

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Building a Strong DEI Foundation

Next Steps on the Journey to Inclusive Excellence
at The University of Texas San Antonio (UTSA)

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PREPARED FOR UTSA BY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since its founding in 1969, UTSA's vision to be not just a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) but a Hispanic-*thriving* institution is inspiring in every way. In 2019, the university established the office and position of the Vice President for Inclusive Excellence (VPIE) and has taken several strides towards creating a stronger diversity, equity, and inclusion agenda. Strategic steps have focused on building a formal DEI training program, assessing the campus climate for inclusion, developing the inclusive excellence ecosystem, supporting the university's broader strategic agenda, and engaging with key stakeholders both on campus and in the San Antonio community.

To support further development, VPIE Myron Anderson commissioned this study, the twin goals of which were to (1) Create a comprehensive inventory of existing DEI programs on campus and (2) Establish a clear sense of where UTSA stands compared to national and Texas peers on key student, faculty, and leadership demographics as well as on strategic DEI indicators and infrastructure.

Study Methodology: (1) In winter of 2020, UTSA's 21 schools/colleges and administrative units responded to a comprehensive diversity, equity, and inclusion survey designed to document the span of each unit's DEI strategies and structures and to catalog the initiatives, programs, and other existing efforts aimed at improving DEI. Phone calls and web searches supplemented this process. (2) Additionally, researchers engaged in a benchmarking survey of 10 of TCU's competitive national peer institutions and six of its Texas peers, using the Integrated Post-Secondary Educational Data System (IPEDS) database.

This report's insights and recommendations rest on a solid foundation of current DEI research and best practices as well as insights gained from our experience working with hundreds of institutions of higher learning and companies across the United States. Amid the uncertain world climate, the findings of this report and its recommendations take on even more meaning, urgency, and importance.

Section 1: The Strategic Diversity Leadership Framework

To conceptualize this review, we lean on the five-element Strategic Diversity Leadership framework (Williams, 2013), which champions evaluating DEI efforts in terms of efforts to:

- (1) Achieve *access and equity* (recruitment, retention) for historically underrepresented groups.
- (2) Create a *multicultural and inclusive campus climate* for the entire institutional community.
- (3) Enhance domestic and international *research and scholarship* around issues of diversity.
- (4) *Prepare all students* for a national and global society that is diverse and interconnected.
- (5) Create effective *strategic diversity leadership infrastructure* in the forms of DEI strategic plans, committees, officers, analysis/tracking scorecards, and other forms of accountability that can transform the first four elements into more than the sum of their parts.

In this model, *Inclusive Excellence* becomes the ideal. Far more than a mere set of numbers, IE features a broader definition of diversity that includes many social dimensions. It affirms the interdependence of inclusiveness and excellence, where to practice one is to practice the other. It works toward a vibrant community that embeds, respects and enjoys diverse cultures, identities and lived experiences. And it distributes responsibility for Inclusive Excellence to every member of the extended campus community.

Section 2: Strategic Benchmarking of Peer Institutions

Across UTSA's 16 peer institutions, we examined a number of strategic and demographic DEI indicators of progress and success. We believe that DEI efforts "can't breathe without AIIR," and these are the core

components we looked for in DEI infrastructure: *Accountability* parameters to shape behavior; dedicated and general DEI *Infrastructures* to guide and support change; *Incentives* to elevate DEI to more than an unfunded mandate; and investment of *Resources* to ensure that change happens in both word and deed.

Many institutions today are developing their CDO roles and establishing dedicated DEI committees. The majority of institutions both nationally and within Texas have a DEI officer (64% and 67%, respectively) and committee (100% for both). Fewer than expected had a formal DEI strategic plan (36% and 50%, respectively). None of the national peers offered public accountability, while 67% of Texas peers did.

To improve campus climate, many institutions are expanding DEI professional development and training programs. While many prioritize “racial equity and social justice,” this was not always evident given the dearth of comprehensive DEI plans that we saw across both national and Texas peers.

UTSA’s peers are clearly actively prioritizing DEI issues, evident in our findings around campus policing (building review processes, anti-bias training) and the greater focus on public DEI accountability (publishing DEI training numbers, and DEI implementation successes and challenges). Both of these areas stand as promising practices for UTSA.

