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# Connecting Assessment and Strategic Planning to Advancing Equity on Campus

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# Abstract

Institutional inquiry has an important role in understanding issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion and the connection of these issues to campus environments. Institutions have a responsibility to better understand the environments on their campuses and how they affect students, with clear attention to campus climate and the impact of equity and inclusion initiatives. One way to increase understanding and provide institutional direction is through assessment, research, and evaluation. Using the context of a student affairs division at a large research-intensive institution, the authors connect assessment and strategic planning to advancing equity on campus. A literature review explores critical constructs such as the importance of diversity, establishing a culture of inclusion, developing a culturally competent student body, and institutional climate. Following the literature review, a discussion of assessment frameworks includes multiple model examples and connects assessment to strategic planning. Finally, a proposed assessment will be offered as an example of connecting inquiry to issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion.

Student affairs as a profession has recognized the importance of educating the whole student as far back as the early 20th century, specifically, the deeply influential relationship between student and environment (American Council on Education, 1949). For instance, Schlossberg (1981) developed a model emphasizing the role environmental and personal characteristics play in an adult's ability to adapt to a given transition. More recently, a portion of the student-environment relationship has been described as a sense of belonging. Belonging is the ability to identify and affiliate with a university community and is deeply connected to identity (Strayhorn, 2012). Particularly concerning is the sense of belonging for historically marginalized populations. Low rates of persistence and retention can be directly connected to a lack of belonging for these students (Strayhorn, 2012). Institutions have a responsibility to better understand the environments on their campuses and how they affect students, with clear attention to campus climate and the impact of equity and inclusion initiatives. One way to increase understanding and provide institutional direction is through assessment, research, and evaluation. Although many institutions now have offices directly responsible for diversity, equity, and inclusion, all student affairs professionals must take a leading role in using inquiry in transformative ways to improve campus climate and students' sense of belonging. Not only do student affairs professionals have the education, experience, and passion to potentially create more inclusive environments, they also have the skill to translate inquiry into policy and practice. This does not mean that all professionals have equal (or any) experience in creating more inclusive environments but have likely had education and opportunity to build skills through graduate study. Given this context, it is important that all assessment and research projects are built on a solid understanding of institutional context and professional skill level.

The purpose of this paper is to recognize the important role that institutional inquiry has in understanding issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion and the connection of these issues to campus environments. The connection of assessment and strategic planning to advancing equity will be discussed in the context of the student affairs division at a large research-intensive institution. After providing the institutional context, a literature review will include critical constructs such as the importance of diversity, establishing a culture of inclusion, developing a culturally competent student body, and institutional climate. Following the literature review, these concepts will be explored using the example of

a recently proposed assessment in the Southeastern University (pseudonym) Division of Student Affairs (Southeastern Student Affairs).

## Institutional Context

Southeastern University (Southeastern) is a large, research-intensive institution located in the southeastern United States. Currently serving more than 35,000 students, Southeastern seeks to fulfill its land-grant mission of serving both students and the residents of the state of Southeastern. A portion of this mission is dedicated to serving a diverse student body and providing an environment that fosters understanding and respect for cultural, racial, gender, and ethnic diversity in the faculty, staff, and student body (Southeastern University, 2011). While the responsibility for enacting this mission falls to various departments on campus, Southeastern Student Affairs has taken a leading role via creation of the 2020 Strategic Plan. The strategic plan includes five initiatives: enhancing an open, welcoming, and inclusive environment; enhancing the student learning environment; advancing strategic partnerships; promoting the impact of Southeastern Student Affairs; and ensuring the long-term success of Southeastern Student Affairs. As pertains to issues of equity and inclusion, this paper will focus on the initiative “enhancing an open, welcoming, and inclusive campus environment” (Southeastern University, 2016, p. 1). Four strategic objectives define this initiative:

