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Commitment of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Higher Education: Exploring DEI Elements Across Institutions

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COMMITMENT TO DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION IN HIGHER EDUCATION: EXPLORING DEI ELEMENTS ACROSS INSTITUTIONS

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

IEM   Inclusive Excellence Model

HEI   Higher Educational Institution

DEI   Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

R1   Carnegie Research I

R2   Carnegie Research II

AACU   American Association of Colleges and Universities

ICL   Inclusive Language Guide

GNB   Gender Neutral Bathrooms

CCS   Campus Climate Survey

NADOHE National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education

ABSTRACT

Dana R. Abrams, M. A., University of South Alabama, August 2022. COMMITMENT TO DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION IN HIGHER EDUCATION: EXPLORING DEI ELEMENTS ACROSS INSTITUTIONS. Chair of Committee: Phillip, Habel, Ph.D.

This study examined the factors influencing university prioritization of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). Using a framework grounded in organizational behavior—I examine commitment and ethical climate from an open systems perspective. This research was further informed by the Inclusive Excellence Framework—a meta-analysis aimed to integrate DEI efforts through dimensions of organizational behavior, and Smith et al.'s (1997) framework analysis of DEI research. This thesis explores DEI values and objectives, the procedures to address discrimination, and DEI elements and established structures. Through both quantitative and qualitative analyses of DEI websites across universities, this thesis offers a new perspective on organizational culture and commitment in higher education to DEI. The findings from the quantitative analysis revealed that factors such as the presence of a Diversity Action Team do not increase the commitment level of higher education institutions towards DEI initiatives compared to other factors like institutional characteristics. The institutional characteristics—such as gender and Carnegie Research Classification influences the direction of prioritization for HEIs and indicates if the HEI will actively commit to implementing DEI initiatives.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Increasing diversity has been a consistent agenda in higher education for the last three decades—evolving to include diverse initiatives and issues on college campuses. The first series of initiatives focused on increasing racial and ethnicity diversity at predominantly white institutions, followed by the inclusion of gender equity strategies. Finally, desegregation mandates and social justice activism based on equal opportunity and equality principles brought upon minority access and gender equity (Milem al., 2012). The 2020 murder of George Floyd, the rise in anti-Asian sentiment during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the prevalence of Black Lives Matter across higher education institutions have served as catalysts for universities to reevaluate their commitment to DEI efforts (Casellas Connors & McCoy, 2022; Trolian & Parker III, 2022). Other factors such as increased advantages from a heterogenous workforce and student body contribute to a greater need for prioritization of DEI (Q Tan, 2019). As a result, higher education institutions have strived to cultivate safe and inclusive environments across diverse frameworks.

Institutions utilize various avenues to recruit students and faculty along with making current staff and students feel safe, including using publicly accessible sources like websites to highlight their values, such as their inclusivity-related plans. Previous

studies have relied on websites to understand and assess university priorities, including in areas related to DEI (Templeton et al., 2016). HEI websites serve as a marketing technique for organizations, and 84% of prospective students note using websites to gather information on future schools. The internet is vital in marketing and serves as a dominant outlet for higher education institutions (Saichaie & Morphew, 2014).

Potential students can acquire knowledge through these mediums. In addition, websites are the first and only point of contact for some prospective students and their parents—with final decisions made simply by perusing web sources; therefore, a platform highlighting brand awareness and institutional values constitutes a reasonable basis for analysis (Saichaie and Morphew, 2014). The online resources function as mediums to host strategic planning and the implementation processes—intersecting initiatives aim to solve systematic challenges of the institutions. Research shows that universities utilize strategic plans and mission statements to prioritize diversity concerns. By doing so, universities can reallocate required funding and resources to complete DEI initiatives (U.S. Department of Education).

Through an analysis of universities' websites, specifically the diversity, equity, and inclusion homepages and related web content, the study examines the factors influencing university prioritization of diversity, equity, and inclusion. By examining the presence of a series of common DEI initiatives and the availability of related web content, this thesis draws conclusions about the importance and prioritization of DEI across institutions, and moreover, the factors that drive commitment. I utilize a framework grounded in organization theory and several DEI frameworks to assess collegiate institutions' commitment. The open systems organizational approach to

institutional design and structure will assist in connecting universities' priorities to DEI to its contingency upon the environment. In other words, an open systems approach emphasizes that organizations' survival is dependent upon the environment and subject to political, social, and economic forces—which influence DEI commitments (Scott & Davis, 2007). For example, this will allow further exploration of public versus private institutions to DEI commitments and the influence of the surrounding community on the implementation of DEI initiatives.

Inclusive Excellence Framework—a meta-analysis aimed to integrate diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts, to the core of organizational function, and Smith et al. 's (1997) framework analysis of DEI assists in conceptualizing its principles and drawing connections to organizational success. Berger et al. (2005) argue that political and legal pressures either hinder or enhance inclusive excellence. Recent judiciary support of diversity as a potential education benefit serves as an example of working for inclusive excellence (Berger et. al, 2005, p. 5). Organizational excellence through DEI initiatives cannot be achieved without acknowledgment of shifting demographic, such as the rise of transgender students in higher education and increased numbers of communities of color among university students (Beemyn, 2005). Additionally, political realities, resource allocation and funding, bureaucratic structures, and academic norms are all factors

influencing higher education institutions' commitment to implementing and sustaining DEI practices (Berger et al., 2005, p. 4-5).

1.1 Contributions

The purpose of this study is to identify factors influencing universities' prioritization of diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives and resources. Significant literature surrounding organizational theory neglects the human element of institutions and often does not properly address concerns of racism and oppression through values and norms (Squire, 2016). This thesis offers a new perspective on organizational culture and commitment in post-secondary institutions to diversity, equity, and inclusion through quantitative and qualitative analyses. Drawing upon institutional theories, I will provide a unique viewpoint on the intersection of diversity, inclusion, and equity themes and environment contingency. Environmental contingency refers to the belief organizations strive to patch their internal conditions to their external surroundings (Scott & Davis, 2007). I will utilize environmental contingency, the need to acknowledge and reshape the environment to survive, as a series of factors explaining HEIs' commitment to implementing and maintaining diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives and resources.

1.2 Structure

This study contributes to a broader range of research on universities' DEI objectives. Chapter II presents a conceptual framework for diversity, equity, and inclusion grounded in the existing literature. Additionally, this thesis uses higher education institutions is understood as "open systems" that are subject to political and

social changes that can take place at the federal, state, or local levels as a framework for the research. The open, available-systems nature of HEIs leaves organizations susceptible to changes surrounding communities demanding greater implementation and further adjusting of DEI initiatives. Relying on theory from organizational behavior, this thesis will explain how post-secondary education institutions utilize DEI initiatives to achieve goals and overall mission. I will draw on the Inclusive Excellence Model and Smith's meta-analysis on DEI efforts to assess the prioritization and work done by higher education institutions. Chapter III introduces the methodology section of the research and outlines the research design. In this section, I will describe the data gathered and the method choices. In Chapter IV, I discuss the major findings of the study including the results of the data analysis and other significant outcomes of the testing methods. Chapter V concludes with the theoretical framework of the research as it applies to the data results and avenues of future research.

CHAPTER II

LITERATUE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptualizing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

The research considers diversity, equity, and inclusion as a working unit or having a symbiotic relationship to achieve desired goals. I begin with diversity, as its history is more extensive and has been at the forefront of higher education for a longer period than both inclusion and equity. Universities in the United States were rooted in the education of white Christian males (Martinez-Acosta & Favero, 2018). The acknowledgment that higher education institutes existed as an entity for privileged white men is a good start to acknowledge the inherent, systemic racism of education in the United States (Martinez-Acosta and Favero, 2018). Scholar Manning (2017) emphasizes that higher education is a diverse enterprise from an international perspective. Institutions can prove commitment to DEI initiatives by acknowledging race and biases. Diversity efforts by higher education institutions began in the mid-1906s' with legislation primarily focused on eradicating barriers to ethnicity and gender (Garcia et al., 2001).

The creation of white women's institutions challenged the previous foundation of men-focused institutions. Several critical historical events initiated American universities' past prioritization of DEI initiatives. The 1890 Morrill Act established

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and served African Americans prohibited from attending white institutions (Manning, 2017). Mid-1960s legislation would continue with the trend toward diversity efforts (Manning, 2017) and affirmative action-related policies passed in the 1960s and 1970s, continuing today, provide pathways and opportunities for students of many backgrounds. Other models of organizational diversity capabilities in higher education were the Multicultural Movement of the 1970s and the Academic Diversity movement in the late 1990s to 2000s (Williams & Clowney, 2007). Institutions established multicultural affairs units, cultural centers, and ethnic and gender-related curricula to progress DEI efforts during the Multicultural Movement.