Section 3: Demographic Benchmarking of Peer Institutions

To glean context for UTSA’s DEI efforts, this strategic DEI benchmarking review provides a 100,000-foot view of faculty, leadership, and student demographic profiles at the 10 national peer institutions and six in Texas. Study limitations include the fact that no institutional comparison is perfectly apples-to-apples and that the latest data from IPEDS was current only through the 2018/19 school year.

Nurturing a diverse learning environment has many benefits, such as allowing all students to establish role model relationships with diverse faculty and building pathways toward more inclusive and civic-minded engagement. Compositional diversity of a campus’s three core populations therefore plays an influential role in defining the campus experience for all groups and establishes a key foundation for understanding campus climate. Yet this diversity is but one ingredient in the DEI process; it should not be an “end” in itself.

UTSA is one of the most diverse universities in the country. It ranked near the top of both national and Texas peers in both Hispanic/Latinx and URM diversity in all three communities:

- *Undergraduate students*: Hispanic/Latinx 57%, ranking #2 in both groups; URM 66%, ranking #2 in both groups.
- *Tenure-track faculty*: Hispanic/Latinx 16%, ranking #1 nationally and #3 among Texas peers; URM 20% also ranking #1 nationally and #3 in Texas.
- *Leadership*: Hispanic/Latinx 34%, ranking #2 in both peer groups; URM 40%, also ranking #2 in both groups.

Also of note, with regard to Asian faculty (19%), UTSA ranks #2 and #3 among national and Texas peer institutions. The university is also near the top in terms of women in leadership in the state of Texas, although it falls more towards mid-rankings nationally.

Areas of opportunity: Ironically, the university has one of the largest differentials between the high percentage of URM students and the percentage of URM faculty, with a gap of 43 percentage points, ranking second-to-last among national (#10) and Texas peers (#6). Women tenure-track faculty (33%, #11 nationally, #4 Texas) and women studying in the STEM disciplines (a generally low 9%, yet ranking #4 nationally and #2 among Texas peers) are other areas of potential improvement. Finally, UTSA’s six-year (2013-2018) graduation rate of 42% ranked last (#11) among national institutions and second-lowest in Texas (#6), offering a prime area for future focus in driving DEI strategy and Inclusive Excellence.

Section 4: The UTSA Strategic Diversity Leadership Inventory

Senior leadership commitment defines the values of the institution and the general vision for DEI, and ultimately sets the activation cadence for achieving change. In this inventory of DEI initiatives, we teased out the elements of AIIR described in Section 2, asking leaders to report their DEI values and commitments in terms of the five segments below:

- (1) **Espoused Commitment to DEI:** Formal public assertions of what matters provide a meaningful keystone for behavior at all levels of an institution. Most UTSA respondents (73%) endorsed the statement “My unit has a strong commitment to DEI.” In our experience, institutions typically come in over 90%, even 100%, here. It will be important for UTSA to continue to track this number.
- (2) **DEI Strategy and Accountability:** Towards becoming San Antonio’s University of the Future, the Office of Inclusive Excellence is fortifying the campus-wide Inclusive Excellence Ecosystem. One national best practice is to have a clear DEI activation plan in each academic and administrative division. Only 23% of participating UTSA units have such a plan (academic schools/colleges, 33%; administrative units, 15%) while still of course engaging in DEI programming and work.

Accountability means DEI is implemented organizationally in day-to-day operations and for every employee. Only about 5% of responding units (8% administrative, 0% academic) produce an annual DEI report. Only 27% of units reported a DEI component in performance reviews, an average again carried entirely by 46% of administrative units versus 0% academic units. Organizational and individual accountability are two sides of the same coin and must both be activated.