- Advocate for an inclusive and socially just learning environment for Southeastern students
- Foster a connected and inclusive Southeastern student community
- Engage in a comprehensive professional enrichment strategy to enhance the social justice competencies of student affairs staff
- Increase recruitment, hiring, retention, and advancement opportunities of a diverse Southeastern Student Affairs staff (Southeastern University, 2016)

Moreover, the initiative echoes a goal from the Southeastern Institutional Diversity Plan that aims to “enhance and sustain an institutional climate that values and welcomes diversity and inclusion” (Office of Institutional

Diversity, 2016, p. 7). Important to note, the Institutional Diversity Plan was created in years prior to the Division's 2020 Strategic Plan and while efforts were made to enhance the work done by the Office of Institutional Diversity, the two plans were created for different purposes and different audiences. In addition, the results or outcomes of the Institutional Diversity Plan were not available at the time of creation of the Division's 2020 Strategic Plan and could not be used to inform the process.

## Literature Review and Institutional Connections

### Importance of Diversity

Diversity is an essential component to the college environment. As future members of the workforce and citizens of the world, students must develop cultural competence to be successful. As noted by Miller (2009), "true diversity represents a reflection of the global community—a bigger, broader, richer place than any Main Street, U.S.A." (p. 7). The opportunity to interact with a diverse peer group, as well as a diverse faculty and staff, leads to a range of outcomes, including learning about and becoming more open to diversity, being able to engage with diversity, questioning and revising prior beliefs, and changing behaviors (Talmadge, 2015). In addition, experiences with diversity have a clear cognitive connection, contributing to students' intellectual engagement and development, problem solving, thinking, and writing (Bowman, 2010). These experiences also lead to students, staff, and faculty feeling that there is a positive institutional climate related to diversity. The goal should be to build a culture of inclusion with specific activities and experiences that build a positive climate related to diversity. At Southeastern University, a number of activities and practices contribute to a culture of inclusion. This is not an exhaustive list of all practices as they are changing and growing each year but should provide a solid sample of current ways Southeastern is engaging in building an inclusive culture.

### Establishing a Culture of Inclusion

Establishing a culture of inclusion begins with an exposure to the current university culture, community, and vision for inclusive groups. Southeastern stated their obligation is to expose students to a robust exchange of ideas within a student body representing the greatest possible

variety of backgrounds (Southeastern Undergraduate Admissions, 2015a). Southeastern is made up of over 35,000 students and welcomes over 51 countries worldwide. Within the Southeastern Student Affairs 2020 Strategic Plan, a goal exists to further establish a culture of inclusion “where individual differences are valued and serve as a source for collective empowerment” (p. 5). In addition, Southeastern seeks to assemble a student class that is both qualified and broadly diverse (Southeastern Undergraduate Admissions, 2015b). While not an exhaustive list, three ways that Southeastern University and its staff work to establish and promote a culture of inclusion include: the Diversity and Inclusion Certificate, staff recognition, and active participation in professional organizations.

**The diversity and inclusion certificate.** Southeastern supports a number of programs that contribute to its “culture of inclusion.” One program in particular is the Diversity and Inclusion Certificate housed within the Office of Institutional Diversity. This program provides university employees with an opportunity to learn about diversity, inclusion, and services to assist students from diverse backgrounds. According to the Office of Institutional Diversity, the Diversity and Inclusion Certificate creates an opportunity for faculty and staff to explore strategic areas around diversity and improve their ability to contribute to the enhancement of Southeastern’s welcoming and inclusive environment.

The certificate will also enable participants to get a closer look at the people, institutions, and initiatives that play a key role in supporting and fostering diversity at Southeastern. This closer look will potentially provide faculty and staff with additional resources through which they can both build their diversity competencies and identify areas of diversity partnership across the institution (Office of Institutional Diversity, 2016).

