

JILL DUNLAP, ALEXA WESLEY CHAMBERLAIN, ALEXIS WESAW, AND AMELIA PARNELL

# Advancing Racial Justice on Campus

**Student and Administrator Perspectives  
on Conditions for Change**

# Acknowledgments

We, the authors, would like to thank the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation for their generous support in funding this project. The findings and conclusions contained within are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of the foundation. We are also grateful to our organizational partners, the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education (NADOHE) and the Ceceilyn Miller Institute for Leadership and Diversity in America, for support in administering the national surveys for this research. We thank Paulette Granberry Russell, president of NADOHE, for providing project guidance and reviewing a draft of the report.

We are deeply grateful for our NASPA colleagues:

- Diana Ali, associate director of policy research and advocacy, for her valuable contribution of time and expertise during campus site visits
- Monica Nixon, vice president for justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion, for reviewing and providing feedback on the draft of this report
- Melissa Dahne, senior director of publications, for managing the report design and editing process
- Scott Fuller, assistant director of marketing and communications, for widening the reach of this work and managing communication efforts

Finally, we would like to thank the many students, campus administrators, and leaders who shared their time and insights with us and whose experiences are at the center of the report.

# Contents

<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>Introduction and Background</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Research Approach</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Research Findings</b> .....	<b>6</b>
Compositional Diversity.....	7
Student Interactions and Space .....	14
Mindsets and Learning Opportunities .....	16
External Forces .....	23
Leadership Commitment.....	25
Assessment and Accountability.....	28
Transparency and Communication .....	31
Student Involvement in Decision-Making .....	35
Student Advocacy .....	38
Faculty/Staff Involvement and Responsiveness.....	40
<b>Closing Takeaways</b> .....	<b>44</b>
<b>References</b> .....	<b>46</b>
<b>Appendix A: Campus Case Studies</b> .....	<b>47</b>
PWI .....	48
HBCU .....	49
Community College .....	50
<b>Appendix B: Student Focus-Group Respondent and Institutional Characteristics</b> .....	<b>52</b>
<b>Appendix C: Student Survey Respondent and Institutional Characteristics</b> .....	<b>54</b>
<b>Appendix D: Administrator Survey Respondent and Institutional Characteristics</b> .....	<b>57</b>

# Executive Summary

Racial justice in higher education cannot be meaningfully advanced without campus leadership understanding the lived experiences of students, particularly those who identify as Black, Indigenous, Latinx/a/o, Asian, or Pacific Islander. Over the 3 years following the murder of George Floyd and the social uprisings in 2020, colleges and universities have continued to think critically about how to make progress on their commitments to campus change.

This report shares insights about ways students and senior administrators define the term *racial climate* and what they identify as key factors for advancing racial justice on campus. NASPA's 18-month research included focus groups with 65 student activists, a national survey of vice presidents of student affairs and senior diversity officers, a national survey of undergraduate students, and three campus site visits. Students and senior administrators who participated in NASPA's research shared a range of nuanced perspectives about the challenges and opportunities facing institutions in their efforts to advance racial justice.



*“NASPA’s research reinforces the notion that efforts to positively influence racial climate and advance racial justice should be made in connection with each other—and with the buy-in and support from everyone on campus.”*

Both students and administrators agreed (to at least some extent) on much of the “what” that needs to happen on campus to positively influence racial climate. Namely, agreement mostly centered on the need to ensure that

1. racial/ethnic diversity exists at all levels of the institution;
2. spaces and engagement opportunities within campus and the surrounding community are well supported, welcoming, and accessible;
3. reporting mechanisms for bias incidents are in place and individuals are held accountable for causing harm;
4. commitments for change are connected to actions validated by students; and
5. progress is measured, transparently reported, and ongoing.

Comparison of student and administrator survey data indicated a degree of agreement about a range of important changes that must happen and the belief that progress on those changes has been limited. NASPA's research reinforces the notion that efforts to positively influence racial climate and advance racial justice should be made in connection with each other—and with the buy-in and support from everyone on campus. This report's findings can help guide campus planning discussions and offer a field-level perspective about student priorities for campus efforts.

# Introduction and Background

Racial justice in higher education cannot be meaningfully advanced without campus leadership understanding the lived experiences of students, particularly those who identify as Black, Indigenous, Latinx/a/o, Asian, or Pacific Islander. Over the 3 years following the murder of George Floyd and the social uprisings in 2020, colleges and universities have continued to think critically about how to make progress on their commitments to campus change. Even amid a backdrop of restrictive state legislation targeting diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts in education, prioritization of racial justice on campus remains critical to student success.

In February 2021, NASPA partnered with the **National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education** (NADOHE) to conduct a survey of vice presidents of student affairs (VPSAs) and senior diversity officers (SDOs) that explored the processes behind making public statements committing to racial justice on campus and whether any institutional actions followed. The resulting research report, *Moving From Words to Action: The Influence of Racial Justice Statements on Campus Equity Efforts*, revealed that institutions have held listening sessions and invested in initiatives related to DEI work as a foundation for long-term plans and actions that are still underway. NASPA's 2021 survey findings also indicated that statements issued by leadership involved the input of multiple campus stakeholders, yet only 3% of respondents reported involving students specifically. Although the research outlined a range of ways that institutions have taken action, it also highlighted a need to better understand how students perceive the effectiveness of these efforts and how students' lived experiences on campus can serve as a means of assessing institutional progress. Examining what drives a campus's racial climate is a critical and related effort for campus leaders

seeking to understand and advance institutional transformation efforts and racial justice in higher education.

This report summarizes the findings of NASPA's 18-month research on student perspectives on racial justice and campus racial climate and the extent to which these viewpoints align with those of the administrators leading campus efforts. To help ground the research, NASPA reviewed 88 statements issued by various student groups in 2015 that were included in the Black Liberation Collective's online repository. Of the 88 institutions at which students issued statements in 2015, NASPA found that 39 of those institutions also had statements issued by student groups in 2020. Comparative analysis highlighted the breadth of changes that students called for over a 5-year span. Perhaps most notably, several of the student demands in 2020 included a reiteration of the same demands called for in 2015. The possible perception among student activists that their demands remained unmet out of institutional unresponsiveness begs this question: What is the disconnect between institutional investments and student priorities for campus change? And recognizing the role that campus climate plays in shaping student perceptions—as well as the inverse direction of that relationship—what are the key factors influencing an institution's capacity for change?

Building on insights gleaned from NASPA's prior research focused solely on administrators' efforts, this report focuses on the ways students and administrators define the term *racial climate* and what they identify as key factors for advancing racial justice on campus. This report synthesizes recent research findings that contribute to the growing foundation of knowledge on ways for institutions to operationalize their commitments to racial justice.



# Research Approach

NASPA's report is informed by a series of original data collection efforts, including student focus groups, student and administrator surveys, and three campus site visits. Such efforts focused on understanding student and administrator perceptions about the most important areas of campus focus for advancing racial justice, areas of campus progress, important drivers of and barriers to advancing racial justice and improving campus racial climate, ways to measure effectiveness and communicate progress, and ways to engage students and include them in making decisions. Rather than provide prescribed definitions of *racial justice* and *racial climate*, NASPA's research team asked students to share how they define and understand these concepts.