Williams and Clowney (2007) describes the Multicultural Movement as "institutional diversity efforts designed to provide services for ethnic and racially diverse students, women, and other bounded social identity groups and secondarily to research these groups and constituencies," (pg. 5). The Academic Diversity period followed the Multicultural Movement. The former movement involved integrating diversity into classrooms and courses. Institutions that participated in the Academic Diversity movement aided institutions in prioritizing DEI initiatives and resources for diversity programs like intergroup relation offices (William & Clowney, 2007). The Civil Rights Act of 1965 and the Higher Education Act of 1965 propelled the integration of higher education institutions. The passage of the Civil Rights Act would also spur diversity initiatives for organizations with various levels of success and commitment (Manning, 2017).

Higher education institutions that are integrated into surrounding communities—

embedded in national and local political situations—face increased pressure to respond to

events transitioning from the communities to college campuses (Casellas Connors &

McCoy, 2022). Namely, universities release statements and propose DEI initiatives in

response to growing social issues, changing demographics in the nation, and protecting

marginalized students. In addition, student activism, as protests on college campuses and

national political discord, operate together to engage institutions in the national

conversation (Casellas Connors & McCoy, 2022). Social issues like the response to the

rising anti-Asian sentiment and on-campus protests in wake of Black Lives Matters are

some of the pressures universities faces to implement change.

The rise in conservative media and the moral conflict unfolding between

polarizing political philosophies also affect the landscape of universities. For example, an

increased number of Republicans have reported that higher education has negative

consequences for the country. Conservatives' general skepticism towards higher

education institutions is nothing new and has been a persistent phenomenon. However,

the rise of distrust by 22% has occurred within recent years (Broćić & Miles, 2021).

Protests have escalated between leftist groups and Trump supporters on college

campuses. With the latter arguing that the campus climate is unwelcoming of liberal

thoughts impeded upon freedom of speech and was unwelcoming to conservative

ideologies (Shepard & Culver, 2018). These proposed cases of discrimination against

conservative thinkers are hot button topics on websites like Turning Point USA and

College Fix, then reenforced via broadcast media shows on Fox News (Shepard &

Culver, 2018). College campuses, in turn, feel forced to comply with these increased pressures (Berger et al., 2005). Individuals organizing anti-affirmative action lawsuits and shifting public opinion can obstruct the pursuit of DEI initiatives. The outrage spread by partisan tension and escalating divisiveness between conservative and liberal bodies on college campuses is a challenge against higher education institutions (Shepard & Culver, 2018).

The increased diversification of the United States serves as a motivation for change on college campuses, and institutions have responded by committing to reflect the changing demographic trends (Casellas Connors & McCoy, 2022). By 2050, people of color will constitute 50% of the population, whereas non-Hispanic whites will only make up 47% (Meric et al., 2015). Universities have diversified their student bodies over the last 40 years, and increasing diversification remains a goal for HEIs (Özturgut, 2017). However, some research has shown these institutions with significant non-white students have policies and practices that are detrimental to the progress of students from underrepresented populations (Haynes et al., 2019). Universities have reevaluated previous DEI policies in the wake of Black Lives Matter and the subsequent 2020 murder of George Floyd by Minnesota Police Officers (Casellas Connors & McCoy, 2022) to provide a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive campus environment and educational experience.

These recent incidents and other visible acts of police brutality and social injustices have served as an initiative for HEIs to address systemic inequities. Black Lives Matter, and the subsequent campus-wide protests, are the most significant social movement affecting higher education currently (Haynes et al., 2019). These changes have

forced higher education institutions to restructure their DEI goals and to continue to evaluate a changing cultural, socioeconomic, and political landscape. Taking in account how institutions are nestled in these specific entities, I expect that there will be differences in investment in diversity, equity, and inclusion. It behooves me to conceptualize each of these terms.

2.1.1 Diversity

This section integrates working definitions proposed by the American Association of Colleges and Universities and other scholars to conceptualize diversity. First, the objective is to explore the language of diversity and what it means to do "diversity work" (Ahmed, 2012). Gause (2011) defines diversity as "representations of real or perceived identity constructs based on religion, ideology, political belief, sex, creed, color, national origin, age, socioeconomic status, gender identity/expression, physical characteristics, sexual orientation/identity, able-ness, parental status, (dis)ability, weight, cultural capital, height, and race" (p. 9). Diversity policies often highlight non-seen and seen differences among various groups (Arora-Jonsson & Agren, 2019). In other words, diversity is not always a visible characteristic, such as religion or sexual orientation (Arora-Jonsson & Agren, 2019).

Williams and Clowney (2013) shows that diversity is an umbrella of definitions with various descriptive demographics, and scholars often disagree about which specific interpretations of demographics should be included. Diversification is often synonymous with affirmative action; however, diversity is not legal terminology like affirmative action and does not aim to correct discriminatory action against a minoritized group

(Jordan & Ewing, 2016). Diversity is the incorporation of people from divergent backgrounds and statuses into the broader or dominant group (Özturgut, 2017).

In the context of higher education institutions, the American Association of Colleges and Universities defines diversity as "individual differences (e.g., personality, prior knowledge, and life experiences) and group/social differences (e.g., race/ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, country of origin, and ability and cultural, political, religious, or other affiliations)" (AAC&U [ND]). This working definition includes individual differences and separates itself from definitions that focus entirely on group/social differences. Practitioners note that diversity occasionally replaces previously used terms, such as multiculturalism or equal opportunity.

Diversity can elicit suspicion or skepticism to the opposition of the principle, and some scholars describe the usage of the word in universities as corporatization and a potential barrier to producing genuine change. This is in part due to the market value nature of diversity, as universities can use diversity to market themselves (Ahmed, 2012). Diverse courses are criticized as undermining multiculturalism and a superficial approach to inclusion (Miller et al., 1998). Additionally, diversity is often hailed as a commodity in HEIs, and institutions often incorporate elements of diversity in various sources from mission statements to strategic plans. Elements of diversity reflected in promise statements on strategic plans and the recruitment of "diverse" students are shown as indicators of the universities' commitment level (Jones, 2019).

I define diversity as a practice that is more than just a replacement filler to substitute equal opportunities for marginalized communities or a source of revenue. More precisely, I define the term as the representation of historically marginalized groups

integrated into dominant groups without the acculturation of culture and traits. Taken together, scholars see diversity as the inclusion of demographics with an emphasis placed on race and major discussions focusing on how diverse groups can adapt to the dominant group. Additionally, diversity should not be used as a proxy for race but as a term encompassing multiple dimensions of demographics while acknowledging the uniqueness of the culture and traits. Diversity and inclusion are concepts that now include a mixture and intersection of various identities that extends beyond race (Jones, 2019). For example, states like New Hampshire have less racially diverse communities, and points of diversity in New Hampshire institutions might include gender or religion (Garcia et al., 2001).

However, it is critical to note that diversity can be stripped and undermine through cooptation. In this section, I will discuss two forms of cooptation that can be harmful to true diversity commitment for universities. Organizational theorists defined cooptation in terms of organizations as the way external circumstances are included and alter the decision-making process of the organization. Representatives from external groups can participate in the decision-making process of the overall institution (Scott & Davis, 2007). This can prove detrimental to universities' commitment to DEI initiates as cooptation serves as a hinderance to proper diversity work (Eriksson, 2018). Cooptation is also the acceptance of language and changes on a surface-level. This can lead to issues of tokenism—diversity as simply a tool for the organization. Institutions can appear as if they are merely uplifting the status quo and not making adequate changes. Universities can use 'diverse' language without ever making critical changes to cultivate and implement diversity, equity, and inclusion practices (Jones, 2019).

2.1.2 Equity

Equity is a related concept that has become mainstream in recent years and popularity has increased in tangent with discussions of diversity. According to a report released by the Pell Institute, the first official mission of the Department of Higher Education was to "ensure equal access to education" (Cahalan et al., 2021, pg. 7). This equity forms an important interconnected dynamic with both diversity and inclusion. Equity consists of two components: inclusion, the ability to achieve a fundamental standard of education—and fairness, obstacles that do not hinder education potential. Equity and equality are commonly misconstrued and used interchangeably, yet the two terms differ in their approach. Equality refers to the unbiased treatment for all, providing the same resources or opportunities. Equity of access to higher education is a central focus of governmental policies, including in higher education (Tavares et al., 2022). Equity ensures that everyone has access to equal opportunities without obstacles or systematic disadvantages (Tavares et al., 2022). By applying equity to post-secondary education, students can achieve academic success without the limitation of socioeconomic or dispositional serving as barriers (Ling & Nasri, 2019).

