehensive support for students of color. A primary recommendation for helping to address this gap involves creating comprehensive support systems for students of color and other underrepresented groups. This could include implementing a multi-faceted approach that addresses academic, personal, and professional needs. Central to this strategy is the establishment of robust mentorship programs, pairing students with faculty, staff, or upper-class peers who can provide guidance and support. These mentorship relationships could be complemented by targeted academic support services, including specialized tutoring, study groups, and workshops designed to address the unique challenges marginalized students face, particularly in demanding fields like STEM.

In addition, it might be helpful for EWU to consider a comprehensive overhaul of its advising services. For example, EWU might consider a holistic proactive approach in which advisors are armed with enhanced training and technology to assist with regular check-in with students and to offer personalized guidance, early and often, that is aligned with the students' academic and career goals. By organizing advisors by discipline, improving advisor-to-student ratios, and integrating career planning into the advising process, EWU could enhance the effectiveness of its support system.

It would also be important for EWU to address accessibility issues and improve the accommodation process. This could include a comprehensive staff training program focused on disability awareness, legal requirements, and empathetic communication. It might also be helpful for EWU to streamline the accommodation request procedure, introducing a user-friendly online portal and assigning dedicated case managers to guide students through the process. Recognizing that financial constraints can be a significant barrier, it is also recommended that EWU consider increasing scholarship opportunities and providing emergency financial assistance for unexpected expenses. In addition, the university could enhance and expand its mental health and wellness services, ensuring they are culturally competent and well-staffed by professionals from diverse backgrounds.

Finally, to help ensure that students are aware of the support services provided, EWU may want to consider developing a comprehensive communication strategy that leverages multiple channels, including social media, a mobile app, and peer ambassadors. This could include integrating information about these services into the academic experience, from course syllabi

to orientation programs, and creating a central support services hub on campus. In addition, the university should conduct an audit of its website to ensure that information is presented in a way that is accessible and easy to navigate. Through these initiatives, EWU could significantly increase student awareness and utilization of support services, ultimately improving academic performance and overall student satisfaction.

### Summary of Response to Question 1

Study findings emphasize the positive reception of DEBI programs at EWU, particularly the MCC and the ODEI. However, results also highlight organizational challenges, such as confusion over roles and responsibilities among DEBI offices and the need for improved communication and interdepartmental collaboration. A recurring theme is the lack of a centralized DEBI structure, which leads to overlaps in responsibilities and inconsistent messaging to students.

To address these issues, recommendations include creating a unified DEBI governance structure under senior leadership, clearly delineating responsibilities between cultural centers and academic units, and enhancing academic support systems for marginalized students. Specific recommendations include mentorship programs, improved academic advising, streamlined accommodations, increased financial aid, and enhanced mental health services. These initiatives aim to reduce redundancy, improve student integration, and foster a more inclusive and supportive environment across the university.

## ***2. How do disproportionately impacted/minoritized communities experience academic and social belonging and what are their success metrics?***

The findings for this question also emerged from the analysis of three major themes and their associated subthemes. Under the major theme of ***Advancing Equitable Opportunity***, relevant insights came from examining ***Institutional Readiness***, ***Cultural Sensitivity Training***, and ***Representation***. The analysis also drew from all the subthemes within the ***Fostering Inclusive Climate and Culture*** major theme. Additional understanding came from exploring the ***Student Supports*** and ***Logistical Accessibility*** subthemes, which fell under the ***Addressing Equity Gaps*** major theme. Details regarding these themes and subthemes, including the number and sentiment of responses can be found in Appendix C.

Based on data collected through focus groups, interviews, and surveys, it is evident that disproportionately impacted and minoritized communities at EWU experience academic and social belonging in complex ways. Cultural centers and student organizations are vital components in nurturing social belonging for minoritized students on campus. Spaces like the Multicultural Center and Pride Center, along with student-led groups such as the Black Student Union, create essential communities where students can feel safe, affirmed, and connected to peers who share their cultural backgrounds. These centers and organizations serve as anchors for underrepresented students, providing a sense of identity and belonging within the larger campus environment.

Complementing these dedicated spaces, campus-wide events and cultural programming play a crucial role in fostering inclusivity and celebration of diversity. Heritage months and cultural festivals, for instance, offer opportunities for the entire campus community to engage with and appreciate various cultures. These events not only provide visibility to underrepresented communities but also contribute significantly to creating a more inclusive atmosphere.

However, findings also suggest unease about the institutional environment and culture among many students, faculty and staff from underrepresented/minoritized groups. For students, this was characterized by reported incidents of racism and bigotry. In addition, students, staff, and faculty reported a culture of fear generated in specific academic departments that focus on weeding out versus creating positive learning environments.

Students also reported microaggressions and misgendering in the classroom, such as professors using incorrect pronouns or sharing incorrect information about the cultural traditions of marginalized communities. Occurrences in which students found it challenging to receive appropriate accommodations in the classroom were also described. Additionally, students reported feeling dismissed when voicing safety concerns about late evening classes, while others mentioned discomfort with faculty's open discussions of course failure rates. These experiences led some students to describe their classroom environment as challenging, with room for improvement in areas of inclusivity and empathy. There are also reports of isolated incidents of inappropriate faculty-student interactions. In many instances, these students perceived a lack of accountability for these faculty behaviors. Students indicated hesitation in reporting such issues, citing concerns about potential retaliation and uncertainty about the effectiveness of reporting processes.

Several students reported feeling isolated on campus due to a lack of belonging. Some felt excluded from clubs because they didn't meet membership qualifications, while others found no events or affinity groups related to their cultural identity. These factors, among others, contributed to a sense of disconnection from campus life and student organizations.

Additionally, students reported that they perceived a disparity in resources and attention from the campus leadership, observing that administrators were often seen attending Greek or athletic events, which students sensed were well-funded, while not attending less-resourced events sponsored by student affinity groups. In addition, the perceived lack of transparency over staff and faculty departures left students unsure of where to go for assistance after their relationships with those faculty and staff disappeared, especially after the departure of faculty and staff of color. Also, there is a perception that leadership may defund departments like Africana, American Indian, Women's Gender, and Sexuality, and Chicana/o/x Studies, which students from underrepresented groups reported as vital to creating a sense of belonging at the university. This potential threat had the students questioning whether the university cared about them.

Many faculty and staff from underrepresented backgrounds reported experiencing a similar lack of belonging at EWU, expressing various concerns, including job insecurity, high turnover rates, and feeling undervalued. Both faculty and staff reported being overworked, with faculty noting

that their DEBI efforts were not adequately recognized or rewarded and adjunct faculty feeling excluded from professional development opportunities and shared governance. Issues of gender discrimination, lack of support for faculty assisting students in crisis, and tokenization of underrepresented staff were also highlighted. In addition, the lack of diverse representation in leadership was noted, leaving many faculty and staff from underrepresented backgrounds feeling further marginalized.