Between December 2021 and March 2022, focus groups took place with 65 undergraduate students who self-identified as activists on their campuses. Of the 65 participants, 19 identified as Black and/or African American; 15 identified with one or more races/ethnicities; 14 identified as Asian, Asian American, and/or Desi American; 9 identified as Latinx/a/o or Hispanic; 6 identified as White and/or European; and 2 identified as Middle Eastern, Southwest Asian, and/or North African. Focus group participants also varied across gender identity, Pell Grant-eligibility status, first-generation status, transfer status, and academic class standing. A total of 55 unique institutions were represented, and all but two participants reported being enrolled in a primarily White institution. Semistructured focus groups were designed to elicit the perspectives of student activists about their institution's efforts to advance racial justice and racial climate during their time at the institution, and to learn about what factors and barriers they think influence progress. For additional details about respondent and institutional characteristics, see Appendix B.

To gather additional quantitative data related to student concerns, priorities, and perceptions about institutional actions related to improving racial climate and racial justice efforts on campus, NASPA then conducted a national survey of 130 undergraduates. Administered in late summer 2022, the student survey was conducted in collaboration with **the Ceceilyn Miller Institute for Leadership and Diversity in America** (the Miller Institute), a nonprofit organization that offers diversity training and professional development for staff and students across the United States. NASPA sent invitations for the student survey to its membership and to student advisors and students within the Miller Institute's database of past program participants. Student respondents varied across race/ethnicity, gender identity, and academic class standing. More than half (55%) of respondents identified as first generation, and 44% identified as eligible for Pell Grants. Most respondents (92%) were enrolled full-time at the time of the survey. Respondents were enrolled in a mix of public 4-year, private 4-year, and public 2-year institutions. Of the 130 student survey respondents, 63 unique institutions were represented. Given the oversampling of students from certain institutions, readers should consider that the student is the unit of analysis in the findings, not the institution, when interpreting the student survey data.

Released at the same time as the student survey, a joint survey by NASPA and NADOHE was taken by 176 VPSAs and SDOs. Each respondent represented a unique institution. NASPA and NADOHE had previously partnered to gather administrator perceptions about public statements and follow-up actions, so the two institutions issued a follow-up survey about what VPSAs and SDOs see as factors that influence efforts to advance racial justice and racial climate on campus, how they perceive the effectiveness of these efforts, and the various ways that campuses are ensuring that students are aware of and involved in strategies for change. Both student and administrator survey data have informed NASPA's analysis about areas

of alignment and disagreement between these groups. For additional details about respondent and institutional characteristics for the student and administrator surveys, see Appendices C and D.

Finally, NASPA conducted three in-person site visits in fall 2022 at institutions representing various sectors, sizes, student populations, and regions of the United States. Each visit included separate group interviews with faculty, staff, and students. Site visits gave NASPA an institutionwide and context-specific perspective about stakeholder experiences on each campus. Institution-specific details and names for each campus have been anonymized.





# Research Findings

Fostering a positive campus racial climate is a critical step toward advancing racial justice in higher education. For institutions seeking to take their efforts further, understanding how students and administrators define and experience racial climate reveals several common themes as well as opportunities. Readers should note, however, that no single element guarantees an inclusive campus climate and that each area highlighted has aspects that overlap with others. The breadth of options presented in Figure 1—and the level of importance indicated by students and administrators for most of them—emphasizes the multifaceted nature of a campus’s racial climate and the need for well-integrated approaches. The list of options for advancing racial justice on campus is wide ranging but not exhaustive. Figures 2 and 3 highlight distinctions in perspectives about factors that *advance racial justice* and those that

“Although the two concepts are closely linked, the intent in asking about them separately is to recognize that *climate* is a measure of lived experiences, while the term *racial justice* refers to a broader vision of transformation.”

contribute to a positive campus racial climate. Although the two concepts are closely linked, the intent in asking about them separately is to recognize that *climate* is a measure of lived experiences, while the term *racial justice* refers to a broader vision of transformation. NASPA’s sharing of insights about key capacity areas that stood out in the research is intended to inform institutional efforts and further affirm where actions must be made.







## Compositional Diversity

Both students and administrators recognize the foundational importance of having individuals (students, faculty, staff, administrators, and senior leadership) from racially/ethnically diverse backgrounds on campus as both an indicator and a driver of a positive racial climate (see Tables 1–3). In alignment with what Milem et al. (2005) refer to as “compositional diversity,” students and administrators identified both demographics and representation as playing critical roles in advancing racial justice efforts and the campus racial climate.

When administrators were asked about the most important areas of focus for advancing the campus racial climate for students, 86% selected increasing racial diversity of faculty and staff, 67% selected increasing racial diversity among senior leadership, and 60% selected increasing racial diversity of students (see Table 1). Student survey respondents also identified having a racially diverse student body (58%), leadership (55%), faculty/staff (54%), and board of regents (45%) as positive contributors to campus climate for racially minoritized students (see Table 3). Student focus-group participants reinforced the survey data about the value of racial/ethnic diversity on campus:

*I think if I could make a magic wand and make any change happen on campus, it would be more faculty of color.*

*Racial climate makes me think of what you can see within your university. Like, what is the racial diversity and representation within your classroom, within the faculty and staff, and within the student body? Is it just that we have a couple of different clusters of non-White students, or is it more balanced and evenly divided?*

*I think because there's so few of us on campus, people of color, it's easy to ignore us. Because there's really strength and power in numbers, and we just don't have that right now.*

### **Staff/Faculty Recruitment and Retention**

Data confirmed that administrators and students believe in the importance of racial and ethnic diversity of faculty and staff on campus, but they feel more could be done to ensure that hiring and retention-related policies align with and support this goal.

Although 64% of administrators and 40% of students surveyed indicated that racially equitable recruitment and hiring policies for faculty and staff is an important area of focus, far fewer (36% and 15%, respectively) reported it as an area of perceived progress<sup>1</sup> on their respective campuses. The gap between level of importance and action taken is even wider when it comes to retaining faculty and staff of color. More than half (53%) of administrators and a third of students (32%) indicated that implementing racially equitable promotion and retention policies for faculty and staff is an important area of focus, but only 14% of administrators and 9% of students perceived it as an area of progress (see Table 1).

---

<sup>1</sup> To capture more recent changes made, NASPA asked administrators to indicate if progress had been made between February 2021 and July 2022.



Focus-group data also found that students recognize the importance of considering the diversity of faculty and staff positions by type and level on campus. One student shared this:

*I think [the institution] needs to entirely reevaluate the structure of faculty employment, even at the student-life level. Like, who are we hiring and what seniority position are we giving them...are we giving them a job where we're not only affirming their diversity and that they belong on this campus, but that we want to give them avenues to be here long term to do that work, and not just asking them to do DEI work in their term as an adjunct and then leave?*

Another student focus-group participant highlighted the importance of considering the geographic location of the campus as an influential recruitment factor—and suggested that salary levels need to better align with the cost of living in the surrounding area:

*I think just being able to get a more diverse staff in higher roles on our campus [is important], because it's been hard for us to keep faculty and staff on campus because the cost of living here is ridiculous. It's very difficult to gain new staff and faculty, and we do a lot of internal hiring because it's so hard to find people who want to come and teach here, because we're so far from everything, and it's ridiculously expensive.*