2.1.3 Inclusion

We often use diversity and inclusion interchangeably. However, the principles are not synonymous. One helpful way to distinguish between diversity and inclusion is to view diversity as a noun and inclusion as an action (M.F. Winters, 2013). To view diversity as a noun is to consider the principle as a word to describe a group of individuals. However, examining inclusion through the lenses of action is to see it as an incident of doing. M.F. Winters (2013) notes that diversity is the act of counting heads or

maintaining a certain quota for an organization, and inclusion is "about making heads count."

Scholars examine inclusion as the process of implementing diversity and translating it into a form of participation. Whereas diversity often utilizes demographics and statistics to describe the number of individual groups at an institution, inclusion is described as a "feeling" (Martinez-Acosta & Favero, 2018). The American Association of Colleges and Universities defines inclusion as "the intentional, ongoing, active institutional efforts to reap the educational benefits of diversity." Inclusion is the notion that one's voice is valued on a college campus and diverse communities have a sense of belonging in the environment, seeing representation in the curriculum and around campus (Clayton, 2021). Despite the interweaving nature of the three practices, diversity is often the central focus of measuring successful DEI goals and management. Universities cannot commit to diversity without the addition of inclusion. For example, the implementation of gender-neutral bathrooms instead of traditional bathrooms across universities signal fairness and provides a safe space across identity dimensions (Chaney & Sanchez, 2018).

Thus, inclusion is defined as the ongoing effort to ensure that diverse identities participate in various levels of the organization and remain a part of the institution (Q Tan, 2019). Increasing diversity may not be sufficient to retaining talent at universities, and the lack of success towards these goals is reflected in the completion rates. For example, completion rates among ethnic and racial groups have drastically fallen, and "by as much as 20 percent" (Martinez-Acosta & Favero, 2018, pg. A525). African American men significantly lag behind other ethnic groups including African American

women. Retention in STEM has dropped for minorities and women (Martinez-Acosta & Favero, 2018). Research indicates that 33% of diverse students enter institutions with an interest in STEM programs. The presence of diverse groups on college campuses alone does not indicate changes. The active engagement of diverse constituents reflects universities' achieving missions toward DEI efforts (Berger et al., 2005). Yet several challenges remain, and the number drops drastically when examining numbers that pursue graduate degrees upon completion (Martinez-Acosta & Favero, 2018).

2.3 Open System Theory

Now that I have conceptualized diversity, equity, and inclusion, I will pivot to the theoretical understanding of universities' investment in DEI initiatives and programs. Scholars have viewed universities as open systems (Lunenburg, 2010). Scott and Davis (2007) define open systems as "organizations are congeries of interdependent flows and activities linking shifting coalitions of participants embedded in wider material resource and institutional environment" (p. 40). Thus, the open systems perspective indicates that universities are influenced from their environment, whether cultural, social, or political (Lunenburg, 2010).

Higher education institutions are in a state of exchange with their respective environments. The makeup of the institution includes faculty, students, and state and federal legislation; these elements are seen as inputs from the environment. The inputs perform within the scope of the university to produce outputs—knowledge, research, and skills (Berger et al., 2005). Socio-political changes affect the open-systems nature of higher education institutions, and HEIs must respond to thrive within potential turmoil.

HEIs are not closed off from environmental pressures, as shown by the response to national political unrest and the diversification of the United States population (Casellas Connors & McCoy, 2022). According to Scott and Davis (2007), universities, like other open systems, face limitations with economic and physical resources (Adams & Lanford, 2021). Significant court rulings in areas of diversity, Michigan (Gratz 2003; Grutter 2003), and Texas (Fisher 2016), have played a critical role in shaping diversity policies for institutions. HEIs must restructure policies and missions to comply with newly implemented regulations or face the consequences of violating constitutional rights (Berger et al., 2005).

The growing need for inclusive excellence requires more than just diversity in the workplace. Universities that allow students to engage in diverse learning within the curriculum produce better trained and more culturally aware individuals for the workplace and the community. These individuals tend to have better cognitive and affective abilities than students taught in homogeneous groups (Berger et al., 2005). A cross-cultural experience is critical for preparing students in areas of law, business, and other professions that work for the public interest (Berger et al., 2005).

Like other organizations under the open-system perspective, HEIs rely on cultural and social environments for information, resources, and knowledge. The exchange is critical to remaining at equilibrium or balance—a fundamental goal for survival for organizations (Adams & Lanford, 2021). Closed systems remain stagnant to advances outside the organization, and do not respond to environmental changes, such as diversification and social unrest or pressures from local, state, or federal levels. In contrast, one essential defining trait of open systems is that organizations are "contingent

upon their environment" (Adams & Lanford, 2021, pg. 112). Lawrence and Lorsch emphasize (1967) that organizations who can meet the demands of their environment can achieve the best adaptation (Scott & Davis, 2007). Organizations might create subunits to tackle the undergoing environmental changes (Scott & Davis, 2007). In the context of higher education, the subunits can take form in the newly created DEI departments and task forces (Nunes, 2021).

Public universities are more likely to be open than their private counterparts given their greater dependencies on political and legal environments and their sensitivity to enrollment demands, and thus can be expected to prioritize DEI initiatives, specifically equity and access, (Hearn & Rosinger, 2014). Public institutions have stronger legal and societal obligations to provide equity to all socioeconomic classes—the latter of which does not apply to a private institution in the same manner. Public universities also might have a legal obligation to serve specific regional or geographic counties in the state. The racial makeup of the state can drastically alter the composition of the student body (Garcia et al., 2001). Private post-secondary institutions with a religious affiliation can alter the religious composition of enlistment and recruitment. In other words, students with a specific religious background might be more prone to attend an institution with that religious tradition (Garcia et al., 2001).

Additionally, public institutions also have organizational expectations to be open and available to all. Both private and public institutions offer-need based financial aid for underprivileged students (Hearn & Rosinger, 2014). However, private institutions do not rely on government subsidiaries and depend primarily on private sources of funding— student tuition, income from the endowment, and foundation grants are some of the

avenues private institutions must rely on. Thus, private institutions have more discretion in their commitment to DEI initiations and concerns (Hearn & Rosinger, 2014). According to Hearn and Rosinger (2014), the social obligation to give socioeconomically disadvantaged students access does not exist for private institutions, drastically shaping the student population.

Ecological theorists Pfeffer and Salanick (2003) argue that organizations are dependent upon their environment to receive proper resources to function. This theory belies the foundation for organizational survival in unpredictable environments (Powell and Rey, 2015). Institutions that do not undergo critical changes are subjected to dire consequences. The resource dependency theory emphasizes three dimensions: environmental influences organizations, organizations managing environmental restrictions, and how these constraints or restrictions influences organizational dynamics (Powell & Rey, 2015). The decline in state funding and competitive forces have negatively affected public institutions. The economic environment in the state and support from the public towards public institutions are uniquely linked (Powell & Rey, 2015). The market forces reshape post-secondary institutions with these institutions competing with other universities for resources and making universities more entrepreneurial.

2.4 Organizational Behavior

In this section, I will discuss how Smith et al.'s Diversity and AACU's Inclusive Excellent Model frameworks can assist in analyzing the prioritization levels of universities towards implementing DEI strategies. Berger et al., (2005) examine the

Inclusive Excellence model through four essential dimensions: political, legal, bureaucratic, and symbolic. The organizational behavior dimensions influence higher education leaders' commitment and achievement toward DEI efforts.

To reiterate, the Inclusive Excellence Model is an initiative created by the Association of American Colleges and Universities with the goal of enhancing inclusivity. A key component of the Inclusive Excellence Model is creating strategic planning for implementing DEI initiatives. Higher education institutions begin by integrating diversity characteristics into strategic plans, which aids the university in prioritizing diversity efforts (Williams & Clowney, 2007). The dimensions influencing administrators and leaderships decision towards diversity, equity, and inclusion, are political and legal issues, shifting demographics, social inequities, and workforce imperatives. Higher education leaders and administrators rely on a multidimensional approach to achieve inclusivity.

Studies demonstrate that administrators who approach Berger et al.'s (2005) framework focus on the dimensions of organizational behavior that influence DEI initiatives and resources. Organizational strategies and priorities are not just internal decisions by administrators and leadership. According to Berger et al.,'s organizational structure model (2005), institutional leaders must examine pressures that hinder or enhance the transformative nature of DEI policies. The dimensions can explain why higher education institutions choose to prioritize DEI initiatives and the various levels of commitment toward DEI resources. The systemic perspective acknowledges the open system approach of universities.