It is important to mention that positive aspects of EWU were acknowledged as well, including the perception by some participants of the institution's commitment to DEBI, the president's attendance at cultural events (e.g., the Powwow), and personal experiences of feeling welcomed and supported. The university's efforts to foster inclusive environments, support diverse student populations, and provide platforms for student voices were highlighted. In addition, EWU's affordability, strong athletic program, community presence, and status as a top transfer destination for students of color were also described as strengths.

It is worth noting the apparent misalignment between EWU leadership's (i.e., Executive Leadership Team, Board of Trustees) expressed commitment to DEBI and the experiences of students and faculty from underrepresented backgrounds. Members of the ELT denied the prevailing narrative that identity studies programs would be eliminated and during one-on-one interviews with the consulting team, many cited various investments that President McMahan was implementing to support students from underrepresented backgrounds. In fact, leaders articulated a strong dedication to DEBI efforts. In contrast, many faculty, staff, and students from marginalized backgrounds questioned whether the institution genuinely cared about their well-being and success. This disconnect highlights a significant communication issue surrounding DEBI initiatives that requires attention and resolution.

### Summary of Response to Question 2

Findings from the needs assessment highlight significant challenges faced by minoritized communities at EWU in terms of academic and social belonging. The predominant theme in the study was the negative institutional climate, with nearly 59% of feedback reflecting concerns about racism, microaggressions, isolation, and a lack of support. Students frequently reported feeling disconnected from campus life, encountering exclusion from clubs, and perceiving a lack of engagement from campus leadership at events related to their cultural identities. The departure of faculty and staff of color, along with the potential defunding of identity-linked departments, further exacerbated feelings of alienation.

Faculty and staff, particularly those from underrepresented backgrounds, also expressed concerns about job insecurity, lack of recognition for DEBI efforts, and feeling marginalized. Issues such as gender discrimination, overwork, and a lack of diverse leadership were also noted.

While there were positive mentions of the university's commitment to DEBI, including the president's involvement in cultural events and the perception of EWU as an affordable, inclusive institution, concerns over faculty behavior and accountability remain. Reports of misgendering,

microaggressions, and inadequate responses to safety concerns led to feelings of discomfort and hesitation in reporting such incidents due to fears of retaliation. In addition, a stark contrast exists between the university leadership's professed commitment to diversity, equity, belonging, and inclusion and the lived experiences of underrepresented students, faculty and staff, signaling a critical communication gap that needs to be addressed.

**3. What is the role of the various DEBI programs and offices on campus in fostering an inclusive learning environment for students and eradicating the racial equity gap in graduation rates?**

Again, the findings for this analysis drew from three major themes and their specific subthemes. Under the **Advancing Equitable Opportunity** major theme, key insights emerged from the **Institutional Readiness and Representation** subthemes. The **Fostering Inclusive Climate and Culture** major theme contributed to understanding through its **Spaces and Places**, **Institutional Response and Effectiveness**, and **Behavior and Accountability** subthemes. Finally, the analysis also drew from all the subthemes within the **Addressing Equity Gaps** major theme. Comprehensive details about these themes and subthemes, including response numbers and sentiment analysis, are available in Appendix C.

Based on response to focus groups, interviews and the online survey, EWU faces significant challenges in fostering an inclusive learning environment and addressing racial equity gaps in graduation rates. Again, cultural centers and student organizations, such as the Multicultural Center, Pride Center, and Black Student Union, are highlighted in responses from the EWU community as essential components in creating a sense of community and safety for minoritized students. These spaces provide opportunities for students to connect with peers who share their cultural backgrounds, affirming their identities and enhancing their sense of belonging on campus. Such initiatives are vital in supporting underrepresented students and promoting their academic success.

Despite these initiatives, EWU struggles with systemic barriers that impede equal access to education and support services. These barriers include classroom dynamics, physical accessibility issues, and cultural inclusivity challenges. Students from marginalized backgrounds reported feeling that the university was ill-equipped to address future equity gaps, citing their own experiences of inequity. These responses suggest that existing DEBI efforts may not be sufficiently effective in creating an inclusive learning environment.

Resource allocation and support for marginalized students emerged as critical areas needing improvement. Findings reveal challenges in affordability and support for certain programs, with some perceiving an imbalance in scholarship distribution favoring STEM fields. Additionally, there are concerns about the handling of racist and bigoted incidents, with some students from marginalized groups feeling unsupported, leading to stop-outs. These issues suggest that a central DEBI administrative infrastructure may need to play a more active role in advocating for equitable resource distribution and developing robust support systems for students facing discrimination.

The lack of diverse representation among faculty and staff was noted as a concern, potentially influencing the support systems available for marginalized students. High turnover rates, especially among staff of color, further exacerbate this issue. This highlights the need for DEBI initiatives to focus not only on student recruitment and retention, but also on creating a diverse and inclusive environment for faculty and staff.

Information dissemination about available resources appears to be a significant challenge, with many students unaware of the services offered. This suggests that a DEBI administrative unit could play a crucial role in improving communication and outreach efforts to ensure all students, particularly those from marginalized backgrounds, are aware of and can access support services. Leverage technology, such as mobile apps, and social media, may be most effective in reaching students. Additionally, the siloed nature of support services may hinder inter-departmental collaboration, indicating a need for DEBI initiatives to promote more integrated and accessible support systems.

It would be helpful if this DEBI administrative unit were empowered with the authority and resources to conduct comprehensive analyses identifying specific areas where equity gaps exist, such as in particular courses, programs, or student support services. Using these findings, the DEBI unit could develop targeted interventions and guide more effective resource allocation to address disparities.

A key initiative to address this point could be the establishment of a cross-functional task force, led by a DEBI executive, comprising faculty, staff, students, and administrators. This task force could oversee equity efforts, ensure accountability, and regularly report on progress, while recommending further improvements. Simultaneously, a unit within the DEBI infrastructure could focus on enhancing academic support services tailored to the needs of underrepresented students, including expanded tutoring programs, peer mentoring initiatives, and bridge programs to facilitate successful transitions into university life.

It would also be beneficial if a DEBI unit could spearhead efforts to review and revise curriculum and pedagogical approaches across all departments. By working closely with faculty, they could ensure course content and teaching methods are inclusive and culturally responsive, integrating diverse perspectives and experiences. This effort could be complemented by comprehensive faculty development programs, led by a unit within the DEBI infrastructure, focusing on inclusive teaching practices and strategies for supporting diverse learners. These training sessions should be strongly encouraged for all faculty members to ensure widespread adoption of inclusive practices.