**TABLE 1 | Perceptions about areas of focus for advancing campus racial climate compared with areas of progress**

Focus area	Administrators (N = 176)		Students (N = 130)	
	Percentage who think the focus area is important	Percentage who think their institution has made progress on the focus area	What are the most important areas of focus in your opinion?	In which areas has your campus made progress?
Advancing student data collection and analysis	64%	53%	40%	20%
Creating a campus multicultural center	20%	14%	55%	50%
Creating a culturally specific space or building for racially minoritized students	33%	19%	37%	39%
Creating a senior diversity officer or equivalent position	15%	24%	31%	27%
Creating scholarships for racially minoritized students	34%	23%	55%	27%
Implementing racially equitable promotion and retention policies for faculty and staff	53%	14%	32%	9%
Implementing racially equitable recruitment and hiring policies for faculty and staff	64%	36%	40%	15%
Improving racial climate of surrounding community	38%	9%	42%	13%
Increasing accountability for acts of racism on campus	59%	29%	67%	15%
Increasing engagement with racially minoritized alumni	45%	18%	35%	10%
Increasing funding for culturally specific departments	22%	9%	39%	8%
Increasing funding for culturally specific student organizations	26%	11%	42%	16%
Increasing funding for mental health supports for racially minoritized students	48%	22%	48%	14%
Increasing funding for the diversity, equity, and inclusion office	53%	31%	51%	18%



**TABLE 1 | Perceptions about areas of focus for advancing campus racial climate compared with areas of progress (continued)**

Focus area	Administrators (N = 176)		Students (N = 130)	
	Percentage who think the focus area is important	Percentage who think their institution has made progress on the focus area	What are the most important areas of focus in your opinion?	In which areas has your campus made progress?
Increasing racial diversity among senior leadership	67%	27%	44%	21%
Increasing racial diversity of faculty and staff	86%	38%	48%	24%
Increasing racial diversity of students	60%	31%	47%	32%
Increasing transparency of law enforcement interaction with minoritized students	24%	19%	47%	11%
Providing education/awareness-building efforts for faculty and staff	82%	65%	53%	22%
Providing education/awareness-building efforts for leadership	73%	52%	51%	22%
Providing education/awareness-building efforts for students	68%	55%	57%	28%
Removing statues	5%	2%	21%	5%
Renaming buildings	10%	12%	15%	8%
Reviewing curricula for inclusion of racially diverse texts and/or authors	55%	33%	34%	15%
Tracking and making public information on campus bias incidents and racism on campus	47%	27%	50%	12%
Other	11%	3%	3%	5%
None of the above	0%	3%	2%	8%

\*Administrator respondents were asked about areas of progress since February 2021.



**TABLE 2 | What do you view as the most important factors for advancing racial justice in higher education?**

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Administrators (N = 176)</b>	<b>Students (N = 130)</b>
Accountability for acts of racism on campus	66%	59%
Alumni/donor influence	22%	28%
Education/awareness-building efforts for faculty	76%	43%
Education/awareness-building efforts for senior leadership	69%	36%
Education/awareness-building efforts for staff	68%	42%
Education/awareness-building efforts for students	67%	44%
Federal and state legislation	31%	27%
Funding for student organizations	14%	50%
Institutionwide collaboration	80%	48%
Media pressure for change	14%	33%
Racial climate of surrounding community	36%	35%
Racial diversity of faculty and staff	84%	62%
Racial diversity of leadership	77%	66%
Racial diversity of students	63%	63%
Support of board of regents	45%	24%
Support of faculty	56%	48%
Support of senior leadership	63%	35%
Support of staff	47%	52%
Transparency in the reporting from senior leaders of racial bias and acts of racism on campus	44%	35%
Year-round programming on issues of race	40%	42%
Other	6%	2%
None of the above	0%	2%



## Student Retention

Structural or compositional diversity plays an important role in shaping an institution's climate, but investments must also be made to ensure that enrolled students on campus are supported and retained. Both surveyed administrators (76%) and students (44%) agreed that having support systems for racially minoritized students is a top factor contributing to a positive campus climate (see Table 3). A student focus-group participant from a Hispanic-serving institution emphasized the limitation of looking at numbers alone to measure climate, sharing how they perceive the designation as performative:

*As a Hispanic student, as a Chicana, I think that we have the numbers. Technically, we have the numbers. Technically, I walk into a class and it is more diverse. For me, when I think about a racial climate, when I go on campus, first of all, there still is a majority of White people on our campus. And I know during the Hispanic Heritage Month they came out with a new T-shirt that had all of these Hispanic things on it. And I remember just seeing it and being like, So do I get a discount because I'm Hispanic? Does that mean that I get a discount on this shirt, or are you just profiting off of my culture?*

Others at predominantly White institutions built upon the feeling that more needs to be done to support students of color and understand their experiences once they enroll:

*Our admissions office is trying to get minority students to work for them so that when we do campus tours, other minorities see us here and want to come here. But to me, it's kind of a form of tokenism. Because you're using us to attract more minorities here, but you're not giving them a reason to stay.*

*I think that racism exists in numbers, it exists in lack of representation and things like that. But you also want to recognize that people are not*

*numbers and that people have real experiences. I think that quantitative stuff is important, but I would appreciate an approach that also incorporates qualitative data.*

An important performance measure for consideration is the extent to which a variety of supports focus on retaining students of color (particularly on a predominantly White campus). Although the kinds of investments made will depend on students' differing priorities across campuses, survey results suggested that providing mental health supports and providing scholarships for racially minoritized students are often identified as areas of desired student support (see Table 1). Approximately half of surveyed students selected mental health support (55%) and scholarships (48%) as important areas of focus, but far fewer believed that their respective campuses are making progress toward delivering them (27% and 14%). Survey data indicated that administrators feel similarly about the gap between level of importance and progress related to these student supports, which points to an opportunity for further discussion. Ensuring that available supports are widely marketed and designed in collaboration with students is critical to maximizing their accessibility and utilization. Several focus-group participants highlighted the limitations of using email to share updates, with one respondent sharing that emails can reify inequities and articulating a preference for other forms of communication:

*I feel like it's only the student leaders on campus who really keep up with all the changes. And a lot of the time the people who don't read their emails are the ones who are probably most directly impacted by the changes happening. I just wish they'd sort of meet us where we're at, whether that's putting up flyers about different changes, a bulletin board, whether it's in the dining halls, or just sending out info to the dorms.*

**TABLE 3 | Which of the following factors do you believe contributes to a positive campus climate for racially minoritized students?**

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Administrators (N = 176)</b>	<b>Students (N = 130)</b>
Accountability for racist/bias incident among faculty/staff/students	80%	67%
Affinity groups or cultural center spaces where students can connect with peers	77%	58%
Anonymous reporting system for bias incidents/protection from retaliation for reporting bias incidents	54%	46%
Culturally responsive curriculum	81%	55%
Leadership making statements in response to incidents of racism or racial injustice	55%	43%
Retention and promotion of diverse students/faculty/staff	78%	39%
Regularly reporting on progress based on commitments to racial equity	65%	38%
Racially minoritized students' sense of belonging and safety on campus	81%	45%
Prioritization of addressing racial trauma and student mental health	51%	42%
Racially diverse student body	65%	58%
Racially diverse faculty and staff	82%	54%
Racially diverse board of regents	51%	45%
Racially diverse leadership	74%	55%
Accountability written into leadership and tenure evaluations	51%	34%
Safety in the community surrounding campus	44%	36%
Support systems for racially minoritized students/faculty/staff/international students	76%	44%
Training for faculty/staff/students	80%	37%
Other	3%	2%
None of the above	0%	2%



## Student Interactions and Spaces

Both students and administrators indicated that racially minoritized students' sense of belonging and safety on campus is among the most important factors contributing to a positive campus climate (see Table 3). Two student focus-group participants emphasized the importance of students feeling safe to be themselves across the campus community:

*I would say that racial climate could be measured by how students of color feel while on campus—whether that's in a social space, classroom, or just walking in the nearby community, even.*

*For me, racial climate would be how everybody, in their own way, feels safe on campus. Safe, of course, in the traditional sense, and safe as well as to express their opinion and not get shut down, and so they can express their own identity, whether that be through their fashion, through the people who they hang out with, the music that they play, etc.*