The bureaucratic perspective is the most common structure associated with universities (Berger et al., 2005). The formal chains of command and structured dynamic of universities can either hinder or enhance the prioritization of DEI efforts (Tinto, 1993). Berger et. al (2005) argues that it is imperative for institutions to pay attention to structural or bureaucratic barriers to achieve inclusive excellence. Institutions can take actions to overcome the barriers within existing institutional structures, such as creating teams or committees devoted to making DEI efforts a strategic priority (Berger et. al, 2005). The individuals and leaders in the units should be diverse, reflecting the goals of DEI initiatives. Berger et al., (2005) note the risk of cultural exhaustion if institutions form teams with the usual suspects. Cultural fatigue experienced by diverse faculty is an indication that universities often ask the same people of color to serve on action teams. Universities should aim to diversify their approach to the creation of Diversity Task Forces and channel change by requesting different individuals than the usual suspects to join the teams. Berger et al., (2005) note that institutions risk creating groups that are part of the issue rather than part of the solution.

Although the bureaucratic dimension focuses on administrators, the collegial perspective (Berger et al., 2005) emphasizes the faculty's role in inclusive excellence. Berger et al., (2005) research show that the addition of faculty members from underrepresented groups has initiated a re-evaluation of traditional paths of scholarship and everyday processes at the department level. Faculty surveys have noted potential issues concerning historically marginalized groups and describe interactions with departments as troublesome. Faculty play a crucial role in ensuring inclusion by planning

and implementing DEI initiatives with a comprehensive, campus-wide approach (Berger et al., 2005).

For example, equity in hiring, student educational outcomes across ethnic and diverse backgrounds, and curricular changes are some ways faculty members can value differences (Berger et. al, 2005). Creating specific strategic plans and horizontal coordinating units across campuses is essential to inclusive excellence. Vertical coordination is also necessary for uplifting goals across departments. Additionally, formal goals cultivated among different departments can assist higher education institutions in increasing commitment to DEI.

The political dimension acknowledges the highly specialized nature of higher education institutions. The universities are constructed into various departments, colleges, and different administrative units and the grouping nature can often lead to conflicts of interest. Campus politics over what Berger et al., (2005) described as administrative turf, the fight for limited resources, and potentially upsetting hierarchies can hinder DEI efforts. For example, suppose a division seeks to create a program for adjusting diverse students to campus life. In that case, issues can arise regarding who should perform what action and which stakeholders engage in the implementation process. DEI initiatives face deferment as divisions wait for stakeholder support and think of infringing on another division's similar programs (Berger et al., 2005).

The fourth dimension is the symbolic perspective and is the messaging that helps shape organizational environments. Campuses have more symbolic messaging than other organizations (Berger et al., 2005). Occasionally, these messages are more focused on expression than production. Higher education institutions should create direct and clear

goals concerning DEI initiatives. HEIs also must define terminology and understand their

approach to DEI, and varied meanings can hinder the progression. Clarifying what

diversity means to an institution can aid in how each university approaches initiatives.

For some scholars, ethnicity is the primary factor influencing decision-making, and

occasionally, ethnicity is the most crucial element in DEI initiatives, given the United

States' unique history with race (Berger et al., 2005). Other institutions make sexual

orientation, socioeconomic status, or gender an essential component of symbolic

messaging.

2.4.1 Campus Climate

Both Smith et al.'s (1997) and AACU's framework emphasized the importance of

campus climate in implementing diversity, equity, and inclusion. Higher education

institutions can prioritize DEI initiatives by evaluating the campus climate and creating a

positive environment for faculty and students. Campus climate is "the cumulative

attitudes, behaviors, and standards of employees and students concerning access for, the

inclusion of, and level of respect for individual and group needs, abilities, and potential"

(Garvey et al., 2019, pg. 30). Campus climate sought to evaluate the belonging of

historically underrepresented groups. Recently, this dimension was extended beyond

ethnicity and race to include sexual orientation, religion, and individuals with disabilities

(Garcia et al., 2001). Researchers have noted that many people of color often describe the

climate of predominantly white institutions as chilly or hostile in some respects and

feelings of alienation on campuses. Diversity is a double-edged sword without

institutions providing an atmosphere that fosters belonging and inclusion.

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Discrimination still exists in a welcoming atmosphere for underrepresented groups, yet universities reap from the benefits of a diverse student body—interpersonal relationships that foster creativity and understanding. The National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education indicates that climate is described as the mood of the institution, and culture is labeled. Culture is the amalgamation of shared beliefs and values, how individuals act within an organization (universities), and basic assumptions developed by the group. Alternatively, the climate results from feelings towards the environment on a college or university campus (National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education).

Administrators can measure campus climate through evaluations and data that contribute to strengthening DEI programs (Garcia et al., 2001). Institutions use two types of assessments to evaluate the strength and success of DEI initiatives. Formative evaluations are used to strengthen the program specifically, and individuals in the diversity programs utilize the feedback to make significant corrections. Summative evaluations focus on comparing institutions or programs and evaluating the trends of programs (Garcia et al., 2001). Summative evaluations are often given to decision-makers who are not as close to the DEI programs as those responsible for the implementation.

Higher education institutions can utilize these institutional audits on culture and climate to achieve "equitable student outcomes" (National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education). Evaluation efforts can determine if programs should be either improved or abandoned completely if the programs do not meet adequate results (Garcia et al., 2001). Additionally, the evaluations determine institutional public policy and potential planning towards arenas such as retention and curricula. If higher education

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institutions seek to commit to DEI initiatives, assessments of efforts are one of the primary ways of showcasing prioritization (Garcia et al., 2001).

The racial climate on campus includes the following characteristics—access to instructors, social support, and student social adjustment. By merely increasing diverse numbers and not attending to difficult racial climates on campus, higher education institutes are not maintaining a proper climate environment for underrepresented students (Henry et al., 2011). For example, African American students might face discrimination on an individual level at predominantly white institutions and are hindered by practices that have a negative impact on race (Campbell et al., 2019). Most white higher education institutions do not create environments to facilitate a welcoming campus for students of color. Additionally, for African American students, success in academics is uniquely tied to a positive campus climate experience (Campbell et al., 2019). Other factors contributing to campus climate are admissions selectivity and student characteristics (Miller et al., 1998).

Smith's framework on diversity (2014), which I will go into deeper detail in the next section, also examines the importance of campus climate and intergroup relations. Engaging in campus climates through surveys and other evaluation forms to understand the experience of underrepresented groups on campus is a step an institution can take to address concerns. The third dimension derives from education and scholarship. Institutions can address diversity concerns through curriculum transformation initiatives, faculty addressing diversity issues in the classroom, and departments that directly manage diversity-related scholarships. Institutional viability is concerned with the presence of

diversity prominent in planning processes, mission statements, and the presence of faculty of color.

According to the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education, areas of concern in cultural analysis range from the racial and ethnic composition of the student body to how institutions virtually portray themselves on platforms such as websites and social media accounts. Alternatively, we must look at how the institutions describe ethnic or minority students and faculty on the websites.

Location is a critical aspect of campus climate. The cultural and socioeconomic conditions of the community can influence the institution's identity. According to Garcia et al., (2001), the location of the campus can affect the comfort level of students in the surrounding communities. Institutions can error when solely addressing diversity issues on campus and not responding to racial differences in the specific state or the surrounding community. Garcia's et. al (2001) emphasizes the need to address concerns of policing and racial tension in college towns or understanding the cultural environment of the community through campus climate surveys. Students can feel comfortable on campuses, but ostracized in the surrounding areas (Garcia et al., 2001).

2.4.2 Access and Success

Removing institutional barriers and the ill effects of systematic racism are essential in creating an equitable experience for historically marginalized communities. In this section and the subsequent sections, I will focus on three of the four dimensions Smith and her colleagues described in their DEI framework to understand how universities might prioritized DEI strategies. Universities can prioritize DEI initiatives through access and success. The first dimension of Smith et al.'s (1997) framework for

diversity is to undo the historical disadvantages of underrepresented groups and utilize diversity as a tool for systematic changes. Higher education institutions can evaluate access and success by analyzing the representation of students on campuses and the relation of historically marginalized communities to large populations (Garcia et al., 2001).

According to American Progress, administrators must assist in eliminating barriers and understanding the populations served at the institution. For example, in some institutions, African American students make up a small percentage of the population and this can affect their student success rates. Higher education institutions note disparities in student performance and success rate is due to academic preparation and socioeconomic differences (Flores, 2014). In other words, African Americans students at predominantly white institutions can experience lower student success rates.