By empowering a DEBI administrative unit to take on these crucial roles, the university can create a more inclusive campus culture that supports the success of all students, particularly those from underrepresented backgrounds. This approach will address systemic barriers and foster an environment where every student has the opportunity to thrive academically. Through these concerted efforts, the university can make significant strides in closing the racial equity gap in graduation rates and creating a truly inclusive learning environment for all students.

### Summary of Response to Question 3

EWU's cultural centers and student organizations play a crucial role in fostering a sense of community and belonging for minoritized students. However, the university faces significant challenges in creating an inclusive learning environment and addressing racial equity gaps in graduation rates. Systemic barriers impede equal access to education and support services, including issues with classroom dynamics, physical accessibility, and cultural inclusivity. Students from marginalized backgrounds report feeling unsupported and cite experiences of inequity. Specific concerns include fear and intimidation in classrooms, limited cultural awareness, strict attendance policies, mishandling of racist incidents, unresponsive and ineffective advising, and financial difficulties. High turnover rates among staff and faculty of color further exacerbate these challenges.

To address these issues, it is recommended that EWU empower a DEBI administrative unit to take on crucial roles in creating a more inclusive campus culture. Proposed interventions include conducting comprehensive analyses to identify specific equity gaps, establishing a cross-functional task force to oversee equity efforts, enhancing academic support services for underrepresented students, and revising curriculum and pedagogical approaches to be more inclusive. Additionally, there is a need for improved faculty development, more equitable resource allocation, and expanded support services for marginalized students. By implementing these measures, EWU can work towards addressing systemic barriers, fostering an environment where every student has the opportunity to thrive academically, and ultimately make significant strides in closing the racial equity gap in graduation rates.

#### **4. What strategies can the campus implement to enhance DEI capacity at individual, interpersonal and departmental levels for faculty, staff and students?**

The analysis for this question emerged from four major themes and their specific subthemes. The first major theme, *Advancing Equitable Opportunity*, provided insights through its **Representation** and **DEI Training** subthemes. From the **Fostering Inclusive Climate and Culture** major theme, the **Safety** subtheme offered relevant findings. Further understanding came from analyzing the **Improving EWU** major theme in its entirety. Finally, under the **Addressing Equity Gaps** major theme, the **Retention and Turnover** subtheme contributed additional insights. Appendix C contains detailed information about all these themes and subthemes, including both the number of responses and their sentiment analysis.

To enhance DEI capacity at individual, interpersonal, and departmental levels for faculty, staff, and students, EWU can implement a comprehensive strategy with components that address multiple aspects of campus life and operations.

### Improve Communication and Transparency

Communication and transparency are perhaps the most essential components to any comprehensive strategy. They entail open communication channels between the administration and the university community regarding DEBI efforts, as well as regular town hall meetings,



progress reports on DEBI initiatives, and concise directives resulting from DEBI-related decisions. Transparency might also include publishing diversity statistics, sharing results of climate surveys, and being open about challenges as well as successes in DEBI efforts. In addition, the institutional climate could benefit from a clear acknowledgment of past incidents and their impacts, coupled with a commitment to accountability and change. It is recommended that the university continue to provide multiple spaces that would allow campus community members to share their experiences, concerns, and ideas for improvement. Additionally, the university could improve transparency in the current bias incident reporting system by specifying to the reporter which university unit will handle the report when it is submitted. To address the impact of bias incidents on the campus community, EWU could implement restorative justice practices to provide culturally responsive interventions, which focus on community impact and healing after bias incidents. Launching comprehensive education and awareness campaigns about various forms of oppression (racism, sexism, homophobia, etc.) and their effects is also recommended.

### *Enhance DEI Training Across the Institution*

Another key strategy is the development and implementation of comprehensive, ongoing DEI training programs for all members of the university community. These programs should cover a wide range of topics, including unconscious bias, cultural competence, inclusive language, and strategies for creating equitable learning and working environments. For faculty, the training could focus on inclusive pedagogy and curriculum design, helping them create more inclusive classroom experiences. Staff training could emphasize customer service, policy implementation, and creating welcoming spaces for all. Student training could be integrated into orientation programs and ongoing campus life activities, promoting a culture of inclusion from the moment they arrive on campus.

To ensure the success of these training initiatives, EWU should consider collaborating with both internal and external DEBI experts to develop and deliver these programs. The university should also anticipate and plan for potential challenges, such as resistance from some community members, resource constraints, and difficulties in measuring long-term impact. To address these challenges, EWU could adopt a flexible approach, offering a variety of training formats including in-person workshops, online modules, and ongoing discussion groups. Additionally, the university should establish clear metrics to evaluate the effectiveness of the training and make necessary adjustments over time.

### *Create Safe and Inclusive Spaces*

In addition to some of the DEBI challenges noted above, students reported difficulty navigating the campus and locating buildings, leading to confusion about where to seek help. Students with disabilities reportedly faced additional hurdles, reporting inaccessible doors and parking spots, with new construction often overlooking accessibility needs. Poor snow clearance further compounds these issues. To address these challenges, the creation, enhancement or expansion of safe and inclusive spaces, both physically and culturally is crucial. Physically, it means creating or enhancing cultural centers, ensuring accessibility for students with

disabilities, and designating safe spaces for students from marginalized populations to congregate and engage. In addition, circumstances at EWU, such as its varying academic calendars, necessitate that some students travel alone to attend classes and other activities. Although the Eagle Safe app has been provided to improve student safety, some voiced concerns regarding the app, expressing a preference for the recently removed blue light emergency systems, citing easier access and universal availability in crisis situations. To enhance student safety, the university should consider proactively identifying potentially dangerous areas near campus, such as poorly lit or isolated locations. Once these areas have been located, the university can implement preventative safety measures to reduce the risk of incidents occurring in those spaces.

Culturally, the university has developed strategies to foster an environment where all students feel welcome and respected. However, there is still a perception that efforts to advance DEBI are not being done or could be done better. This represents a point of opportunity for EWU to be intentional about reiterating their commitment to DEBI through broad promotion of multicultural events, efforts to ensure diverse perspectives are represented in curricula, and the implementation and enforcement of policies that clearly prohibit discrimination and harassment.

Regarding psychological safety, EWU could significantly improve its prevention of harmful incidents by implementing a proactive approach to community well-being. Specifically, the university could consider instituting regular check-ins or "wellness checks" for students and faculty. These check-ins would serve as an early warning system to identify and address issues such as microaggressions, ethnic slurs, and/or identity-based discrimination before they escalate into more serious problems. These wellness checks could take various forms, such as confidential surveys, one-on-one meetings with counselors or advisors, or facilitated group discussions. By regularly gauging the campus climate and individual experiences, EWU could be better positioned to intervene early, provide support where needed, and maintain a more inclusive and respectful environment for all university community members.