One way campus leaders can advance students' sense of belonging and safety on campus is by ensuring positive engagement opportunities with peers across a variety of racial and ethnic identities. Several student focus-group participants also shared that campus racial climate could be assessed by gauging the frequency and quality of interactions among students with peers who have a different racial or ethnic identity from their own:

*In terms of how I would measure racial climate on campus, I would say by the groups of people that you see hanging out on campus. I notice a lot of, I don't like to use the word segregation, but you can see a clear divide. Like-people hang out with like-people, and it's very rare that you see a diverse friend group, unless it's in a big organization.*

*To measure [racial climate], I would look at how students of different races interact with one another and the different programs offered and what audience they tend to target. And then what type of audience actually shows up. Because if you have a diverse group that shows up [to an event], it shows that the student body might be a little more open to learning about other races and cultures.*

*When we do have spaces on campus where it's mixed, it's very awkward because I feel like White people are scared to say the wrong thing, and then Black people feel uncomfortable because they're scared that they're going to be judged in some way.*

### Multicultural Centers

Survey results also suggested that one area of perceived alignment between student priorities and institutional action is around the institution-led creation of cultural spaces in which students of various racial and ethnic backgrounds can interact. Among surveyed students, 55% thought that the creation of a multicultural center is a top area of focus for advancing racial justice in higher education, while 50% also reported perceiving this effort as an area where their institution has made progress (see Table 1). A student focus-group participant shared an example of how an administrator at her institution helped facilitate opportunities for identity-based student organizations to interact:

*The assistant director of the Latinx Affairs on campus is starting an on-campus event that's called Fusion Nights, which include social activities meant to have various minority organizations congregate. So, we have an Asian American Ambassadors Club, we have the Black Student Union Club, we have the Multicultural Sorority, we have my Latino Club. To see that sort of attitude from the highest of the highest administration, I think, would be a great step in achieving an optimal racial climate, not only on my campus, but that same behavior on other campuses as well would be great.*



While the creation of multicultural centers is by no means a singular method for advancing students' sense of belonging, it can serve as a critical step toward building a campuswide support system and infrastructure for engagement opportunities.

### **Identity-Based Affinity Groups**

Student data suggested that identity-specific spaces and resources are needed for students with shared identities to connect with each other and establish support networks. Spaces and groups specific to student cultures and identities, such as a Black Student Union, are distinct from multicultural centers in that they are student led and provide opportunities for students who share a similar cultural identity and experience to find community with each other. Among surveyed students, 58% indicated that having affinity groups or cultural center spaces where students can connect with their peers is a factor contributing to a positive campus climate for racially minoritized students (see Figure 3). A student focus-group participant explained the importance of having dedicated identity-specific spaces on her predominantly White campus:

*A lot of the school's culture is rooted in spaces that are not for students who are not rich or White. And that's the biggest thing I've noticed [on my campus], whether that be within organizations or clubs, but especially with Greek Life. ...It's just like the culture [on my campus] is very much catered for rich, White students, and especially if they're involved in Greek Life. And so, it makes it hard for students—especially for first-gen, low-income students of color—to find spaces on campus to belong and feel accepted within that community.*

Even on campuses that do have affinity- and identity-based spaces, often there is a great need for resources to help maintain them. A student focus-group participant explained:

*Even with the spaces that do exist, there are a lot of affinity spaces and resources for those students, those spaces don't have as much infrastructure and as much attention brought to them as Greek Life or just spaces that have traditionally been for White students.*

Student survey data also supported the notion that additional funding for culturally specific student organizations is needed, with 42% of surveyed students indicating that increasing funds for these spaces is an important area of focus for advancing campus racial justice in higher education (see Table 1). In contrast, only 26% of surveyed administrators indicated that increasing funding for culturally specific student organizations is an important area of focus, and even less (22%) saw it as an area of institutional progress (see Table 1). Colleges and universities should ensure that adequate and sustained resources are available to invest in both programming and physical spaces that facilitate student engagement. A student focus-group participant from a large 4-year public institution shared:

*A lot of our buildings are outdated and sort of falling down. We have an African American Cultural Center, and when it rains a lot, because we're in Louisiana and it's very much a rainy state, they'll get a lot of water, moisture, and buildup and whatnot. I've seen this issue with a bunch of other buildings too. I feel like if we were to replace these buildings with newer models and better structure, I think that could help encourage students to want to keep attending [my institution] or have their other family members attend.*



## Mindsets and Learning Opportunities

Survey results confirmed that students view individual mindset as an important driver of institutional progress and perhaps a factor that leads to the lack of racial diversity on campus. When asked about the greatest barriers to advancing racial justice efforts, students most frequently responded with lack of acknowledgment of racial inequities from leadership (41%), lack of acknowledgment of

racial inequities from students (39%), and lack of recognition of the intersectional barriers students face (38%; Table 4). Part of defining a path forward should involve senior leadership establishing an institutionwide understanding of the breadth and depth of inequities on campus and ensuring that approaches do not treat any one student group as a monolith. A lack of acknowledgment about their lived experiences on campus can leave students feeling disconnected from—and often distrustful of—even the most well-meaning approaches to advancing change.

**TABLE 4 | What are the greatest barriers at your institution to advancing racial justice efforts?**

Barrier	Administrators (N = 176)	Students (N = 130)
Lack of acknowledgement of racial inequities from leadership	26%	41%
Lack of acknowledgement of racial inequities from students	12%	39%
Lack of recognition of intersectional barriers students face	43%	38%
Lack of acknowledgement of racial inequities from public policy makers/legislature	26%	28%
Lack of education/awareness-building efforts for students	23%	30%
Lack of education/awareness-building efforts for faculty	41%	23%
Lack of education/awareness-building efforts for staff	30%	20%
Lack of education/awareness-building efforts for senior leadership	32%	18%
Lack of campuswide efforts to enact change	32%	41%
One-time programs or programming offered only in celebration of nationally recognized cultural months	34%	28%
Lack of funding for student organizations	15%	32%
Lack of accountability for those who cause harm	33%	32%
Lack of racial diversity of faculty	68%	32%
Lack of racial diversity of staff	46%	26%
Lack of racial diversity of senior leadership	40%	31%
Lack of racial diversity of students	25%	24%