Equity is intricately linked to access and success. The principle allows students to participate and receive multiple 'equitable' educational opportunities. This can include engaging within the language and institutional culture, access to educational resources and the attention of teaching instructors, and classroom instructional practices (Parveen & Awan, 2019). Other equity initiatives in higher education include scholarships for lower socioeconomic groups and physical structure modification to assist students with disabilities (Gidley et al., 2010).

2.4.3 Curriculum Transformation Initiatives: Education and Scholarship

The third dimension of Smith et al.'s (1997) framework focuses on the institution's educational role in diversity matters. Institutions can prioritize DEI

initiatives by introducing inventive learning strategies and aiming to educate all students, which includes the availability of courses, learning or individual impact, and experience.

Creating new learning strategies and changing the curriculum for diverse students are indications of commitment to DEI-strategies. An EAB (Education Advisory Board) report shows that the number of college students aged between 25 and 34 will increase by 21% (Cahalan et al., 2021). The older students seek class courses to reskill their career path, including micro-credentials and certificate programs. With this steady growth, universities have reevaluated their curriculum to meet the demands of a shifting student body. HEIs know that these diverse sets of students cannot be bound by time or specific locations and have shifted initiatives to benefit non-traditional students (Powers, 2000).

Universities have also updated their curriculum to include inclusive courses that reflect a diverse student body and communities that are no longer just white and heterosexual (Clayton-Pederson & Clayton-Pederson, 2022). Institutions that do not make the needed changes for environmental drift risk declining enrollment (Powers, 2000). Institutions can address diversity concerns through curriculum transformation initiatives, faculty addressing diversity issues in the classroom, and departments that directly oversee diversity-related scholarships. Institutional viability is concerned with the presence of diversity prominent in planning processes, mission statements, and the presence of faculty of color.

2.4.4 Institutional Viability

The fourth dimension, institutional viability, serves as a comprehensive overview of the previous dimensions concerning DEI approaches. Garcia et al. (2001) describe it as "the diversity efforts in the other three dimensions and concentrates on the institution as a

whole" (pg. 17). The questions underneath this dimension include universities seeking to measure how they are perceived by the public, how does the diverse student body feel towards the university, does the official mission statement of the institution align with its diversity-oriented goals, and how does the institution define its diversity needs and strategies (Garcia et al., 2001). For example, the feelings of a diverse student body towards the institution fall. Two tools an institution might use to evaluate this might be campus climate surveys or institutional audits. Constituents' perceptions towards the actual DEI initiatives undergone by the institutions are categorized underneath this dimension. Another essential component of this dimension is looking at the central messaging of diversity in statements and within publications of the institution (Garcia et al., 2001). Institutional viability might also focus on the historical legacy of the post-secondary institution towards diversity and the progression of DEI initiatives over time (Garcia et al., 2001). Economic issues are another element of institutional viability. The level of endowments and resources various from institution to institution, with several universities having a significant larger pool of economic resources. State-funded institutions have a level of limitations due to state legislation than their non-state funded counterparts (Garcia et al., 2001).

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 University DEI Webpages as Lenses for Understanding DEI Priorities and Elements

In this section, I will focus on the research design and methodology behind the project. According to studies, websites are considered the first point of connection for prospective students (Saichaie & Morphew, 2014). Using the digital platform as a source of analysis can prove beneficial to understanding how universities prioritized DEI elements. To investigate DEI prioritization, I selected 31 universities that represent a variety of educational missions, overarching priorities, and values, and vary by location, research classification, student demographics, and more. Additionally, as the research takes place in Alabama, I selected several institutions located in the state. I specifically looked at institutions that either were classified as Research I or Research II institutions by the Carnegie Research Classification categories. After selecting institutions from either of these attributes, I looked to see if the pages had a specific diversity, equity, and inclusion webpage. I then located their webpage for their Offices of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. The universities without a DEI website were omitted from the project as I was solely looking for DEI-related content on official DEI webpages. These 31 institutions are summarized in Table 1.

For each webpage, I examined the presence (or absence) of 8 DEI elements: visible diversity and the word count of strategic plans, gender-neutral bathroom maps, inclusive language guides, and the number of members on the diversity action team, diversity-related images, and campus climate survey availability. These elements subsequently serve as the dependent variables of the study, and they are summarized in Table 2. The dependent variables *include visible diversity, world count of strategic plans, inclusive language guides, the number of members on a diversity action team, the presence of a diversity action team, and the availability of a campus climate survey.*

I defined visible diversity as the presence of non-white, female-presenting, and visible disabled individuals in photos on the homepage. The AACU's Inclusive Excellence Model and Smith et al.'s (1997) DEI analysis assists in conceptualizing the variables. The IEM focuses on the importance and inclusion of diverse differences among students to engage in learning and operating together. I analyzed images on the homepages of the DEI dashboards and websites for diverse constituencies to reflect how important showcasing diversity was to the university. I counted the number of non-white ethnic individuals appearing in images and the number of female- or male-presenting images. I utilize the terms male or female-presenting because it is more inclusive in language. I categorized images of people into ethnicity descriptions: Black, Asian, Latinx, Indigenous, Racially Ambiguous, Female-Presenting, and Male-Presenting.

The dependent variables capture the principles of DEI in various levels. However, it is important to note that some dependent variables explain the concepts better than others. To illustrate, the image analysis captures diversity, however, does not speak directly to equity or inclusivity. The number of members on the Diverse Action Teams

and the presence of the DAT aims to explain diversity. Gender neutral bathrooms provide a linkage to equity more than any of the other variables and aims to capture inclusivity. The Inclusive Language Guide also captures inclusivity more efficiently than other variables. The availability of the Campus Climate Survey (CCS) is responsible for accessing belonging and the incorporation of marginalized students on campus: this variable speaks to inclusivity.

IEM emphasizes analyzing the climate to understand how members of the community feel towards the environment and their place on campus. Smith et al.'s (1997) framework on diversity, equity, and inclusion also highlights the need for campus climate surveys to understand issues from underrepresented students and apply significant changes to address the concerns. Underrepresented students can express feelings of alienation and levels of hostility on campus. The Campus Climate element was determined by the availability or accessibility of the survey. It is important to note that some institutions participate in Campus Climate surveys but have not published the data nor made the results accessible to the public. I also did not include Campus Climate surveys focused on sexual harassment and assault awareness. Therefore, in the DEI mapping, I sought to identify if higher education institutions contained a Campus Climate Survey on DEI-related issues accessible to the public. If I was able to properly locate and download the results of the CCS, then I marked the element as present. If the CCS was available and the results were not accessible, I marked the element as absent.

Institutions can address diversity concerns through the work of *Diversity Action Teams.* I defined Diversity Action Teams as a unit specifically designed to build and implement DEI projects across college campuses. Additionally, I identified the Diversity

Action Team as thoroughly acquainted with their universities and can properly connect

DEI initiatives to the educational mission. I sought to see if the DAT was present and

counted the number of members, including co-chairs, on the Task Force source.

According to the Inclusive Excellence Model, diversity strategic plans can make a

significant difference in the implementation and prioritization of DEI initiatives (Berger

et al., 2005). First, I looked at the diversity strategic plans and downloaded any available

PDF files from the DEI homepages. The strategic plans are the official statements and

timeline outline of DEI-related future projects. This does not capture strategic plans that

included other missions and goals of the universities outside of DEI initiatives.

To understand the university investment and prioritization of these DEI elements,

I turn to a set of explanatory variables, as summarized in Table 3. The explanatory

variables are the locations of the universities, public or private identification, Carnegie

Classification, institutional characteristics such as race and gender, and the size of the

endowment. The independent variable institutional characteristics, including *non-white*

and *female*, were retrieved from the U.S. Department of Higher Education. I identify non-

white students as anyone who did not self-identify as white. I did not include unknown

ethnicity or race as non-white. As mentioned in the literature review section, the

environment plays a consequential role in how universities pursue and implement DEI

initiatives.

The independent variable *Location in Southern States* aided in conceptualizing the

research. The location was divided into southern states and states outside of the south.

The southern states and locations included: Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, Virginia,

Florida, Washington D.C., and Tennessee (Table 1). I considered universities that were

not located in the aforementioned areas as outside of the southern region. The universities

in the southern region are affected by conservative political leanings and legislation.

Thus, the expectation is that these institutions would not progressively pursue DEI

initiatives like their non-southern counterparts. The independent variable *Public*

University distinguishes between institutions that are predominantly government-funded,

whereas private institutions require endowments and tuition to sustain themselves. The

assumption is that public institutions are more susceptible to environmental influences

and are more open to political, legal, and social changes than their private counterparts.