### *Diversify EWU Workforce*

Representation is another critical area where EWU faces challenges. There is a perceived mismatch between the diversity of the student body and that of faculty, staff, and leadership. Many staff members have expressed concern about the lack of diversity in hiring practices, emphasizing the importance of employing faculty and staff with whom students can identify and relate. EWU participants identified several key strategies to enhance faculty and staff diversity. These included actively seeking diverse talent aligned with the institution's proposed changes, clearly communicating diversity progress to potential hires, and supporting and expanding employee affinity groups for support. Community outreach was emphasized through educating the tri-state area about EWU's drive for transformation. Additionally, establishing recruitment pipelines from HBCUs was suggested as a promising approach for both faculty and student diversity. As a complement to the recruitment strategies described above, it is also recommended that EWU partner with professional organizations focused on advancing professionals from underrepresented backgrounds in higher education leadership and utilizing diverse search committees trained in recognizing and mitigating bias. Simultaneously, EWU

could also develop a strong leadership pipeline by creating formal development programs for faculty and staff from underrepresented groups. These programs could offer mentorship opportunities, funding for professional development, and clear pathways to leadership positions. Accountability will need to be a key focus, with clear, measurable goals for increasing diversity in leadership positions and regular reporting on progress to the university community and board of trustees.

In order for these efforts to be successful, structural changes at the university will likely be necessary to support these initiatives. This includes ensuring diverse representation on key committees and task forces, implementing policies requiring diverse candidate pools for all leadership positions, and potentially creating new leadership positions focused on diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging. In addition, the university could adopt a data-driven approach, collecting and analyzing comprehensive data on leadership demographics and experiences to inform strategies and measure progress over time.

### *Rebuild Trust*

A crucial addition to the comprehensive recommendations discussed is the encouragement for the university to address historical trauma through open, transparent conversations. This involves acknowledging past injustices or oversights that may have affected marginalized communities, and creating safe spaces for ongoing dialogue about these issues. By confronting its history openly, EWU can demonstrate a commitment to healing and moving forward more inclusively. It might be helpful for EWU to consider implementing restorative justice practices and organizing community healing events to promote unity and understanding. By consistently amplifying marginalized voices, integrating diverse perspectives into decision-making processes, and demonstrating a long-term commitment to change through concrete actions, EWU can begin to rebuild trust and foster a more inclusive campus environment. This healing process requires sustained effort, transparency, and a willingness to confront uncomfortable truths, but it is essential for creating a truly equitable and welcoming academic community.

### *Summary of Response to Question 4*

To enhance DEI capacity at EWU, a comprehensive strategy addressing multiple aspects of campus life and operations is recommended. Key components include improving communication and transparency, enhancing DEI training across the institution, creating safe and inclusive spaces, diversifying the EWU workforce, and rebuilding trust. The university should establish open communication channels regarding DEBI efforts, implement comprehensive DEI training programs for all community members, and address accessibility challenges on campus. Additionally, EWU should focus on creating culturally inclusive environments, instituting regular "wellness checks" to prevent harmful incidents, and actively working to diversify its faculty, staff, and leadership to better reflect the student body.

Crucial to these efforts is the need to address historical trauma through open, transparent conversations to build trust. This involves acknowledging past injustices, creating safe spaces for dialogue, and demonstrating a long-term commitment to change through concrete actions. It

is recommended that EWU consider implementing restorative justice practices, such as community circles and community healing events. This approach brings together individuals affected by a harmful incident, including the person who caused harm, those directly impacted, and members of the broader university community with trained facilitators to promote unity and understanding. By consistently amplifying marginalized voices, integrating diverse perspectives into decision-making processes, and adopting a data-driven approach to measure progress, EWU can work towards fostering a more inclusive and equitable campus environment.

**5. *What is an effective model for aligning the various DEBI programs and offices to best center and meet the needs of underrepresented students at EWU?***

To answer this question, the analysis drew from two key areas. First, data was examined from the major theme ***Improving EWU***. Second, insights were gathered from the ***Institutional Readiness*** subtheme, which falls under the broader ***Advancing Equitable Opportunity*** major theme. Appendix C provides comprehensive details about these themes and subthemes, including both the quantity of responses and their sentiment analysis.

Historically, the model receiving the widest support from university constituents is the one with the highest probability for success. A dedicated leader, empowered with the authority and decision-making power necessary to implement DEBI initiatives effectively, and an expanded DEBI infrastructure were consistent recommendations that emerged in the needs assessment. The recommendation aligns with the university's stated commitment to diversity initiatives, which highlights the need for staff members who can develop and implement strategies to advance its DEBI initiatives and communicate EWU's offerings and opportunities to a broader range of diverse communities.

For any DEBI model to successfully advance equity at EWU, certain key elements must be in place. The chosen approach must focus on all constituents - faculty, staff, and students - recognizing that each group has unique needs and challenges. Dedicated staff with expertise in each constituency are essential, regardless of the DEBI unit's position within the administrative structure.

To be effective, the DEBI lead must have the authority to allocate resources, propose policies, and establish accountability measures. Regular access to senior leadership, especially the president, is crucial for advocacy and progress reporting. Additionally, fostering a supportive organizational culture that values DEBI efforts, encourages cross-departmental collaboration, and promotes DEBI staff development is vital. By ensuring these foundational elements are present, the DEBI infrastructure can more effectively drive meaningful change and advance equity across all levels of the university.

Building upon these foundational elements, there are several models that can be explored to help the university design an expanded DEBI leadership infrastructure. One option is to establish a Vice President for Diversity, Equity, Belonging & Inclusion position with clearly defined responsibilities and authority.

### VP of DEBI

This is the latest model utilized by EWU. For several years, the VP of DEBI reported directly to the university President and sat on the President's cabinet. The VP oversaw the development and implementation of DEBI strategies across the university and played an integral role in all high-level decision-making at the institution. The benefits of this model include a unified direction and strategy for DEBI initiatives across the entire institution, ensuring consistency and alignment with university goals while wielding elevated authority to advocate for DEBI at the highest levels of decision-making. In addition, this centralized leadership structure allows for more effective resource allocation, establishment of institution-wide accountability measures, and facilitation of collaboration between different units, ultimately enhancing the overall impact of DEBI efforts across the university.

However, feedback during the needs assessment process was mixed regarding the effectiveness of this model at EWU. While many faculty, staff, and students supported it, leadership expressed concerns about its fragmentation, disorganization, and lack of coordination. They noted that the VP of DEBI had to collaborate with multiple unit leads and VPs across the institution to advance DEBI initiatives, ultimately compromising accountability. Although this is a prominent model in higher education and has been successful at other universities, it is important to remember that the fundamental elements describe above must be in place, such as a leader with authority to propose policies, and establish accountability measures, as well as a unit with adequate financial and human resources to effectively implement university-wide initiatives. Without these key elements, this model would be ineffective at any university. A consistent theme in the needs assessment among those faculty, staff and students who supported this model was the lack of authority and resources allocated to the VP of DEBI at EWU.