**TABLE 4 | What are the greatest barriers at your institution to advancing racial justice efforts? (continued)**

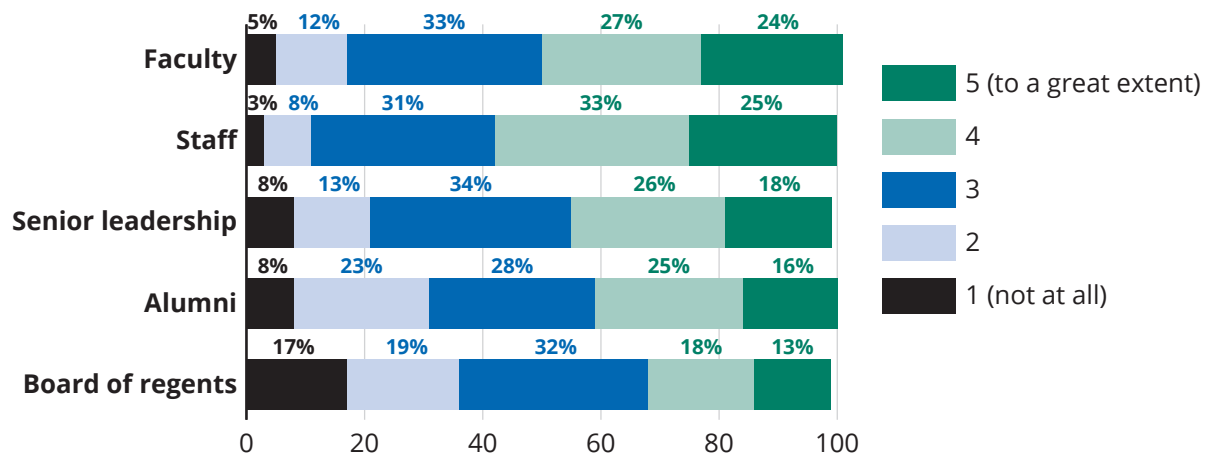
<b>Barrier</b>	<b>Administrators (N = 176)</b>	<b>Students (N = 130)</b>
Unsupportive faculty	27%	16%
Unsupportive staff	15%	15%
Unsupportive senior leadership	18%	15%
Unsupportive board of regents	15%	13%
Racial climate of surrounding community	24%	17%
Lack of media attention on racial justice issues	4%	19%
Alumni/donor influence	13%	14%
Federal or state legislation	22%	16%
Lack of institutional commitment/follow-through on institutional goals	31%	15%
Lack of institutional commitment/follow-through on changes in policies and procedures	27%	21%
Lack of institutional commitment/follow-through on changes on student concerns	18%	25%
Slow pace of change/bureaucracy	57%	33%
Other	9%	1%
None of the above	0%	12%



The role of awareness-building and biases is underscored in the survey findings, suggesting that students perceive different groups—faculty, staff, senior leadership, alumni, and boards of regents—to have varying degrees of supportive mindsets about advancing racial justice on campus. Surveyed students perceived their respective institutions’ board of regents and alumni as having the least

supportive mindset regarding advancing racial justice on campus, followed by senior leadership, faculty, and then staff (Figure 1). Though not to suggest that the entirety of any one group is unsupportive (as there are often many within that group working to create change), these findings are still worth noting, as they show how students perceive various entities in the aggregate.

**FIGURE 1 | Students: On a scale of 1 to 5, to what extent do you think the following groups demonstrate having a supportive mindset regarding advancing racial justice on campus? (N = 130)**



Note. Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.



Several student focus-group participants further explained why they identify alumni and board of trustees as barriers to progress:

*I'm at a private college, which means you need funding from alumni, and a lot of the alumni are older White people who don't support progressive initiatives. So, trying to create change is difficult because we have to market to the alumni who don't really get what's going on in the world right now, or they get what's going on but aren't willing to change their mindsets.*

*Most of the people who are on the board of trustees are never even on campus, so they don't even know what's actually happening here. Trying to get them to understand how students are feeling and what's going on within the student population is really important to address the racial climate here.*

*I wish we had younger alumni on our board of trustees. Because when I say [our board of trustees] holds all the power, they hold all the power. I have seen seven presidents in the span of 4 years as I have been here. And I have had great relationships with all my presidents here. I have been respectful, very cordial to all of them. And I have seen change come from every one of them here. But I want to say our board of trustees have a direct block.*

Other students suggested that perhaps unsupportive mindsets of leadership are reinforced by policies and administrative checks that slow progress and prevent timely changes on campus:

*I'm not sure if other institutions are shaped the same way, but at our institution, the board of trustees ultimately has the final say as part of our president's council. But I think that the bureaucracy exists not only at the board level but also among senior administrators as a mechanism for...how do you say? As a mechanism for actively rejecting DEI.*

*There are so many hoops and channels that [we] have to go through in order to actually make something happen. The institution has so many other things going on that are "important." I have noticed in recent conversations within my university that one of the reasons why some things don't happen is because we, being the students, have good initiatives that we want to make happen. And then the university, through the bureaucratic channels, will say, "[The campus is already going to do that]." And so that has stalled a couple of things.*

*We get everything set up to where we can do things that would be better for equity, inclusion, and racial justice, and [the president] shoots it down. He goes, "No, we're not doing that, because I don't necessarily want to do that. Because..." And then he gives whatever reason it is. And I've had a couple conversations with him that have never gone well. And it's very frustrating.*

Notably, both students and administrators surveyed agreed that a "slow pace of change/bureaucracy" serves as a significant barrier to advancing racial justice efforts (see Table 4). Disaggregating administrator survey data by institutional characteristics also revealed that concerns about bureaucracy exist regardless of institution size: A third of those who identified it as a barrier came from institutions with fewer than 5,000 students. Concerns about bureaucracy may be a result of a combination of hierarchical process checks, competing institutional priorities, or a lack of succession planning during instances of leadership turnover.



### **Educational Efforts and Skill Building**

Both students and administrators agreed that education-, awareness-, and skill-building efforts for students, leadership, faculty, and staff are important areas of focus for advancing racial justice and racial climate efforts on campus (see Figure 1). Some surveyed administrators reported that their institutions had sought to build faculty and staff’s cultural competency through training and professional development. Such efforts can play an important role in shifting underlying mindsets and building institutional capacity for change. One student focus-group participant shared:

*Having more conversations about what it really means to be culturally competent, knowing when to stop and educate yourself, and really understanding power dynamics with race, I think, would be really important.*

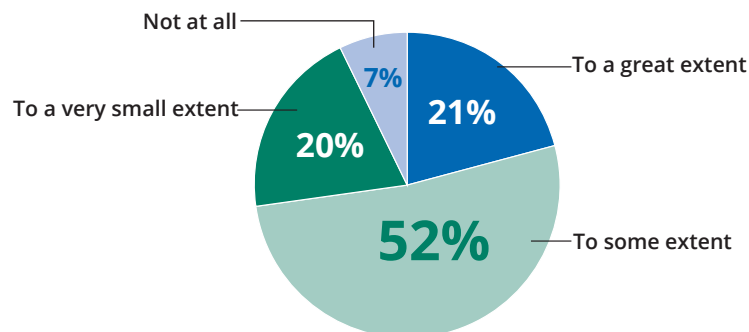
Although student survey results suggested that students do not perceive much progress being made in this area, surveyed administrators reported offering education- or awareness-building efforts for faculty, staff, students, and leadership as top areas where recent progress had been made (see Figure 1). This apparent disconnection in perception may relate to how various stakeholders on campus define and measure progress for

“education-/awareness-building efforts.” One student focus-group participant noted the importance of ensuring that the educational opportunities offered by a campus reach their intended audience:

*People have to bring themselves forward to take these workshops; it’s usually people who are already very knowledgeable about these issues and topics who attend them. So, it’s like preaching to the choir. So, if there was an effort to encourage students who don’t know about these topics, or maybe even opposed to them, to encourage them to take them by giving them credit or required classes—I think that would make a huge difference.*

Both administrators and students identified attention to creating a culturally responsive curriculum as a top factor contributing to a positive racial climate (see Table 3). Approximately half of surveyed students (52%) believed that the curriculum in their field of study incorporates people of color “to some extent,” suggesting that such efforts could be made on a more consistent basis (see Figure 2). Additionally, although a third of administrators (33%) indicated reviewing curricula for inclusion of racially diverse texts and/or authors as an area of recent progress, only 15% of surveyed students felt the same (see Table 1).

**FIGURE 2 | Students: To what extent do you think the curriculum within your field of study incorporates people of color (scholars, important figures, studies of, etc.)? (N = 130)**



Note. Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.