The institution sample consists of Research I (R1) and Research II (R2)

universities, as defined by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher

Education. This classification was utilized to distinguish between universities based on

research activity and teaching activity as universities with higher commitment towards

teaching duties might have an increased dedication to the student body. According to

Carnegie, the R1 vs R2 classification calculates specific measures of universities across

ten indicators—including the research doctorates awarded and the number of faculty in

Science and Engineering, research expenditures, doctorates awarded in social science

fields and humanities, per-capita (faculty members) in non-S&E areas, the total number

of research staff, including postdoctoral researchers, doctorates awarded in other areas

with a research emphasis, and other doctorate-holding non-faculty researchers in S&E

and per-capita (faculty) number of PhD-level research staff including postdocs (Carnegie

Research Institution). Research I institutions are defined by the following characteristics:

described as the highest level of research activity, institutions that awarded at least 20

research scholarship doctoral degrees and have at least $5 million in total research

expenditures. Research II institutions are defined as "high" research activity, institutions that are awarded at least 20 research scholarship doctoral degrees and have at least $5 million in total research expenditures. Furthermore, institutions categorized as R2 are considered more 'teaching'-based, in comparison to their research-focused counterparts.

3.2 Hypotheses

Four hypotheses guide the quantitative analysis, which are presented in Chapter 5:

H1: More open systems should prioritize DEI elements. As public universities are more open according to the open systems framework, we should expect greater prioritization of DEI elements at public universities than at private institutions.

H2: The political and legal climate should affect DEI elements. States located in the South that have had a long history of segregation and currently have a more conservative political climate should be less likely to prioritize DEI elements.

H3: Universities with greater commitment towards teaching should prioritize DEI elements more so than those with lesser resources. The measure of research classification reflects prioritization of teaching and an increased prioritization of students. I expect universities that are classified as Carnegie Research II institutions to have a greater level of commit to implementing DEI initiatives.

H4: The demographic composition of the student body should affect DEI initiatives. A larger percentage of non-white and female students should lead to a greater prioritization of DEI elements.

3.2 Methods

I carefully scrutinized university DEI websites to identify the presence or absence of DEI initiatives or resources. In other words, I utilized content analysis to determine the universities' available diversity, equity, and inclusion commitments and then self-categorized them into specific initiatives or resources. I developed a codebook labeled 'DEI Mapping' (See Table 2 and Table 3 for Codebook descriptions). I wrote out my specific elements and each institution. I gathered institutional characteristics from the 31 universities I selected through specific features such as location and public versus private categories.

For analyses with dichotomous dependent variables, I used logistic regressions. Finally, for those dependent variables that were counts, I utilized negative binomial regression models. Tables 5-9 in the subsequent chapter present the findings of these models.

3.3 Limitations

All research has limitations, and this section will explore some of the limitations I encountered with this project. Before moving to the findings of this research, it is important to note that the scope of the study is limited to the analysis of DEI initiatives as presented on university websites. Institutions that perform adequate DEI work could be doing so without advertising their commitments on their website, using social media, or posters on campus, or other means. Additionally, several factors could influence the validity and reliability of webpages as a source of information and analysis—for example regarding the validity, universities may lack human resources or a sufficient budget to update outdated pages, or universities may simply not prioritize updating their DEI pages

as they undertake new DEI initiatives. Regarding reliability, some institutions may update their web pages more frequently than others, and so this cross-section analysis collected at a given point in time may capture websites at varying states of updating. Related, as this study represents a snapshot in time of DEI and related designated pages, it does not track changes in universities' DEI websites over time. It is important to state that this study leans heavily into the diversity and inclusion principles of DEI. It is difficult to address equity elements from the DEI websites.

To acknowledge biases in the study is a critical element. I sought to analyze institutions with official DEI websites and did not look at any other sources for commitment level. The research cannot speak to institutions that do not have an official DEI website nor if institutions included DEI initiatives or resources on other pages beyond the DEI homepage. For example, I took count of faculty and students' images on the DEI homepage and did not look at the main page. The DEI websites provide a more accurate capture of diversity and inclusion. It is difficult to access the level of equity from the DEI webpage. This paper leans more heavily towards diversity and inclusion as working elements than equity.

Regarding the sample, there are several additional caveats. The sample constitutes 31 institutions, which does, of course, not reflect all institutions of higher education across the United States. The sample consists of four-year public and private institutions, and those with either an R1 or R2 Carnegie designation, and thus does not include community colleges, 2-year institutions, or military academies, or for-profit universities.

It is imperative to note that certain measures were challenging to obtain. The lack of comparable transgender student data across institutions is a limitation. Concerning the

analysis of images, the analysis has not been subjected to inter-coder reliability, and thus

a second or third coder has not offered their perspective. Moreover, the individuals in the

images could self-identify as another category, and individuals could have a disability not

readily seen from images on the website. Other limitations exist in the forms of legal

requirements for public institutions that do not affect private institutions. This could be an

underlying mechanism creating a relationship that I do not take an account for. While

these limitations are important to recognize, this thesis nonetheless offers an important

cross-institutional perspective on DEI elements in higher education. The next chapter

describes the findings of this research.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings of the analysis of DEI elements across 31 institutions of higher education. The chapter begins with a summary, and descriptive statistics of the DEI elements, and these elements later serve as dependent variables in the quantitative analysis. In the following subsections, I consider each DEI element and offer perspective.

4.1. Strategic Plans

Strategic DEI plans represent a university's key mission statement surrounding DEI. The 31 institutions crafted strategic action plans that either read as general and broad without clear goals or specific or with clearly identifiable action steps and goals. For example, to illustrate a particular focus, the University of South Alabama's plan is "the purpose of this Strategic Diversity and Inclusion Plan is to define and clearly identify, within a legally sustainable structure, goals and measurable outcomes for diversity and inclusion at the University of South Alabama." (University of South Alabama Strategic Plan, p. 9) The universities have designated specific pages for initiatives.

As seen in Table 4, the longest strategic plan was 20,876 words, and the shortest strategic plan was 543 words. The average word count across the 31 universities was

4,736. Regarding the content, I analyzed the definitions and common wording of the strategic plans, finding similarities among the universities, such as defining DEI with an emphasis on race and survival as an organization. Strategic plans tended to utilize terms like "mission" and "goals" that are linked to their core values. Higher education institutions also used strategic plans to outline past work accomplished in DEI and to establish future projects. For example, Stanford University highlighted its intricate history with student activism on campus, noting that "student activism in the late 1960s led to the creation of ethnic theme houses and community centers that now form a foundation for many communities on our campus," (Stanford University Strategic Plan, p. 2).

The diversity strategic plans assist in the illustration of DEI approaches by universities and their level of commitment to incorporating DEI in its culture. For example, Emory University noted that DEI is interwoven into its infrastructure and foundation. In addition, Emory University also considers diversity as critical to its success and culture. The examples from Emory University's strategic plan invoke ideas of commitment level to DEI-related practices. Several universities defined diversity, equity, and inclusion in their plans in ways like the conceptualizations discussed earlier in this thesis. For example, the University of Toledo stressed that diversity is essential for the institution to thrive, highlighting that a diverse student population is beneficial for survival (University of Toledo Strategic Plan, p. 4). Campus Climate is an additional common point of reference across strategic plans. For example, the University of Missouri-Kansas City states in its strategic plan, "UMKC cultivates an environment committed to civility and respect where all faculty, staff, and students are empowered to

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pursue their personal, academic, and professional goals," (UM Kansas City Strategic Plan, p. 14).

4.2 Images

This section addresses the analysis of images on the diversity homepage. The images on the institutional dashboard highlighted diversity, encompassing multiple racial and ethnic groups, as presented in Figure 1 and Figure 2. The most representative ethnicity/race displayed within images were Black students and faculty members at 222—30.03% of the total non-white individuals present (Figure 1) Disabled students were the least represented on the page at 0.42% of the total individuals present and students or faculty members of Indigenous or Native American heritage at 0% of the total non-white individuals present. The only institutions with visually disabled students or faculty members on the DEI homepage images were the University of Alabama, the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, and the University of South Alabama. Male-presenting students and faculty members of various ethnicities were significantly less common than female-presenting students and faculty members. In Figure 2, I noted 124 female-presenting representations, including white students, across images (35.06%)—compared to 225 male-presenting, including white students, representations (17.32%).

4.3 Findings from the Regression Analysis

Next, I present findings from a series of regression models motivated by the hypothesis explicated in Chapter II. As noted, the type of model selected was a function of the variable types of the dependent variable, whether percentages, dichotomous or counts. Each model follows a similar progression, with explanatory variables

encompassing political and legal environments presented first (that is, public vs private university; location of the campus), followed by explanatory variables considering resources (i.e., Carnegie classification; endowment, and finally, measures of the composition of the student body demographics (percent self-identified female, percent self-identified non-white). I focus the conversation on variables that appear statistically significant in each model. Because the analysis is limited to 31 cases, it could be that with further data collection, additional variables that are not at present statistically significant reach statistical significance. With 31 cases, those variables that are presently statistically significant can be understood to be especially important indicators of DEI prioritization.