The Office of Institutional Diversity started the certificate program in 2012. Around 420 participants have completed the certificate program since its inception five years ago and approximately 5,500 participants have completed at least one course in the program. As a result of participating in this certificate program, many participants reported broadening their definition of diversity beyond racial composition. Moreover, participants also learned more about ways in which Southeastern engages with diversity work, such as the establishment of food pantries for students who are food insecure and dining facilities that are responsive to dietary needs based on religious diversity (S. W.

Matthews, personal communication, June 23, 2017).

**Recognition for staff.** Another area in which Southeastern promotes a culture of inclusion is the recognition of staff for their achievements in providing services for historically underrepresented populations. At the annual Finance and Administration Merit Awards, employees receive awards for: outstanding performance, excellence in staff achievements, staff development, and exceptional workplace creativity, innovation and sustained excellence. Recognition activities motivate employees to work toward further enhancing a culture of inclusion for students, staff, faculty, and guests of the university.

**Professional organizations.** In an effort to establish a culture of inclusion, Southeastern incorporates standards set by the field's leading professional organizations. A joint task force comprised of members from two leading national organizations, ACPA: College Student Educators International and NASPA: Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, created the Professional Competency Areas for Student Affairs Practitioners (ACPA & NASPA, 2015). Under the newly revised Social Justice and Inclusion competency area, one measure suggests that individuals should, "design programs and events that are inclusive, promote social consciousness, and challenge current institutional, national, and global sociopolitical systems of oppression" (ACPA & NASPA, 2015, p. 30). Southeastern defines a "culture of inclusion" partially as the hiring and promotion of a culturally competent and diverse staff to carry out transformative and inclusive programs, services, and policies to serve the university and global society (Office of Institutional Diversity, 2016).

## A Culturally Competent Student Body

In addition to the Division's focus on professionals work to establish a positive and inclusive campus, the Southeastern Student Affairs 2020 Strategic Plan outlines the need to "cultivate a culturally competent and inclusive Southeastern student body" (The Southeastern University, 2016, p. 5). Cultural competence, a term that first appeared in social work, psychology, and the medical field (Gallegos, Tindall, & Gallegos, 2008) was adopted by colleges and universities out of the desire to increase student learning and prepare students for a globalized world. Assessing cultural competency can be a challenge, given the varying interpretations

of the term cultural competency. However, for the purpose of Southeastern Student Affairs 2020 Strategic Plan, cultural competence is defined as students' knowledge of their own cultural identity, the recognition of similarities and differences between cultures, and demonstrating pride for their own cultural group (Howard-Hamilton, Richardson, & Shuford, 1998). It should be noted that creating a culturally competent student body takes time and requires the work of the entire campus community (Cuyjet, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2011).

Some departments in Southeastern Student Affairs offer programs and services that promote student learning around social identities and other cultures, further enhancing student intercultural competency. Currently, the IGNITE social justice program represents a program in the division that achieves culturally competent goals. Several units in Southeastern Student Affairs, such as the LGBT Resource Center, Multicultural Services and Programs, and Center for Leadership and Service to name a few, sponsor IGNITE and invite approximately 50 undergraduate and graduate students each year to go on a weekend retreat. Trained facilitators comprised of staff, faculty, and occasionally graduate students lead the retreat guiding discussions on various social justice topics. IGNITE is an example of a program that could be assessed for creating a culturally competent study body.

## Institutional Climate

Exploring the broader concept of institutional climate is critical now having examined the importance of institutional diversity and how professionals and students are working within Southeastern's campus culture. A positive institutional climate can enhance the work to increase a culture of inclusion while a negative climate will certainly hinder efforts. Institutional climate, also referred to as campus climate, can be defined as "attitudes, perceptions, and feelings about an environment" (Kuh, 1990, p. 47). Campus climate is deeply tied to campus culture and community. A chilling effect exists when students, particularly from historically underrepresented populations, view the climate as less than welcoming or even exclusionary (Strayhorn, 2012). The long-term effects for underrepresented students include negative academic performance, lack of belonging, and lower retention rates (Vacarro, 2014). These serious realities make developing cultural competence and promoting diversity important initiatives.