Another student focus-group participant also shared a desire for institutions to focus on curricular review for courses in the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields:

*Curriculum-wise, what is the institution or the administration doing to make sure that they properly acknowledge achievements from other diverse populations that have been made in different fields? Especially, I feel like STEM is a big one. Because achievements of Black inventors are always overshadowed by those of their White counterparts.*

Moreover, efforts to cultivate supportive mindsets and offer educational opportunities can also be led by a variety of groups outside the classroom. Surveyed administrators indicated that they frequently turn to existing student spaces and meetings to expand their understanding of student experiences and needs (see Table 5). Hosting listening sessions, for example, is an informal way to gather feedback from students and other key stakeholders about the effectiveness of efforts to better understand their lived experiences on campus. For students, educational efforts may also range across communication media, both in person and online (see Table 6). In addition to engagement via emails and social media, surveyed students identified watching online videos and lectures by scholars of color as an opportunity to seek out information and educate themselves about racial justice efforts at their respective institutions.

**TABLE 5 | Administrators: How do you search for information and educate yourself about experiences of racially minoritized individuals at your institution? (N = 176)**

Education method	Percentage
Attending student group meetings	75%
Attending student government meetings	59%
Attending protests/rallies	49%
Emails from students	74%
Engaging with social media of student organizations	30%
Holding listening sessions or town halls with students	74%
Holding listening sessions or town halls with faculty/staff	50%
Other	13%



**TABLE 6 | Students: How do you seek out information and educate yourself about racial justice efforts at your institution? (N = 130)**

Education method	Percentage
Attending student group meetings	58%
Engage with social media of student organizations	51%
Emails from campus leadership	50%
Attending student government meetings	42%
Registering for courses	38%
Online videos/lectures by scholars of color	30%
Attending protest/rallies	29%
Other	4%







## External Forces

Students and senior administrators recognized that college campuses do not operate in isolation from broader society. Local, state, and national contexts and history can meaningfully shape an institution's racial climate and racial justice efforts.

### **Surrounding Community**

More than a third of students and administrators surveyed identified the racial climate of the surrounding community as another important factor for advancing racial justice and improving climate on campus (see Tables 2 and 3). For example, a student focus-group participant from a Florida-based university noted that political ideologies of residents in the surrounding community can clearly influence institutional decisions:

*Our school is in a very conservative area, so it is harder to try to get certain issues out there. If our whole entire community is mainly conservative and the people who are doing scholarships and things like that are mainly conservative too, it's harder to get those issues out there because it's the demographic of our school and the location that we're in as well.*

While the climate of the surrounding community can pose a barrier to progress in some instances, in others it can also serve as a positive factor that can help advance change. Several student focus-group participants noted how pressure from outside communities helped play a role in shaping institutional priorities to take action. One student shared an example:

*When [my campus] was saying that they were going to change the library name, it was really the pressure from the community itself saying, "Why haven't you done anything about this? Why are we still acknowledging this man who wanted to keep our schools segregated? That's unacceptable." I would say, although [the name change] didn't happen, the pressure from the campus was what led to the petition to gather thousands of signatures, and the university to even make a statement regarding that.*

Additionally, an institution's surrounding community may include other colleges and universities nearby. Students may coordinate with others and view efforts on other campuses to build momentum for change at their own institution. One administrator survey respondent shared that students communicate with peers on other campuses for guidance on activism efforts and that this coordination can result in demands for faster-paced changes. Another administrator survey respondent shared that choosing not to coordinate efforts at a systems level is a missed opportunity:

*There is a hesitancy by the system as a whole to openly engage in efforts across the four-campus system to address racial justice. This leads to siloed efforts among campuses, which dilutes the impact that could be made if efforts were approached collectively.*





Although survey respondents identified improving the racial climate of the surrounding community as an important area of focus, only 13% of students and 9% of administrators reported it as an area of institutional progress (see Table 1). The gap between identified influence and progress suggests that there is an opportunity for institutions to do more to engage with the surrounding community and to account for its influence on a campus's racial climate. Responding to how student focus-group participants would like to see their campuses move efforts forward, one student shared:

*I would say it's engaging with the off-campus community and not just off-campus-living students, but just residents of the [surrounding] area. Sometimes we'll do peaceful on-campus or off-campus protests, marches, seminars, candle events...so mainly it was just bringing the community back together.*

### **Federal and State Policies**

Federal and state policies—such as affirmative action, financial aid, and funding restrictions—can meaningfully influence how institutions approach racial justice work. When asked about the greatest barriers to advancing racial justice efforts, 28% of students and 26% of administrators selected lack of acknowledgment of racial inequities from public policymakers/legislature (see Table 4). Another 27% of students and 31% of administrators indicated that federal and state legislation are among the most important factors for advancing racial justice in higher education (see Table 2). A student focus-group participant from a public institution in the South shared how state legislation can serve as a block to certain changes on campus:

*Student involvement is big, but when it actually comes to getting it done, it's very hard, especially going to a Southern school. And with my campus, students have wanted to change building names, but we have [a state law] preventing this. It's very complicated, but the governor sits on our board of trustees, and other legislators, so it's very hard to get anything really pushed.*

The introduction of anti-DEI legislation has become increasingly prevalent since the time of this project's data collection efforts. However, it is worth noting that one administrator survey respondent called out this challenge:

*The local legislature and political environment among stakeholders hold the institution hostage. It is also often communicated that the work be done in silence—like covert operations.*

Implications of the wave of state-level legislation specifically targeting DEI efforts on campus are further discussed by Ali et al. (2023) in *Student Affairs Perspectives on Anti-Critical Race Theory State Policies and National Narratives*.



## Leadership Commitment

To some extent, students and administrators agreed that a public commitment on advancing racial justice can influence an institution's racial climate. Written statements issued by campus leadership serve as one avenue for communicating commitment to change. Approximately 43% of students and 55% of administrators surveyed believed that leadership's statements in response to incidents of racism or racial injustice constitute a positive contributor to campus climate (see Table 3). Several student focus-group participants highlighted the importance of hearing from leadership as well as the influence that public commitments can have on racial justice efforts:

*I think it's better to say something than nothing, especially for leadership. I think they're the ones who need to say something the most. I just feel like when you have such a platform or even just such a high position, you're kind of obligated to say something at that point.*

*I think that students see how a person of authority reacts to an incident of this nature. And then they start to emulate that same attitude or the same action. So, if you see a lot of inaction or a lot of silence following one of these [racial bias] incidents, lots of people will follow the same behavior. But if you see someone speaking up or someone fighting for something following one of these incidents, then it also promotes that same behavior.*

*History is important to write down at the end of the day as well....Not to say [the statement] can be used against the institution, but if the institution doesn't put action behind those words, we can say, "But you said this at this time and it was put out to every single student, every single alumnus and faculty, and you're still not upholding those values that you stated having." There's a level of accountability that can come with words and statements as well.*

Although some students have pointed to the value of statements, the leading belief highlighted in focus groups is that words must be paired with meaningful and ongoing action to maximize impact, as summarized by two participants:

*For me, I would say it's really important to have tangible resources to back up the statement you're making. So, if you're going to make a statement saying, "Here are these resources to support you," you need to have those sufficiently in place.*

*I think a statement should always be moving, and not just one document that's just published and that's it. It should definitely be an introduction to something greater and something that is followed up on in the future and over time continuously.*



While statements can hold value, a lack of follow-through action can harm students' trust in the authenticity of institutional commitments. Both administrators and students identified as a barrier to advancing racial justice issues a lack of institutional commitment/follow-through on changes in policies and procedures. Another quarter of surveyed students also found a lack of follow-up about student concerns as a challenge faced (see Table 4). Elaborating on this view, a student focus-group participant shared examples of ways that actions from leaders did not align with their stated commitments:

*When I see these emails, I usually read them, but if I'm being completely honest, I just kind of laugh at them. Because I remember when the Supreme Court trial made the decision about DACA, and [the campus] put out this whole statement of support saying, "We support our DACA and undocumented students," but then they also bring border patrol on campus. They say that they support students, but then they always do 180s on them.*

Data point to the need for leaders to think critically about whether values espoused through public commitments are consistent with policies and how students experience campus. Pairing commitments with clearly defined accountability measures can help campuses move toward more sustained racial justice efforts.