I begin with the analysis of the word count of strategic plans, as presented in Table 3. Table 3 explores the set of explanatory variables introduced earlier in the discussion. A negative binomial regression was conducted to examine the relationship between the Diversity Strategic Plan word count and the independent variables. As shown in Table 5, the results indicated that none of the independent variables were statistically significant. Table 5 also presents the correlation coefficients and their corresponding significance level. In looking at the analyses, I do not find that any of these variables capture political and social environments, resources, or campus composition, to reach statistical significance at common levels. Thus, I move to Table 6.

Table 6 presents the findings for the logistic model where the presence of gender-neutral restrooms (GNB) served as the dependent variable. In this model, two explanatory variables reach statistical significance at the $p<.10$ level: the measure capturing the Carnegie classification, and the measure speaking to the percent of the student population that identifies as female. The signs of the coefficients for the student population

identifying as female is negative, which run counter to the hypothesis. Additionally, the signs of the coefficient capturing Carnegie classification is positive and indicated that GNB were more likely to be found at R1 institutions.

Table 7 explores the findings for the logistic model and the availability of a Campus Climate Survey (CCS) served as the dependent variable table. In this model, three explanatory variables reached statistical significance at the p<.10 level and one explanatory variable reached statistical significance at the p<0.5 level: the measure capturing the Carnegie classification, the measure identifying rather an institution was public or private, and the measures speaking to the percent of the student population that identifies non-white. The measures speaking to the percent of the student population that identifies as female was statistically significant at the 0.5 level. The coefficient sign of the non-white measurement is negative, which runs counter to the hypothesis that institutions with significant non-white populations commit more to DEI initiatives like implementing Campus Climate surveys. The coefficient signs for the student population identifying as female, the Carnegie Research Classification, and the measure identifying an institution as public or private are positive.

Table 8 presents the findings for the logistic model where the presence of a Diversity Task Force serves as the dependent variable. As displayed in Table 8, I do not find any variables that captured the political and social environments, resources, or campus composition, and the variables did not reach statistical significance at common levels.

As shown in Table 9, the logistic model analyzes the presence of an inclusive language guide across universities. In this model, one explanatory variable reaches

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statistical significance at the p<.10 level: the measure capturing the Carnegie

classification. The signs of the coefficients are positive indicating that R1 institutions are

more likely to have an inclusive language guide than their R2 counterparts. I will discuss

the implications behind the results in the subsequent chapter.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

5.1 Discussion

In this section, I will dive into discussing the results, beginning with unexpected findings. The results rejected the hypothesis that the likelihood of GNB (Gender Neutral Bathrooms) would occur at RI institutions. The assumption was that R2 institutions would have a greater commitment to the study body and DEI initiatives, such as GNB, were considered one of the commitments towards creating equity and inclusion on campus. However, the results indicated that R1 institutions are more likely to have GNB. The model indicates a negative relationship between GNB and student bodies with a greater female population—therefore, gender neutral bathrooms are more likely to be found in institutions with a larger male population. Potentially indicating that institutions with a larger male population have a higher level of commitment to certain inclusive practices like gender-neutral bathrooms.

The assumption was that a longer diversity strategic plan would equal universities having a higher commitment to DEI initiatives. However, diversity strategic plans that were verbose did not indicate that the institutions prioritized DEI initiatives more than strategic plans with a lesser word count.

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The results of the Campus Climate Survey do not fit with the hypothesis that the availability of the surveys would be accessible at institutions with a greater non-minority population. According to the results, the availability of the Campus Climate Survey is found at institutions with a smaller non-minority population. This could indicate that higher education institutions highlight more effort in acknowledging their predominantly white institutions and aim to access the Campus Climate through repeated testing measures, such as surveys.

However, Campus Climate Surveys are more likely to be available at institutions with a predominantly female population. According to the results, the measure of female-students among the student body does affect the prioritization levels of institutions towards DEI initiatives. Campus Climate Surveys are also more likely to be available at public universities than private institutions.

Additionally, it was hypothesized that Carnegie Research II institutions with a higher level of teaching priority would have a higher level of commitment to creating DEI initiatives for its students than RI universities. However, *Inclusive Language Guides* and CCS were more likely to be found at Carnegie Research I institutions. RI institutions have significantly more funding than their RII counterparts and positioning as some of the best institutions in the United States could contribute to the level of commitment for DEI initiatives. The more renowned an institution could equal a higher level of prioritization towards cultivating a DEI-focused image. In other words, one could say RI universities actively pursue individual strategies, such as CCS and ICLs, to diversify its student body and retain potential talent more than RII institutions.

5.2 Conclusion

The intention of the research study was to examine the factors influencing the prioritization of higher education institutions toward DEI initiations and resources. I examined 31 institutions across the country and evaluated their commitment levels to implementing and continuing DEI initiatives through quantitative and qualitative measures. The universities' DEI pages served as the source for the analysis and proved to be a significant source of accessing commitment levels to DEI. I conceptualized diversity, equity, and inclusion as individual principles and explored the intricate history of the ideas in higher education. I used literature to develop the elements and differentiate between DEI principles. In addition, I connected open systems organizational theory to understand the human component of institutions, providing research in areas that often neglects to address racism and oppression at an institutional level. By viewing commitment through the lens of various DEI frameworks, a unique perspective to organizational culture, behavior, and the pursuit of DEI initiatives at universities was explored.

Results indicated that institutional characteristics such as race and gender mattered to universities pursuing DEI initiatives and relocating resources. Carnegie classification also mattered when it came to the level of commitment of institutions towards implementing DEI initiatives such as CCS (Campus Climate Surveys) and gender-neutral bathrooms. The R1 institutions took on more DEI-focused initiatives than R2 universities.

Future research should include a larger pool of DEI elements to access the work of higher education institutions. Additionally, if the data is available, future research

should utilize the retention rates of diverse constituents to examine the effectiveness of the universities' commitment to DEI. Retention rates would be an essential way to scale the factors and commitment, or lack thereof, of higher education institutions towards implementing successful initiatives. The budget and available resources for DEI projects is a potential component that might influence the level of commitment and should be studied in future research. Other avenues that can be explored is to compare efforts between institutions in different political climates, analyzing if the commitment levels are significant depending on the location within either a liberal or conservative environment.

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APPENDIX A: TABLES

TABLE 1. Institutions with Locations and Public/Private Categorization

Amherst University	Massachusetts	Private
Auburn University	Alabama	Public
Brown University	Rhode Island	Private
Clark University	Georgia	Private
Cleveland State University	Ohio	Public
East Tennessee State University	Tennessee	Public
Eastern Michigan University	Michigan	Public
Emory University	Georgia	Private
George Mason University	Virginia	Public
George Washington University	Washington D.C.	Private
Georgia State University	Georgia	Public
Harvard University	Massachusetts	Private
Jackson State University	Mississippi	Public
Massachusetts Institute of Technology	Massachusetts	Private
Mississippi State University	Mississippi	Public
New York University	New York	Private

TABLE 1. CONTINUED

Ohio University	Ohio	Public
Princeton University	New Jersey	Private
Stanford University	Connecticut	Private
University of Alabama	Alabama	Public
University of Alabama at Birmingham	Alabama	Public
University of Alabama in Huntsville	Alabama	Public
University of Nevada, Las Vegas	Nevada	Public
University of North Dakota	North Dakota	Public
University of South Alabama	Alabama	Public
University of Toledo	Ohio	Public
Vanderbilt University	Tennessee	Private
Washington State University	Washington	Public

TABLE 2. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Elements: Summary of the Dependent Variables in the Analysis

Designated Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Webpage	1 = Presence of University DEI Page 0 = Absence of University DEI Page
Diversity Strategic Initiatives Word Count	Total Number of Words in the Diversity Strategic Initiative Plan
Number of Members of the Diversity - Action Team	The total count of administrators, faculty, and staff on the University's Diversity Action Team
Diversity Images	Percentage of Non-White Students Reflected in Diversity Images on University DEI Webpages
Inclusive Language Guide	1 = Inclusive Language Guide Present 0 = Absence of Inclusive Language Guide
Gender-Neutral Restrooms	1 = Presence of Gender-Neutral Restrooms on Campus 0 = Absence of Gender-Neutral Restrooms
Campus Climate Survey	1 = Presence of Campus Climate Survey 0 = Absence of Campus Climate Survey