Another drawback of this model is there could be a danger that other departments might view DEBI as solely the responsibility of the central unit, rather than a shared commitment. In addition, the landscape of DEBI is changing in higher education, with many state legislators opposing DEBI efforts, making it increasingly more difficult to secure and protect state funding for these initiatives. Given this opposition to DEBI, some organizations are moving to other models to continue the work with less political opposition.

### Expand the Responsibility of Another VP

A second option could be to expand the role of another senior leader at the institution, such as the Vice President of Human Resources. In this model, the VP role would be expanded to explicitly include DEBI responsibilities, and the title would reflect that expanded responsibility, such as VP of People, Culture and Equity (a combination between HR and DEBI). This leader would oversee both their traditional domains, as well as the DEBI initiatives across the university. A dedicated DEBI office would be established within the VP's division, led by an AVP of Inclusive Excellence who reports directly to the VP. The office would have its own staff focused on implementing and coordinating DEBI initiatives across the university. DEBI principles and goals would be integrated into all aspects of the VP's domain. For example,

within HR, this would include recruitment, hiring, retention, and professional development practices.

Given EWU's strength in community partnerships, another option in this model is to create a Vice President of Community Engagement and Inclusive Excellence. This unit could foster a culture of inclusive excellence both within the university and in its interactions with the broader community. The primary goals would include promoting inclusive excellence across all university activities, strengthening community partnerships through equity-focused engagement, enhancing academic learning through community-based experiences, and advancing DEBI initiatives within the university and surrounding community. This unit would be divided into two main branches, each led by an Associate Vice President. The Associate Vice President for Academic Community Engagement, focusing on academically oriented community engagement, overseeing areas such as service-learning programs, faculty community-based research, and student internship and co-op programs. The Associate Vice President for Equity and Community Partnerships would concentrate on equity-focused community engagement, managing initiatives related to diversity and inclusion, community equity programs, and cultural centers and affinity groups. This structure allows for specialized focus on both academic community engagement and equity-focused initiatives while promoting collaboration between these areas under unified leadership, addressing the unique needs of faculty, staff, and students while also engaging effectively with the broader community.

Regardless of the unit in which DEBI would be housed, it would be important for the unit to include a few other key staff members, a Director of Assessment and Accountability, to measure the impact of unit initiatives, and a Communications and Outreach Specialist, to manage internal and external communications about unit activities. In addition, an advisory committee comprising faculty, staff, students, and community members could be formed to provide input and feedback on DEBI initiatives. This committee would ensure that diverse perspectives are considered in decision-making processes. Each academic and administrative department could also designate a DEBI liaison who works closely with the DEBI office to implement initiatives at the departmental level.

Benefits of this structure include the potential for greater integration of DEBI principles into core university functions. For example, if combined with HR, it could lead to more inclusive hiring practices and employee development programs. If paired with Community Engagement, it might result in more equitable community partnerships and outreach initiatives. This dual-role leadership can also provide a broader perspective on how DEBI intersects with other crucial university operations, potentially leading to more holistic and far-reaching strategies. Additionally, this structure might be more cost-effective for the university, combining leadership roles and potentially streamlining administrative processes.

However, there are significant drawbacks to consider. The primary concern is that DEBI efforts might become secondary to the other major responsibility, potentially diluting the focus and resources dedicated to DEBI initiatives. The Vice President may struggle to give adequate attention to both areas, particularly given the complex and evolving nature of DEBI work.

There's also a risk that the DEBI function could be perceived as less important or merely an add-on to another administrative area, rather than a central, stand-alone priority for the university. Furthermore, this structure might limit the VP's ability to fully advocate for DEBI issues, as their attention and political capital within the university would be divided between two significant areas of responsibility.

The success of such a structure would largely depend on the individual leader's ability to balance both roles effectively, the university's commitment to prioritizing DEBI alongside other responsibilities, and the resources allocated to support both functions adequately. It would require careful consideration and ongoing evaluation to ensure that DEBI efforts are not compromised in this dual-role leadership model.

### *Distributed Model - DEBI Council*

A third option the university might use to expand the DEBI leadership infrastructure is the distributed model in which responsibility and engagement is distributed across the institution rather than centralized under a single executive position. In this model, leadership for DEBI would rest with a DEBI Council or Equity Action Team, which would consist of representatives from various stakeholder groups including faculty, staff, students, and community members. Members would be drawn from different departments, ensuring broad representation from across the university. Instead of a VP, the council could be chaired by three senior leaders, such as a Provost, an administrative VP, and the Chief of Staff to ensure both academic and operational perspectives are represented. These three chairs would report directly to the university President and Board of Trustees. The council would oversee several working groups, each focused on a specific aspect of DEBI, such as curriculum, student support, hiring practices and community outreach. Each administrative department and college within the university could also designate a DEBI coordinator. These coordinators would liaison between their department and the DEBI Council, ensuring that initiatives are implemented across the institution. A student-led advisory board could also work alongside the DEBI Council, ensuring student voices are central to the DEBI efforts. While not led by a VP, this model would still require dedicated staff support, potentially including a full-time DEBI director and administrative staff to coordinate efforts and track progress.

This model encourages broader engagement and ownership of DEBI initiatives across the institution, potentially leading to greater buy-in and commitment from various departments and units. It brings together diverse perspectives from different areas of the university, which can result in more comprehensive and nuanced approaches to DEBI issues. The distributed structure also offers flexibility, allowing for adaptations to the specific needs and contexts of different departments or academic units, and may lead to more seamless integration of DEBI initiatives into various aspects of university operations.

However, this model also presents several challenges. The lack of a single, high-level executive responsible for DEBI can make it difficult to set cohesive strategies and priorities, and may lead to accountability issues. Resource allocation can be more challenging without centralized control, and there's a risk of inconsistent interpretation and implementation of DEBI initiatives



across different units. The distributed model may also result in less visibility and influence for DEBI efforts at the highest levels of university leadership. Additionally, ensuring effective communication and coordination between various units and the DEBI Council or Equity Action Team can be complex and time-consuming.

The success of this model largely depends on the university's commitment to DEBI, the effectiveness of the council or team's leadership, and the establishment of clear communication channels and accountability measures. While it can promote widespread engagement, care must be taken to ensure that DEBI remains a top priority and that efforts are coordinated and impactful across the institution.

#### Summary of Response to Question 5

In response to the inquiry regarding effective models to align DEBI efforts at the university, details for three models were provided, a Vice President of DEBI, expanding the responsibility of another VP to include DEBI, and a distributed model with a DEBI Council. Fundamental to each of these models is the importance of having key elements in place for any DEBI model to succeed, including a focus on all constituents, dedicated staff with expertise, authority to allocate resources and establish accountability, and a supportive organizational culture.