### **Support From Leadership**

Moreover, leaders have myriad ways to demonstrate commitments in their engagement and support of students. Surveyed senior administrators were asked about how they have supported students working toward racial justice at their institutions (see Table 7). Results suggest that administrators are proactively engaging with students by attending group meetings and focusing on structural changes to policies and procedures while also aiming to be responsive to student demands through efforts like publicly addressing racial bias incidents. A clear takeaway voiced by students is that where and when leadership shows up matters—and that these efforts should be frequent and sustained. Students noted the importance of leadership making active commitments to move away from one-time programs and to instead focus on systemwide supports that they themselves help to design and deliver. Moreover, they shared the importance of leadership not only attending student meetings but also using students' perspectives shared during those meetings to inform priorities for institutional change:

*You can invite us to conversations all you want. But if you're not actively putting that into practice, if you're not actually taking our initiatives at face value, then what do they mean?*

**TABLE 7 | Administrators: How have you supported students working toward racial justice at your institution?**

Support method	Percentage
Allocated funding to student groups	70%
Enacted changes in structural policies and procedures	71%
Attended student group meetings	81%
Attended student government meetings	69%
Addressed racial bias incidents publicly	57%
Provided additional resources for mental health supports of racially minoritized students	55%
Other	9%
None of the above	1%



## Assessment and Accountability

Throughout the project, both students and administrators regularly noted the importance of assessing impact and reporting findings and progress; they also stressed accountability for ensuring that racially minoritized students have safe and positive interactions with other students, faculty, and staff.

Both students and administrators identified collecting data to better understand compositional diversity and experiences of racially minoritized faculty, staff, and students as an important area of focus for improving racial climate on campus. However, 53% of administrators but only 20% of students identified it as an area for progress (see Table 1). Table 8 highlights the range of ways that administrators reported measuring the effectiveness of campus efforts. Most frequently selected efforts were using campus climate surveys, disaggregating data on the retention of racially minoritized students, disaggregating data on graduation rates of racially minoritized students, and receiving student feedback. In terms of responses by institution size, larger institutions reported more ways of measuring efforts than did smaller institutions across most of the options presented. For example, 80% of respondents from institutions with more than 20,000 students reported disaggregating graduation rates by race, compared with 54% of respondents from institutions with fewer than 5,000 students (see Table 8). Such differences suggest that perhaps data assessment efforts have been hindered by a lack of resources among smaller institutions. One surveyed administrator noted the challenges they face in measuring effectiveness:

*We largely advance a “food, fun, and festivals” approach to DEI work, focused more on raising awareness and providing training, where the*

*primary measure of “success” is in measuring the growth in representation—rather than measures of belonging, equity, and inclusion. There is minimal transparency in how we analyze and provide ready access to data, there is minimal discussion in a substantive manner about systemic and structural issues, and the political climate has created a lot of anxiety and fear, meaning we oftentimes do not act with courage!*

Another administrator noted that one of the challenges of measuring effectiveness is that students may not always be aware of longer-term efforts:

*We want to deliver consistently for our marginalized students—and sometimes doing that is via changes that most of them will never realize. We have really tried to avoid a “check the box” mentality. Symbols are powerful, but we also want to back the symbols up with structural changes that would improve a student’s experience even if the student were unaware of any of the symbols or the “box checks.”*

Administrators also noted that measuring effectiveness requires resources to do it well:

*Institutionally, we have done a good job assessing where we are making an impact and where we have opportunities for improvement. In the areas of improvement there’s a strong need to allocate dollars to advance these efforts, which is more of a challenge.*

One administrator highlighted a note of caution about data collection and measurement to advance racial justice:

*Our attempts to advance racial justice have been, in students’ eyes, too slow....They see our data collection as a way to “spin” the numbers and want us to pay attention to the data we’ve collected already (vs. continually collecting more).*



**Table 8 | Administrators: How are you measuring the effectiveness of efforts?**

Measurement method	All (N = 176)	Under 5,000 (n = 67)	5,001– 9,999 (n = 40)	10,000– 19,999 (n = 30)	20,000+ (n = 35)
Disaggregated data on graduation rates of racially minoritized students	60%	54%	55%	63%	80%
Disaggregated data on retention rates of racially minoritized faculty and staff	47%	39%	45%	43%	69%
Disaggregated data on retention rates of racially minoritized students	61%	58%	58%	57%	77%
Campus climate survey	66%	67%	65%	63%	74%
Racial bias incidents	44%	46%	45%	33%	49%
Student feedback	52%	54%	55%	37%	60%
Equity pay analysis	29%	21%	20%	27%	51%
Disaggregated data on recruitment of hiring of racially minoritized faculty and staff	34%	21%	28%	47%	54%
Level of funding and support for programs that support racially minoritized alumni	10%	9%	10%	3%	17%
Disaggregated data on engagement from racially minoritized alumni	6%	4%	3%	3%	17%
Don't know	4%	3%	5%	7%	0%
Other	5%	3%	5%	10%	3%
None of the above	3%	3%	5%	3%	3%

Recognizing that the survey did not contain an exhaustive list of ways to measure progress, one administrator shared that they are using NADOHE’s (2021) **framework for advancing anti-racism strategy** as another way to assess

efforts. Even if institutions are prioritizing data collection and analysis, however, the impact of these efforts is limited if adequate feedback loops and communication mechanisms are not in place.



### **Accountability Through Reporting**

Students' calls for accountability included demands for reporting on a range of racial climate metrics, such as campus racial climate data; admissions/enrollment and recruitment data for students, disaggregated by race, ethnicity, and gender; data on the recruitment, hiring, and retention of faculty and staff of color across departments, disaggregated by race, ethnicity, and gender; and information on how resources were being invested in DEI efforts on campus.

Surveyed students, focus group participants, and students during campus site visits also frequently indicated a desire for accountability for advancing racial climate from institutional leaders. Some students expressed that student organizations were in an optimal position to hold leadership accountable for commitments made about advancing racial climate. But nearly all students agreed that they wanted, as a form of accountability, more proactive communication from leadership about progress that had been made. During campus site visits, students noted that some of their institutional leaders had held listening sessions with relevant student groups that have made demands or been affected by bias incidents. Some of these students indicated that this effort felt like an authentic desire on the part of leadership to hear students' concerns and to hold themselves accountable to act on them. One student focus-group participant explained,

*I think that opening avenues for people to have that town hall structure would make people feel more heard and more understood in a lot of ways.*

But other students in both focus groups and during campus site visits indicated that although leaders, faculty, and staff may provide opportunities for them to share their concerns, ultimately no action is taken. These students felt like hearing student concerns was the end rather than the means by which to identify problems and develop solutions.

One surveyed administrator similarly reflected on the importance of accountability in advancing racial climate efforts:

*There's a tendency to address peripheral issues rather than addressing the core issue in an effective way. There is also a hesitation to leverage authority to hold campus leaders accountable for failure to address ongoing issues or to make policy changes or create written policies to remediate systemic issues.*

This administrator noted the importance not only of having a chief diversity officer (CDO) role but of providing the person in that role with appropriate resources and authority to lead substantive change within the institution.