TABLE 3. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Elements: Summary of the Explanatory Variables in the Analysis

Public University	1 = Public University 0 = Private University
Located in Southern State	1 = Located in Southern U.S. State 0 = Located in All Other U.S. States
Carnegie Research Classification	0 = Second Highest Research Activity (R2) 1 = Highest Research Activity (R1)
2020 Endowment in Millions of USD	2020 Endowment at the Beginning of the Fiscal Year, in Millions of U.S. Dollars
Percent of Students who are Female	Percent of Students Who Identified as Female
Percent of Students who are Non-White	Percent of Students Who Identified as Non-White

TABLE 4. Summary of the Word Counts of Diversity Strategic

UNIVE RSITIES MISSING OFFICIAL DIVERSITY STRATEGIC PLANS	3
SHORTEST	543
LONGEST	20,876
AVERAGE	4,736.6
STANDARD DEVIATION	395.27

TABLE 5. Negative Binomial Regression of the Diversity Strategic Plan Wordcount

Public University	-.868
	(.604)
Located in Southern State	.0838
	(.643)
Highest Carnegie Classification	-.5725
	(.650)
2020 Endowment in Millions of USD	-4.05e-11
	(3.96e-11)
Percent of Students who are Female	4.819
	(6.525)
Percent of Students who are Non-White	-1.155
	(2.00)
Constant	3.54
	(7.04)
N = 31	
Log likelihood = -282.84665	
Coefficients with Standard Errors in Parentheses	
*p < .05, †p < .10	

TABLE 6. Logistic Regression of the Presence of Gender-Neutral Restrooms on Campus

Public University	-.06578 (1.20)
Located in Southern State	-1.93 (1.33)
Carnegie Classification	2.13[†] (1.13)
2020 Endowment in Millions of USD	0.003 (0.01)
Percent of Students who are Female	-27.55[†] (15.88)
Percent of Students who are Non-White	0.074 (3.91)
Constant	17.55[†] (9.17)
N = 31	
Log-Likelihood = -12.21	
Coefficients with Standard Errors in Parentheses	
*p < .05, [†]p < .10	

TABLE 7. Logistic Regression of the Presence and Availability of Campus Climate Surveys

Public University	1.90[†]
	(1.12)
Located in Southern State	1.03
	(1.09)
Highest Carnegie Classification	1.81[†]
	(1.09)
2020 Endowment in Millions of USD	0.009
	(0.007)
Percent of Students who are Female	29.48[*]
	(12.76)
Percent of Students who are Non-White	-6.06[†]
	(3.47)
Constant	17.55[†]
	(6.92)
N = 31	
Log-Likelihood = -15.67	
Coefficients with Standard Errors in Parentheses	
*p < .05, [†]p < .10	

**TABLE 8. Logistic Regression of the Presence of Diversity Task Force**

Public University	.862 (.961)
Located in Southern State	-128 (.997)
Highest Carnegie Classification	1.04 (.973)
2020 Endowment in Millions of USD	0.004 (0.0007)
Percent of Students who are Female	-10.58 (9.43)
Percent of Students who are Non-White	2.06 (3.21)
Constant	4.82 (5.32)
N = 31	
Log-Likelihood = -17.44	
Coefficients with Standard Errors in Parentheses	
*p < .05, †p < .10	

**TABLE 9. Logistic Regression of the Inclusive Language Guide on Campus**

Public University	-.346 (1.04)
Located in Southern State	1.37 (1.51)
Highest Carnegie Classification	2.46* (1.29)
2020 Endowment in Millions of USD	0.0008 (0.0009)
Percent of Students who are Female	-3.46 (9.00)
Percent of Students who are Non-White	1.13 (3.76)
Constant	17.55† (0.290)
N = 31	
Log-Likelihood = -16.02	
Coefficients with Standard Errors in Parentheses	
*p < .05, †p < .10	

APPENDIX B: FIGURES

FIGURE 1. Diversity Image Mapping for Ethnicity/Race on DEI Homepage
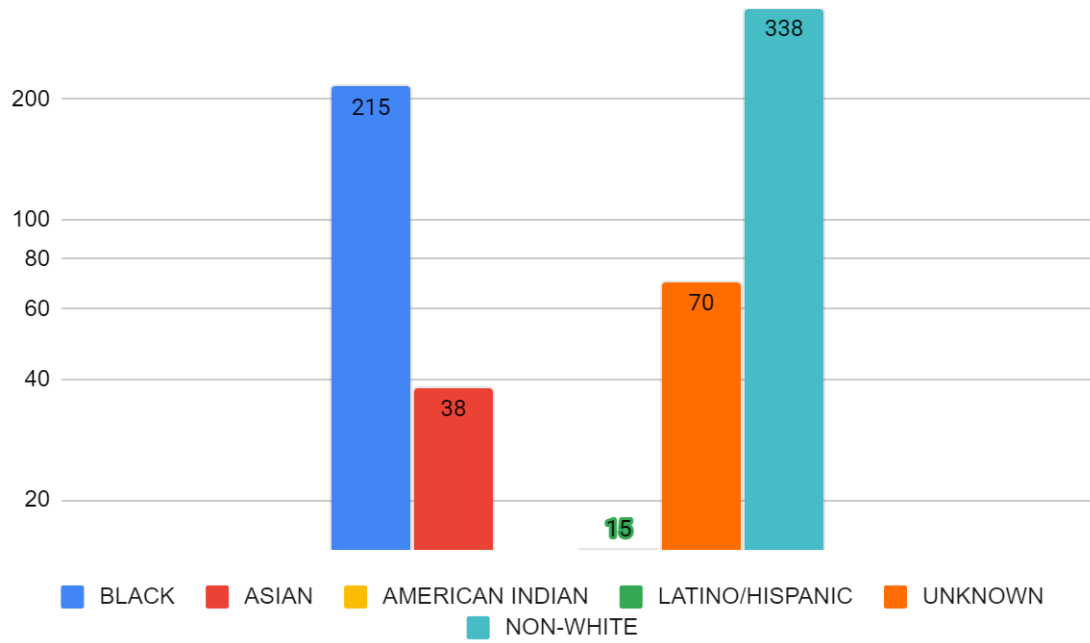
FIGURE 2. Diversity Image Mapping for Gender and Disabilities on DEI Homepage
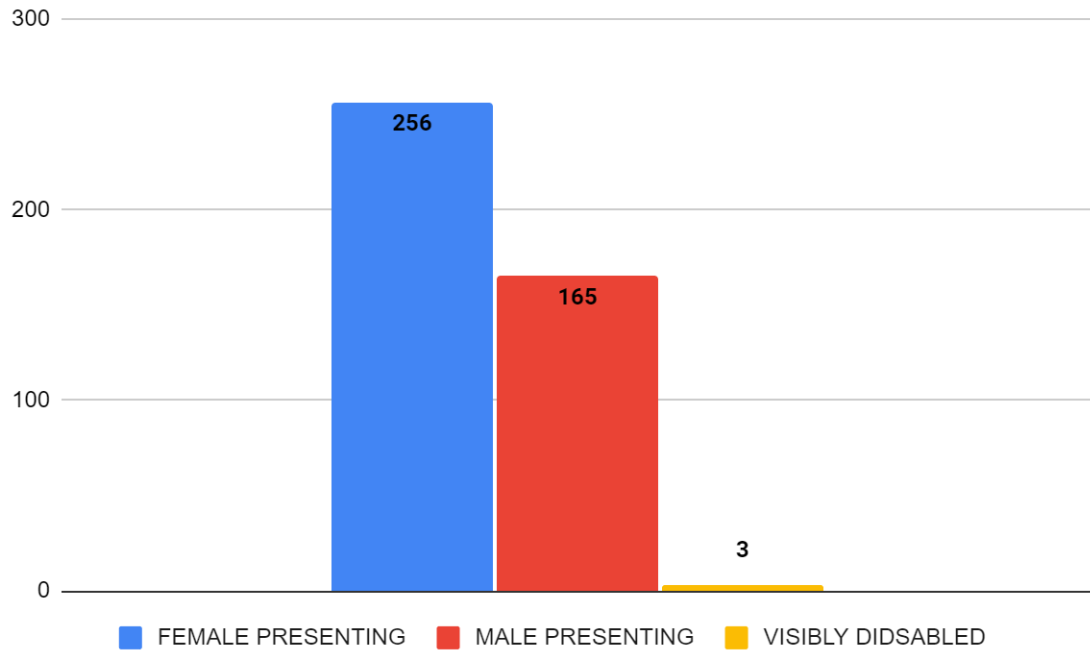
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