Each model has its own strengths and challenges. The VP of DEBI model offers a unified strategy and elevated authority but may face political opposition and resource constraints. Expanding another VP's role to include DEBI could lead to greater integration of DEBI principles into core university functions but risks diluting focus on DEBI initiatives. The distributed model encourages broader engagement across the institution but may struggle with cohesive strategy-setting and accountability. Regardless of the chosen model, success depends on the university's commitment to DEBI, effective leadership, and the establishment of clear communication channels and accountability measures.

#### **Summary and Conclusions**

This report presents a comprehensive analysis of EWU DEBI efforts, based on qualitative data from focus groups, individual interviews and an online qualitative survey. The findings reveal a complex landscape where DEBI programs are positively received, yet significant challenges persist. These challenges include organizational confusion, lack of a centralized DEBI structure, and a disconnect between the university's stated commitment to diversity and the lived experiences of underrepresented students and faculty.

The analysis highlights critical issues faced by minoritized communities at EWU, including feelings of isolation, experiences of racism and microaggressions, and a perception of inadequate support from campus leadership. Faculty and staff from underrepresented backgrounds report job insecurity and lack of recognition for their DEBI efforts. The study also identifies systemic barriers impeding equal access to education and support services, which contribute to racial equity gaps in graduation rates.

To address these challenges, several recommendations are offered. These include creating a unified DEBI governance structure, enhancing academic support systems for marginalized students, improving communication and transparency, and implementing comprehensive DEI training programs. The importance of diversifying EWU's workforce, creating culturally inclusive environments, and addressing historical trauma through open dialogue and restorative justice practices is emphasized. In addition, three potential models for aligning DEBI efforts are offered, 1) a Vice President of DEBI, 2) expanding another VP's role to include DEBI, or 3) a distributed model with a DEBI Council.

In conclusion, while EWU has made efforts in DEBI initiatives, there is a clear need for more comprehensive and systemic changes to create a truly inclusive and equitable campus environment. The success of any chosen model or strategy will depend on the university's commitment to DEBI, effective leadership, and the establishment of clear communication channels and accountability measures. By addressing these issues head-on and implementing the proposed recommendations, EWU has the opportunity to significantly improve its campus climate, close equity gaps, and foster an environment where all members of the university community can thrive.

## Appendix A

### Focus Group/Interview Protocol

**Purpose:** Eastern Washington University is embarking on a process to learn the perspectives of its community members to identify strategies to improve the campus climate and to address equity gaps among students at the university. Focus groups are organized to collect detailed feedback from the EWU community about their experiences and perceptions of campus climate, university leadership, support systems, freedom of expression, and diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives at EWU.

**Participants:** EWU students, staff, faculty, and community stakeholders

**Duration:** 45-60 minutes

#### Preparing the Room

- Set up the Otter.ai so that the audio can be captured and recorded for data analysis
- Turn on the PowerPoint presentation with the questions (to address accessibility)
- Arrange chairs

#### Agenda:

- Welcome and introductions - 1 minute
- Explanation of the process - 1 minute
- Establish group norms; solicit questions - 2 minutes
- Discussion - 40-50 minutes
- Wrap up and next steps - 2 minutes

#### During the focus group

##### 1. Welcome (1 minute)

Introduce and welcome the participants and thank them for their participation.

- *Greetings and welcome! Thank you for taking the time to be with us today. My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I am a consultant with CORE Perspectives, a diversity, equity, and inclusion consulting firm contracted by EWU.*

##### 2. Explanation of the process (1 minute)

Explain why the focus group is being conducted and the importance of consent, participation, and accessibility of information.

- *This focus group aims to learn about your insights, experiences and perceptions of EWU.*
- *We will ask questions about five key areas: campus climate and your sense of belonging, closing equity gaps, improving retention, freedom of expression, safety, and collaborative DEI initiatives at EWU.*
- *Your presence today indicates your consent to participate and share your experiences. Your participation is voluntary. Please feel free to leave the room if the topics discussed cause any distress, harm or discomfort to you.*

- *This meeting is being recorded (audio only). We want you to know, however, that confidentiality is assured. We will not share your identity in any of our reports.*

**3. Establish group norms (1 minute)**

- *We want to hear from everyone, so feel free to speak up and engage in the discussion.*
- *Respect the participants in the room and their opinions on different topics.*
- *We ask that you share your thoughts one person at a time.*
- *There are no right or wrong answers.*
- *What is said in this room stays in this room.*

**4. Address any questions (1 minute)**

Ask the participants if they have any questions. Respond to them briefly.

- *Do you have any questions before we begin?*

**5. Start the group discussion (50 minutes)**

Script	Probing questions	Time allocated
<p><i>Let's start by discussing how you feel about your overall campus experience</i></p> <p><i>What makes you feel that you belong and are included here at EWU?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How would you describe the current state of diversity, equity and inclusion at EWU?</li> <li>• Can you share specific events or incidents that affected your sense of belonging at EWU?</li> <li>• In what ways do you think the university could further foster a sense of belonging?</li> </ul>	8 - 10 minutes
<p><i>Moving on, we would like to hear your thoughts on how the university leadership could address diversity, equity and inclusion on campus.</i></p> <p><i>What do you think EWU leadership should do as a priority to ensure that every student enrolled is retained and graduates on time regardless of where they came from or how much money they, their parents or family paid towards their degree?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If you had a magic wand, which three equity-based challenges would be solved?</li> <li>• What role should students, staff and faculty play in advancing diversity, equity and inclusion at the institution?</li> </ul>	8 - 10 minutes

<p><i>What specific support systems are essential to ensure psychological and physical safety for all members of the EWU community?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can you think of any specific initiatives that would help promote safety for everyone?</li> </ul>	8 - 10 minutes
<p><i>How would you rate your ability to express your thoughts and opinions freely at EWU?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What specific steps could be taken to improve it?</li> </ul>	8 - 10 minutes
<p><i>Next, we would like to get your input on DEI collaboration on campus.</i></p> <p><i>What opportunities do you see for effective collaboration among the university's offices and services to better support students and to ensure every student has the opportunity to be successful, regardless of their background?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can you share examples of successful diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives at EWU in the past and now?</li> <li>• Which campus partners would you consider to be DEI leaders at EWU?</li> <li>• How well do they work together now?</li> <li>• Are there ways they could improve their collaboration?</li> </ul>	8 - 10 minutes

## 6. Wrap up (2 minutes)

Thank the participants and provide them with next steps.