# Climate, Culture and the Language of Social Justice

Having established that creating an open, welcoming, and inclusive environment is important to Southeastern Student Affairs, the next question must be how do we create such an environment? One possible direction is informed by social justice principles. Social justice in this context implies that all students are able to fully participate on campus without compromising their safety and security (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 2016). The division's commitment to infusing social justice principles into its program and service delivery is a way to build a more welcoming and inclusive environment for all students, staff, and faculty. As mentioned earlier, professionals have had a variety of different exposures to social justice principles or practices and how they relate directly to institutional climate. Before considering any programs to increase social justice understanding and improve campus climate, assessments must be conducted to establish a baseline understanding of professional competency.

Assessment is a tool to gather information about individual professional's competency as well as the division's commitment to social justice education. Moreover, assessment tools can be used to gather important information at every step of the strategic plan, and should be employed in multiple directions to really understand the current institutional climate. Once student, staff, and faculty perceptions are known, programs and improvement plans can be created and further assessments done. The goal is to establish a cyclical process of assessment and improvement, and to be able to articulate how initiatives are being executed in specific terms.

## Assessing Southeastern's Campus Climate

A common concept in higher education, campus climate is difficult to define given multiple, vague and competing definitions. Some have described it as the faculty, staff, administrators, and students' actions and attitudes regarding the level of respect for individuals and their ability to thrive at an institution (UC Regents, 2011; Rankin & Reason, 2008). Others have delineated the various ways that climate impacts the campus, such as objective climate, perceived climate, and psychological or felt

climate (Hart & Fellabaum, 2008). Regardless of the definition administrators at institutions ascribe to regarding campus climate, studying this concept on college campuses is important because universities and colleges invest time, money and effort recruiting students, staff, and faculty from historically underrepresented populations. Beyond recruitment efforts, institutions must strive to improve the experience of underrepresented populations via mentoring relationships and intergroup opportunities (Hurtado, Griffin, & Cuellar, 2008). Ultimately, a diverse campus will enable historically underrepresented populations to be more successful (Hurtado et al., 2008).

Campus climate studies are traditionally conducted using the entire university population to research what students, faculty, and staff think about their holistic campus experience, as opposed to specific touch points or interactions. In fall 2015, Southeastern used the consulting firm Rankin & Associates to conduct a comprehensive campus climate survey. The general results were recently released, but a deeper analysis is forthcoming. This analysis will be useful to Southeastern Student Affairs as the strategic plan is connected to larger institutional initiatives. Should a campus-wide climate survey not be possible, an ideal place to begin is in University Housing. For example, more than 7,600 undergraduate and graduate students reside in Southeastern's residence halls (University Housing, 2016). With an enrollment of over 35,000 students, roughly 20 percent of all Southeastern students live in one of the 22 residence halls or 20 apartment areas that hold undergraduate and graduate students, sororities and fraternities, and families (University Housing, 2016.) Southeastern's housing's mission, vision and goals incorporate language that speaks to the importance of campus climate with phrasing like "personal growth of residents", "diversity is valued and appreciated" and "meaningful work environment" (University Housing, 2016).

## Connecting to Southeastern's Diversity Plan

The final goal of the Southeastern Student Affairs strategic initiative, "enhancing an open, welcoming, and inclusive campus environment" is to "champion Southeastern's Diversity Plan to sustain and enhance a learning and work environment that is diverse and inclusive" (The Southeastern University, 2016, p. 1). The goals of the 2011-2016

Southeastern Diversity Plan from the Office of Institutional Diversity are in congruence with the Southeastern Student Affairs 2020 Strategic Plan language of “taking leadership to enhance an open, welcoming, and inclusive campus environment at Southeastern.” The Southeastern Diversity Plan outlines the following five goals:

- Enhance and sustain an institutional climate that values and welcomes diversity and inclusion
- Increase the recruitment and retention of diverse students, with emphasis on those who are historically underrepresented
- Recruit, retain and support advancement opportunities for a more diverse faculty and staff
- Expand partnerships that increase diversity-related research and program initiatives with businesses, communities and organizations.
- Integrate diversity and inclusion into established systems of accountability (Office of Institutional Diversity, 2016).