- (3) **DEI Infrastructure:** Having a DEI committee and officer in place in each unit is an important element for UTSA’s decentralized infrastructure. Only 41% of units reported having a DEI committee to help with strategic thinking around DEI in their school, college, or unit (46% administrative, 33% academic units). Only 36% of units reported a DEI officer/point person (46% admin, 22% academic). A well-designed DEI team and local officer is a promising practice. That so many units reported neither a DEI plan, accountability system, nor point person is an area of concern and development for the university.
- (4) **DEI Training and Leadership Development (Incentives):** With campuses more diverse than ever, students, faculty, staff, and leadership should all have the opportunity to participate in regular structured DEI training and professional development. Only 27% of units reported that they provide sufficient DEI learning/growth opportunities and trainings for students, about 32% for faculty, and 23% for staff. If not for the recent DEI training efforts of the Office of Inclusive Excellence and Human Resources over the last 12-18 months, leaders would have even reported an even lower level of DEI related activity in the accompanying inventory.
- (5) **DEI Resource Allocation:** A key expression of an institution’s priorities is allocation of precious financial resources. UTSA is clearly investing millions of dollars in scholarships, offices, programs, research, and multicultural/international areas of study, across a range of diversity dimensions that include race, ethnicity, economic background, disability, gender, nationality, and faith for students, faculty, and staff. Yet most units do not feel that they are allocating adequate financial resources to support diverse student (45% overall), staff (45%), or faculty (32%) success. DEI discretionary “innovation” funds are critical, yet only a fifth of units reported such resources. The lack of fungible dollars to drive DEI innovation is consistent with the low level of espoused DEI plans, accountability, and infrastructure.

Section 5: The UTSA DEI Program Inventory

This section supports UTSA’s strategic diversity leadership efforts by providing an overview and accompanying database of the DEI activities, programs, and efforts that currently exist across campus.

Within these programs, *DEI intensive* initiatives advance an aspect of DEI as an institutional priority, while *integrated DEI* efforts directly infuse inclusive excellence into academic and administrative efforts. Both types of program are needed. Across academic and administrative units, UTSA's 314 reported programs were largely noted as evidence-based in design and with impact assessment, both best practices. We organized them into six interrelated categories for discussion:

- (1) *DEI General Infrastructure (n=31)*. The overall campus community was largely the focus of these efforts (61%), which tended to center around race and ethnicity (42%). Several promising practices already in place emerged from our review, including establishing the VP/IE and office, the Inclusive Excellence Advisory Board, building the IE Ecosystem, the UTSA Inclusivity Statement, and your DEI web portal.
- (2) *Recruitment, Retention, and Outreach (n=113)*. With more programs than any other category, over half of these mostly DEI-intensive initiatives focused largely on students and faculty. Research discusses the importance of scaling up efforts that work—taking successful existing concepts and models and infusing those principles and activities in other areas to lift all tides and gain breakthrough results. We suggest examining current programs to discover and scale proven activities to further improve educational outcomes, recruitment, retention, and campus climate. Notably, UTSA's faculty DEI RRO efforts are an impressive and emerging strength. The university should consider a few "big bets" in this area to drive towards becoming a Hispanic-thriving institution.
- (3) *Preparing Students for a Diverse and Global World (n=54)*. These initiatives include courses, majors and minors, leadership programs, study abroad, and community service learning efforts. Historically, multicultural programs generally have a more intentional focus on social justice issues than do international, yet both types of programs could benefit from cross-pollination to ensure a DEI angle. We recommend considering a common book program and adding intergroup dialogue methodology to these and other programs to enhance their efficacy while better preparing students to bridge differences. DGW programs have a direct effect on retention and graduation rates, especially for first-generation and BIPOC students, both areas of growth for UTSA.
- (4) *Multicultural and International Research and Scholarship (n=17)*. Faculty must engage in scholarship critical to understanding our increasingly diverse and multicultural world. The relatively few DEI programs identified in the MIRS category represents an area of opportunity for UTSA as the Presidential Initiative on Research Excellence seeks to become the first university in San Antonio to achieve Carnegie R1 status. MIRS capabilities are foundational to achieving this goal and contribute to recruitment and retention of diverse faculty, as can your San Antonio DNA.
- (5) *Affirming Diverse Identities and Building Community (n=57)*. At 95% DEI intensive, this type of initiative affirms diverse identities, building cultural, faith and identity affinity groups, events, and spaces of belonging that nourish specific groups and build connections among groups. Leaders can contribute by asking, "How can I incorporate DEI aspects?" into every program on campus.
- (6) *DEI Training, Campus Climate Research and Policy (n=42)*. This DEI-intensive (81%) category focuses on specific DEI training, campus climate research, and policy improvement to enhance inclusivity and climate. The level of DEI training, research, and policy in the schools and colleges is an opportunity area for UTSA. A DEI certification program would shift training towards a higher impact and improve capacity-building.