- *This concludes today's focus group. Thank you once again for joining us and providing your valuable input. We will be analyzing the aggregated data from all of the focus groups.*

## Appendix B

### Survey

Do you believe that you are an essential part of the university's mission to retain, support and graduate all students, regardless of demographic background? If so, how? (F, S)

What spaces and places do you feel most comfortable at EWU? What is special or unique about the places you like to hang out? Please feel free to list more than one place, if applicable. (ST)

Where do (did) you go or what activities do (did) you engage in on campus to find support, belonging, and connection? What is (was) special or unique about those places or activities that facilitate(d) your sense of belonging and connection? Please feel free to list more than one place/activity, if applicable. (F, S, A)

What could the university change to increase your (students') sense of belonging at EWU? (F, S, ST, A)

Please describe how comfortable you are (were) in expressing your thoughts and opinions at EWU. (F, S, ST, A)

Based on your knowledge or experience, what are (were) some of the reasons that students withdraw (withdrew) from EWU? (F, S, ST, A)

What suggestions do you have for helping EWU better support the academic success and retention of all students, with a particular focus on students from underrepresented and marginalized backgrounds? (ST, A)

What offices, services, or units at EWU should be responsible for ensuring that every student is retained and graduates on time? (F, S)

Reflecting on your answer to the previous question, what could these offices, services, or units do to better retain all students, particularly those students from underrepresented and marginalized backgrounds? (F, S)

How could collaboration among these offices, services, or units improve to ensure the success of every student at EWU? (F, S)

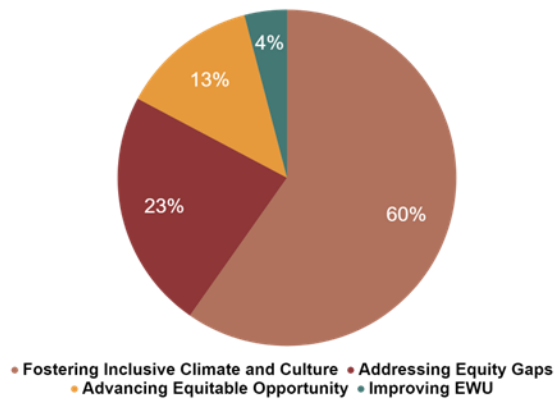
Demographics: Race/Ethnicity, Gender, Student Academic Level, Faculty Role, Recipient of Pell, LGBTQ+, Age, Psychological and Physical Disability, Other Identity

\*Note: F = faculty, S = staff, ST = student, A = alums

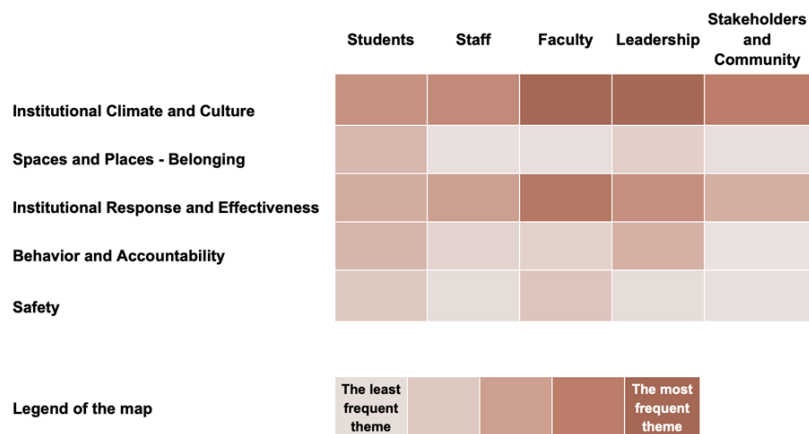
## Appendix C

### Themes/Subthemes

#### Top four themes that emerged from the qualitative analysis



#### 1. Fostering Inclusive Climate and Culture



This larger theme encompasses the interplay of social, cultural, and institutional factors that shaped students' experiences at EWU. It reflects the tension between the university's efforts to create a diverse and welcoming environment and the

challenges faced by students, particularly those from marginalized groups. The theme highlights the importance of fostering a sense of belonging and safety, while also addressing concerns about discrimination, accountability, and institutional response to incidents that negatively impact the campus climate. Overall, this theme highlights the critical role of inclusive practices and responsive policies in creating a positive and supportive educational environment at EWU.

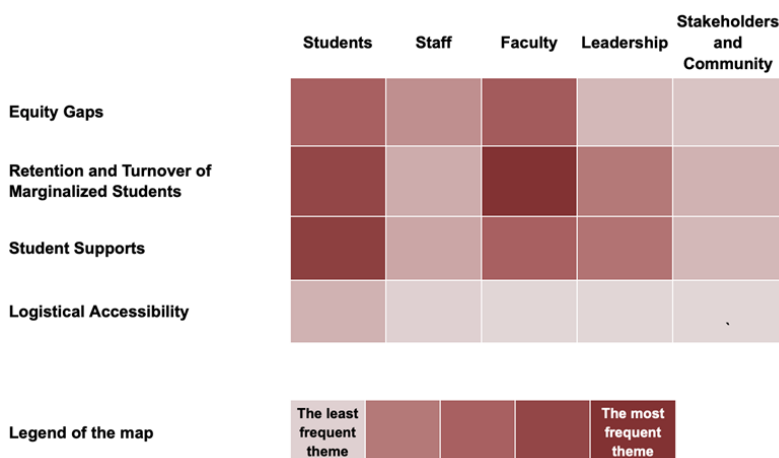
- a. ***Institutional Climate and Culture*** - encompasses concepts of community, belonging, respect, and feeling valued, as well as reflections on EWU's overall climate. This subtheme emerged as the most prevalent, with **338 coded entries** from focus groups and interviews. Nearly 59% were negative, 21% positive, and 20% neutral.
- b. ***Spaces and Places*** – highlights spaces on campus that provide opportunities to connect with others and find support and a sense of belonging. This subtheme



was comprised of **152 responses from students, 48 from faculty and 86 from staff.**

- c. ***Institutional Response and Effectiveness*** – responses in this theme indicated a perceived inadequacy in the institution's handling of racist and heterosexist incidents. It consisted of **168 comments** the majority suggesting the institution's response was inadequate.
  - i. ***Superficial and Performative*** – this subtheme consisted of **27 comments** concerning the lack of genuine commitment.
- d. ***Behavior and Accountability*** – this theme included concerns raised about racist or bigoted behaviors and the perceived lack of accountability. This subtheme consisted of **65 comments** regarding behavior concerns.
- e. ***Safety*** - responses included both physical and psychological aspects of safety and freedom of expression. These subtheme consisted of **38 comments** from focus groups and **316 survey responses**, 121 from students, 123 from staff and 72 from faculty.
- f. ***Other themes*** - workload and institutional identity

## 2. Addressing Equity Gaps



This theme encompasses the university's various structural and systemic challenges that impede equal access to education and support services for all students. It highlights how institutional practices, from classroom dynamics to the physical layout of the campus,