The Diversity Advisory Council—members of the diversity planning committee—indicated that progress on the aforementioned goals can be measured by “enhanced curriculum diversity including academic courses, service-learning, international programs and extracurricular activities” (Office of Institutional Diversity, 2016, p. 6). Southeastern Student Affairs is well positioned to track progress on service-learning programs, international programs, and co-curricular activities, all of which support and champion the university’s diversity plan. One program in particular, Coffee Hour, is a weekly event organized by staff and students in the Office of International Student Life. Each week, members of the campus community come together to sample food, have coffee, and engage in conversation. The Office of International Student Life, international student organizations, and other student organizations and university departments take turns hosting Coffee Hour. Coffee Hour is an example of a co-curricular program that can be assessed to measure progress on Southeastern’s commitment to diversity.

# Assessment Landscape

Student affairs personnel are well situated to conduct assessment plans for the improvement of programs and services. Assessment and evaluation practices in student affairs date back to the field's foundational documents, such as the *Student Personnel Point of View* (ACE, 1949). However, only in the last couple of decades have student affairs graduate programs, at least at the master's level, implemented assessment courses in program curriculum (Henning & Roberts, 2016). Today, the assessment landscape has evolved into an expansive and distinct area of practice with a great deal of new scholarship informing professionals. In 2016 two books were published with contemporary views on assessment in student affairs (Henning & Roberts, 2016; Schuh et al., 2016). Both offer excellent insights into the history of assessment, types of assessment, planning and designing projects, methodology options, ethics, and politics. In addition to books a variety of assessment-based articles are available in peer-reviewed journals such as the *Journal of Student Affairs Inquiry*, the *Journal of Student Affairs Research*, and the *Journal of College Student Development*. Finally, many student affairs assessment professionals write blogs and share best practices via a vibrant assessment listserv.

Five core purposes of assessment in student affairs include: (1) to improve programs and services, (2) to tell a story about the performance of students and staff, (3) to support decision-making, (4) to advance the division, and (5) to enhance student learning (Culp & Dungy, 2012). In essence, the systematic process of assessment in student affairs practice holds staff accountable to enhancing the quality experience among students.

Outcomes-based assessment is one mechanism toward enhancing a campus' culture on equity, diversity, and inclusion. This method of assessment complements a strategic plan given that plans provide vision and direction with a desired state in mind for student affairs work. Some outcomes-based models however, such as Astin's (1991) *Inputs-Environment-Outputs (I-E-O) Model*, consume a significant amount of time and staff resources to implement (Bresciani, Gardner, & Hickmott, 2009). However, what makes outcomes-based assessment so compelling is its use of concrete and "direct measures" of success. Other forms of assessment include "indirect measures" that take into account perceptions rather than actual experiences (Culp & Dungy, 2012).

## Assessment Evaluation Model

Upcraft and Schuh (1996) define assessment as “Any effort to gather, analyze, and interpret evidence which describes institutional, departmental, divisional, or agency effectiveness” (p. 18). In the context of this conceptual paper, the authors recommend Barham and Scott’s (2006) comprehensive Assessment Evaluation Model, which focuses on institutional mission, philosophical tenets of student affairs, objectives, outcomes, and evaluation. The model is structured on the foundation of an institution’s mission, the mission of student affairs, objectives of student affairs and the alignment of goals and objectives of each student affairs functional unit. Emerging from the foundation are three philosophical tenets in student affairs – service, learning, and development – that represent a point of emphasis for building an assessment plan.