Section 6: Recommendations

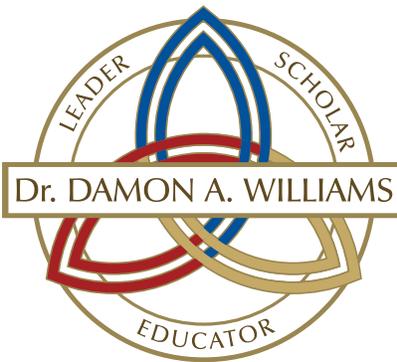
DEI is strongly articulated as a top priority at UTSA, yet more is to be done as UTSA looks to achieve R1 status, become a Hispanic-thriving institution, and build an increasingly strong Inclusive Excellence Ecosystem and campus. We recommend focusing in six areas:

- (1) *Develop a campus-wide Inclusive Excellence activation framework, a strategic plan, 3-5 big bets, and a focus on accountability.* Change is driven by a few powerful core choices. For UTSA, these big bets should center specifically on becoming Hispanic-thriving, faculty diversification, DEI in the curriculum, and DEI training and professional development. What major investments can the university make into these areas to accelerate DEI success? How can you build effective institutional accountability into the system?
- (2) *Establish an Inclusive Excellence scorecard.* Institutional research should produce an annual diversity indicator report across various dimensions of the Inclusive Excellence framework. This effort offers three main benefits: (1) Regular progress tracking, (2) Transparency, and (3) A high level of engagement with the diversity implementation journey. A regular commitment to gathering these data will build a robust set of quantitative and qualitative over time. We recommend tracking no more than five key campus climate indicators, disaggregated across key groups.
- (3) *Involve senior leaders in owning the DEI plan.* No strategic plan will be successful if senior leadership does not own its implementation campus-wide. Institutional DEI commitment was inconsistent at UTSA. The president, VPIE, and provost can create spaces for each dean and divisional leaders to be publicly accountable in moving their agendas forward as well as to learn from one another as they work together to connect the dots in the campus's DEI efforts.
- (4) *Develop local Inclusive Excellence infrastructure and activation plans to deliver the overall campus strategy.* Every unit or divisional area should have a dedicated point leader and a local Inclusive Excellence committee. Each committee must have strong and varied representation, clear strategic goals that are aligned to the campus-wide Inclusive Excellence framework (Recommendation 3), and leaders who can make a difference. Every dean and divisional leader should be required to develop annual alignment plans and status reports by divisional unit.
- (5) *Establish a campus-wide DEI training and leadership development certificate program* based on a set of key learning experiences and achievements that you develop: Build scaled training and professional development on the foundation of required DEI learning experiences already in place. Create an expectation that every faculty, staff and leader will engage in diversity and inclusion development as part of what it means to teach and lead at UTSA.
- (6) *Develop an Inclusive Excellence innovation and partnership fund:* This budget can be used to build DEI entrepreneurial energy on campus, nimbleness, partnership and collaboration, and inspire greater involvement. This program, involving both small grants and large partnership grants, should be led by the VPIE and a small committee that reviews proposals and makes shared decisions about funded projects.

By following these steps, UTSA can move forward into a future with a reinforced, effective DEI platform, a renewed and clear strategic plan, supportive implementation directives, improved buy-in and participation rates, and the accountability systems in place to keep the system humming. These efforts in turn will further and even up-level the mission and vision of the university while building a strong, interconnected community.

Section 7: Final Thoughts and Next Steps

This report provided a detailed roadmap delineating the core steps required to position UTSA as a national leader around the ever-growing issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion, especially with regard to Hispanic and BIPOC themes. We encourage you to share this report across campus and use it to engage in further DEI work. From all of us at the Center for Strategic Diversity Leadership and Social Innovation, thank you for the opportunity to serve your intentions and efforts to strengthen your Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion work. We look forward to your next steps and are proud to be a friend to your work.



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