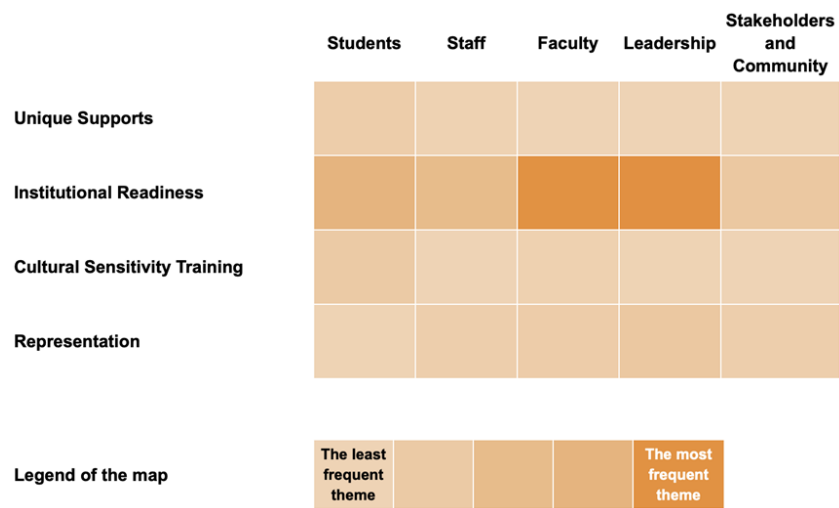
can inadvertently create or perpetuate disparities in student outcomes. The theme underscores the interconnected nature of these barriers, showing how issues in information dissemination, siloed support services, physical accessibility, and cultural inclusivity collectively contribute to a system that may disadvantage certain student populations, particularly those from marginalized backgrounds. Participants from those marginalized backgrounds reportedly felt that EWU was ill-equipped to address future equity gaps, citing their own experiences of inequity as evidence.

- a. ***Equity Gaps*** – this theme identifies institutional performance gaps contributing to differential educational outcomes. There were **65 comments from focus groups and interviews** and 62% were negative, with the remaining being primarily neutral suggestions and some positive observations. There were **226**

**survey responses** that comprised this subtheme, 141 from faculty and 85 comments from staff.

- b. **Retention and Turnover of Marginalized Students** – this theme focused on retention and turnover of marginalized students, a key aspect of helping to address equity gaps. There were **102 comments from focus groups and interviews** and 70% were negative. There were **305 survey responses** that comprised this subtheme, 116 from students, 69 from faculty and 120 comments from staff.
- c. **Student Supports** – these responses highlighted areas for improvement in the implementation and accessibility of the services. It was comprised of **85 comments**.
- d. **Logistical Accessibility** – this theme focused on navigating the campus and locating buildings, which was viewed as difficult, leading to confusion about where to seek help. There were **10 comments** from the focus groups that comprised this subtheme, 8 negative and 2 neutral.

### 3. Advancing Equitable Opportunity

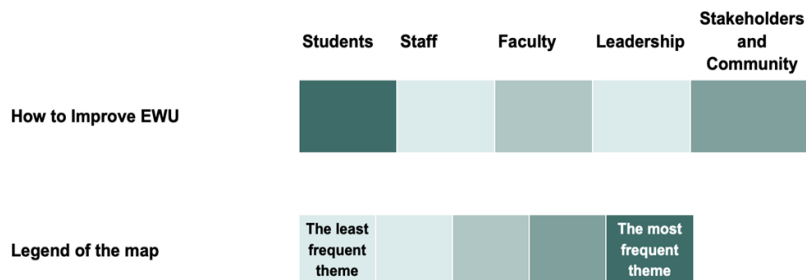


This overarching theme describes the complex context of challenges and strengths in EWU's approach to DEBI. While there was positive recognition of existing DEBI programs, particularly the Multicultural Center, the feedback revealed systemic issues that hindered

the full realization of equitable opportunities. These included inadequate funding for cultural events and interdisciplinary programs, unclear organizational structures, and a lack of diversity among faculty and staff that reflects the student body. The theme underscores the need for a more comprehensive, well-communicated, and sustainably funded DEBI strategy that permeates all aspects of university life, from student support services to cultural sensitivity training. There was also consensus on the need for resources to attract, recruit, retain, and reward employees, as well as build diverse talent pipelines. However, doubts persisted about the senior administration's commitment and EWU's ability to become a preferred employer, given its structural equity issues.

- a. **Unique Supports** - this subcategory highlights the positive reception of DEBI programs and offices on campus. There were **10 comments** from the focus groups that comprised this subtheme.
- b. **Institutional Readiness** - This subcategory summarizes the institution's current state of preparedness to effectively support and promote equity for its diverse student body
  - i. **Sustainable DEI** – describes EWU’s investment in DEIB initiatives on campus. There were **84 comments** that comprised this subtheme. The majority of respondents (61%) in this subtheme expressing dissatisfaction, while 21% remained neutral, and the rest provided positive feedback.
  - ii. **Organizational Structure** - captures participants' viewpoints on how the various DEIB offices, activities, and initiatives are currently organized and suggestions for how they should be structured. There were **59 comments**, of which 32 were negative, 19 were neutral, and the rest were positive.
  - iii. **Resource Allocation** – major points raised focused on budget cuts for interdisciplinary programs that include Women’s and Gender Studies, Africana Studies, and other humanities and social sciences programs. There were **81 comments** that comprised this subtheme.
- c. **Cultural Sensitivity Training** – responses emphasized a need for intentional and sustainable cultural sensitivity training for the EWU community. There were **13 comments** that comprised this subtheme.
- d. **Representation** – responses focused on a perceived mismatch between the diversity of EWU's student body and that of its faculty, staff, and leadership. This subtheme was comprised of **29 comments**.

#### 4. Improving EWU



Respondents provided a wealth of suggestions when asked about improving EWU's culture and climate, resulting in **43 distinct qualitative themes**. A prominent

idea among the responses was a perceived misalignment between EWU's institutional structure and its stated objectives. The university's publicly declared mission emphasizes providing "an inclusive, equitable, and transformative learning experience" while "driving the pursuit of knowledge with affordable academic excellence." Many participants expressed the view that the current organizational framework may not fully support these aspirations. They suggested that to effectively realize its mission, EWU might benefit from reviewing and potentially adjusting its institutional structure.

Suggestions included realigning DEI units to better serve student needs, particularly in light of recent leadership changes. They also emphasized the importance of developing inclusive criteria for shared governance processes. To address concerns about leadership efficacy, they proposed reviewing the authority and equity granted to senior diversity roles.

- a. ***Improving sense of belonging*** – described ways the university could enhance a sense of belonging among students and consisted of **308 survey responses**, 122 from students, 116 from staff and 70 from faculty.
- b. ***Additional recommendations for improvements*** – these responses included various individual suggestions to help improve EWU that participants offered spontaneously without prompting