Once student affairs administrators determine whether to assess student services, learning, or development, the next step involves establishing objectives. According to Barham and Scott (2006), “objectives describe what the program hopes to accomplish” (p. 215). Objectives should be in alignment with the institutional and divisional missions. Objectives, then, inform the types of specific outcomes that need to be created to measure program success. The next step, once objectives and outcomes are established, consists of implementing an assessment plan. A widely adopted definition of assessment in student affairs practice comes from Upcraft and Schuh (1996), which they define as, “any effort to gather, analyze, and interpret evidence which describes institutional, divisional or agency effectiveness” (p. 18). The last step in Barham and Scott’s (2006) Assessment Evaluation Model is the evaluation process. Evaluation requires taking a critical look at the structured program and its desired outcomes and judging the program’s effectiveness (Barham & Scott, 2006).

## Connecting Assessment to Equity: A Proposed Assessment

The following assessment plan focuses on the Southeastern Student Affairs strategic initiative, “enhancing an open, welcoming, and inclusive campus environment.” The assessment plan contributes to Southeastern Student Affairs’ strategic planning process by highlighting critical issues

that need to be addressed and resolved, and by providing baseline data so that student affairs staff can design programs that meet today's college students' needs (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996).

There is little evidence in the division documenting staffing practices that points toward building an inclusive campus environment to promote student learning and development. The purpose of this assessment plan is to (a) understand staff perceptions of the strategic direction, (b) gather baseline data surrounding staff practices related to inclusivity, and © apply results to practice. The framework for the assessment plan is a five-year model designed to build a culture of evidence and improved practice (Varlotta, 2012). Furthermore, the assessment model aligns with the five-year Southeastern Student Affairs strategic plan. Described in more detail below, the five-year assessment plan is an iterative process and one that includes setting department goals, gathering data, submitting reports, gradually moving from indirect to direct measures of success, evaluating program effectiveness, and making necessary adjustments in an effort to foster an inclusive and welcoming campus environment.

**Year 1: Gathering baseline data.** Senior Officers in the OVPSA will communicate the purpose of the assessment plan, expectations of leaders and staff in each department, and information on the five-year assessment plan to Southeastern Student Affairs staff. Department leaders should invite staff (e.g. Coordinators, Graduate Assistants, Administrative Assistants) to participate in the assessment process for their unit in an effort to build a culture of evidence and improvement. Senior Officers and department leaders should emphasize using the assessment plan as a resource for departmental and divisional improvements.

A questionnaire measuring staff agreement on items related to the strategic initiative “enhancing an open, welcoming, and inclusive campus environment” will be distributed in early fall to all Student Affairs staff. For example, the questionnaire will consist of a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Four sections comprise the questionnaire, each representing a strategic objective (i.e., engage in a comprehensive professional enrichment strategy to enhance the social justice competencies of student affairs staff) within the initiative. With four to five questions for each section including one open-ended question for each section, the time to complete the questionnaire is short thus encouraging a higher completion rate.

Reminder emails will be sent to staff to increase participation. In the spring, the data gathered will be analyzed, summarized, and documented. A series of meetings will be held with departmental leadership to share the data summary, and gather input so that programs and professional development opportunities can be created around the needs expressed from staff in the data summary. The assessment process must be inclusive of all Southeastern Student Affairs departments to ensure buy-in for programs created as a result of the assessment. Specific measures of success (i.e., learning outcomes) will accompany staff development opportunities, student programs, and services.

**Year 2: Assessment and practice.** Divisional leadership will execute the first round of programming initiatives stemming from the series of meetings with department heads in year one. The primary focus of programs will be around social justice education, which will parallel each department's individual initiatives. The overall goal of the first round of programming will be to increase staff's understanding of social justice principles in addition to applying these principles to student programs and services. Year two is a critical point where staff develop their own knowledge of social justice and then make connections to their practice. In other words, year two is where the shift occurs from professional development (i.e., social justice education) to student learning and development (i.e., programs connected to the Pillars of Student Success) (Bresciani, Gardner, & Hickmont, 2009).

**Year 3: Evaluate departmental efforts.** The assessment leadership team will conduct a midterm evaluation on the division's programming efforts around staff development. The goal of the midterm evaluation will be to provide Southeastern Student Affairs staff with initial feedback on staff training and development programs related to social justice. The purpose for this evaluation will be to improve divisional and departmental effectiveness (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996). The evaluation process will include conversations with departmental leadership and questionnaires for staff specifically around training and development opportunities. At this point in Year 3 three of the assessment plan, staff should have an enhanced understanding of social justice concepts with the ability to connect these concepts to student programs and services. Simultaneously, staff in each department should have continuous conversations about the assessment plan as a whole and how to continue to build a culture of inclusion across the division and with students.

**Year 4: Assessment cycle.** The original assessment questionnaire will be distributed again to all Southeastern Student Affairs staff. The results will be compared with data collected from the assessment in year one in order to understand the development of staff competencies in the area of social justice and inclusion. This comparison data will be analyzed and documented, and shared with all departmental leadership. As in year one of the plan, meetings will take place with departmental leadership to review the results, and discuss continued programming needs for staff. Programs should be increasingly advanced and focused on both staff development and connections to student programming.

**Year 5: Communicating results to stakeholders.** A summary report of the entire assessment plan, including data results, interpretations, programming, and future suggestions will be created. This report will be shared with internal and external stakeholders, which will help advance Southeastern Student Affairs in becoming a leader at the university around social justice issues. Senior Officers in the division should welcome conversations around the holistic experience of the assessment process. The goal in Year five of the assessment plan will be to advance the division within the university and continue to build a culture of inclusion and assessment.

## Limitations and Future Implications

The assessment survey and multi-year plan for Southeastern University were created in response to a need to better understand how well student affairs professionals on campus were advancing equity and inclusion through their professional practice. The authors of the plan conducted institutional research and engaged in conversations with staff to better understand the type of survey that would gather the most appropriate data. The final survey and plan were sufficient but will need revision for future use based on the cycle of assessment, in which current data is used to “close the loop” and improve future assessments. An additional limitation is the impact of employee turnover. During the five years of the proposed assessment plan, staff will change positions and leave the institution. New staff will be hired and this overall change in staffing will impact the continuity of data and may even impact individual office practices. This unavoidable concern can be addressed in the final data report as well as future assessments designs.

The data gathered and analyzed from the five-year assessment plan will have implications for the Division at Southeastern University. It should be used to inform each department and provide detailed guidelines for improved practice. The overall result will be the creation of a culture of assessment, improved inclusivity, and the advancement of equity through professional practice. As the cycle of assessment continues, continued improvements should follow. While the assessment used at Southeastern was created specifically for the needs of the Division, aspects of the both the process and the survey could be used to inform other institution's assessment practice. The authors hope that professionals interested in creating assessments will benefit from the work shared by Southeastern.

## Conclusion

In order to advance equity and inclusion on campus, specific initiatives must be created and evaluated. One way of doing this is through strategic planning and assessment. Southeastern Student Affairs, through its 2020 Strategic Plan, has taken leadership in understanding and creating equitable and inclusive environments. Executing the plan and assessing its effectiveness requires setting priorities, gaining support from various constituencies both on-campus and off-campus, and creating forms of measurement to decipher how goals and objectives are met. The Division of Student Affairs' role at any institution is to ensure that the holistic developmental needs of the students are met, but by engaging in the 2020 Strategic Plan the division will also have the ability to impact administration, faculty, and staff. Specifically focusing on issues of equity and inclusion is critical to improve campus climate and students' sense of belonging. By using thoughtfully planned assessments to explore the effectiveness of the strategic plan, Southeastern Student Affairs will understand better how to advance equity and inclusion on campus.

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# Figures, Tables, and Supplementary Materials

## Appendix A

Five-Year Assessment Plan

Download: <http://submissions.scholasticahq.com/api/v1/attachments/6411/download>

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## Appendix B

Staff Perceptions on Building Inclusive Campus Environments Questionnaire

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