## Transparency and Communication

Importantly, students also expressed a desire for leadership's communication to be authentic in terms of both progress and challenges. Student focus-group participants felt a lack of information on their campuses. On more than one occasion, students noted that their institutions share data publicly—but only when the data reflect positively on the institution. Student survey respondents (38%) indicated that one of the factors that leads to a positive racial climate is when institutions regularly report on progress made on commitments to racial equity (see Table 3). Surveyed administrators mirrored this emphasis on accountability for commitments, with 65% indicating that it is important that leaders regularly report on progress made on commitments to racial equity (see Table 3). During site visits, students indicated that they want the institution to pursue multiple pathways to report on the progress of racial justice efforts on campus. Student focus-group participants acknowledged that administrative capacity is an issue, which they believe leads to lack of transparency on progress toward racial justice.

### **Communication Methods**

Students from the focus groups and site visits indicated that updates on racial justice efforts should be posted on campus in easily accessible ways. Some students noted that an institution's efforts to report progress should be done on a more consistent and campuswide basis, as they perceive current approaches as scattershot or sporadic. Students and administrators weighed in about the best methods for communicating with the student body about accountability for those who cause harm, campus climate survey data, and progress on the institution's commitments to advancing racial equity. Table 9 presents the ways that administrators and students reported campus leadership's communication on progress

toward racial justice at their respective institutions. Administrators reported their campuses relying heavily on email communications (80%), in addition to social media posts (39%) and websites dedicated to racial justice efforts (38%). More proactive, in-person outreach efforts—such as hosting student town halls (40%) and having senior leaders attend student organization meetings (46%)—also have been deployed. Administrator survey data suggest that institutions rely far less on communication methods that are more passive, but perhaps have a broader reach, with 5% of respondents citing the use of course software banner ads or announcements as a communication method.

Surveyed students were aware of some of the more proactive efforts, such as hosting town halls (38%) and senior leaders attending student organization meetings (18%). Despite how much institutions rely on email communication, surveyed students were only marginally aware (12%) of the ways their institutions communicate via this method. Students were similarly unaware of websites dedicated to the campus's racial justice efforts (5%). During site visits, students also indicated a strong desire for dedicated websites about racial justice issues and about how institutions are making progress on their commitments. One administrator survey respondent noted that communicating about desire for change cannot be an end unto itself, stating,

*Our leadership believes communicating their commitment is the same thing as actual commitment.*



**TABLE 9 | How does your campus leadership communicate progress toward racial justice at your institution?**

Communication method	Administrators (N = 176)	Students (N = 130)
Social media posts	39%	18%
Emails to campus community	80%	12%
Website dedicated to racial justice efforts	38%	5%
Proactive in-person outreach to students in the form of town halls	40%	38%
Course software announcements/banners	5%	4%
Senior leadership attendance at student organization meetings	46%	18%
Video statements posted online	16%	1%
Other	6%	1%
None of the above	9%	3%

Additionally, students noted specific areas of concern related to lack of transparency and accountability. Ultimately, many of these concerns centered on students' desire for additional communication from senior leadership. These areas of concern appeared in written student demands, during student focus groups, in survey data, and during campus site visits, which indicates the weight these specific issues carry for students.

### ***Bias Incident Protocols and Reporting***

A significant area of emphasis, for both students and administrators, involved bias incidents on campus. Student demands in both 2015 and 2020 called for the creation or revision of bias incident policies and methods for reporting them. Students felt as though the policies were not readily accessible to them and that those individuals affected by bias incidents often were not aware that they could report them, or how. Beyond institutional efforts to raise awareness about how to report incidents, students also called for transparency about how those incidents would be investigated and what disciplinary sanctions would result for those individuals found responsible. One

of the more explicit calls for transparency from students involved asking institutions to create a set of emergency alerts to notify them when bias incidents occur. This was not only a demand made in a student statement in 2020 but also a theme that arose in meetings with students at a campus site visit and across the various student focus groups. Students at one campus site visit indicated that, similar to emergency alerts that institutions send when there has been an instance of interpersonal violence, they would be able to use those alerts to actively avoid certain areas of campus where those incidents regularly occur.

Surveyed students identified increasing accountability for acts of racism on campus as an important area for advancing campus racial justice in higher education broadly (67%) but were somewhat less convinced that tracking and making public information on campus bias incidents and racism on campus was as important (50%; see Table 1). By comparison, however, students felt far less confident that these were areas where their institution had made progress, with only 15% indicating that their institution had increased

accountability for acts of racism on campus and only 12% indicating that their institution tracks and makes public information about bias incidents and racism on campus (see Table 1). During campus site visits, students often recounted incidents in which staff or students of color experienced incidents of racial bias and then felt as if those incidents were sidestepped or not sufficiently addressed by the institution.

A surveyed administrator echoed that sentiment in this way:

*Students have little confidence in reporting racist incidents to [public safety or the dean of students]. They fear retaliation and/or lack of transparency when they have the courage to speak up. A formal structure is needed.*

A third of surveyed students (32%) also indicated that the lack of accountability for those who cause harm was one of the greatest barriers to advancing racial justice at their own institution (see Table 4). In addition to serving as factors contributing to a positive racial climate on campus, accountability for acts of racism on campus (59%) and transparency in the reporting from senior leaders about racial bias incidents and acts of racism on campus (35%) were also identified by students as important factors for advancing racial justice in higher education broadly (see Table 2). During site visits, students indicated that they fervently want institutions to take bias incidents seriously. They felt that there were many examples of administrators acknowledging bias incidents and providing multiple “let’s talk about it” opportunities—but then presenting no next steps for students who were harmed. Students frequently expressed that without consequences for bias incidents, having reporting systems felt like a performative measure by the institution.

Surveyed administrators echoed these calls for transparency, with 80% of respondents indicating that one of the most important focus areas for advancing racial climate on campus was increasing accountability for racial bias incidents among faculty/staff/students (see Table 3). More than half of administrators (54%) also agreed that having anonymous reporting systems for bias incidents, including protection from retaliation for reporting, was important for improving racial climate on campus (see Table 3). Additionally, 47% of administrators indicated that tracking and making public information about bias incidents and racism on campus was another important area of focus and is an area in which they had made progress in the past 2 years (see Table 1). Other related areas of perceived progress by administrators included increased accountability for acts of racism on campus (29%) and tracking and publicizing information about campus bias incidents and racism on campus (27%; see Table 1). About a third of administrators (33%) perceived a lack of accountability for those who cause harm on campus as a key barrier to advancing racial justice at their institution (see Table 4). Beyond their own institutions, administrators noted that accountability for acts of racism on campus (66%) and transparency by senior leaders about racial bias incidents and acts of racism on campus (44%) were important factors for higher education to address (see Table 2).

Administrators also indicated that one of the ways they had supported students working toward racial justice at their institution was by addressing racial bias incidents publicly (57%; see Table 7). And even if they are not sharing this information publicly, some administrators (44%) indicated that they do track bias incidents as one way to measure the effectiveness of their efforts to advance racial climate (see Table 8).





### **Climate Surveys**

One mechanism that institutions frequently employ—but represents an area for improvement—is campus climate surveys. Student focus-group and site visit participants saw campus climate surveys as a positive way for the institution to measure campus climate. However, some of these students felt strongly that the results of these surveys—both what is going well and what is not—should be shared more widely. During site visits, students noted the lack of transparency around climate survey results; limited access to the data; and the fact that, if available, the data are often presented in inaccessible formats (such as documents that are hundreds of pages long).

Climate surveys are one of the most used ways of measuring the effectiveness of efforts to advance racial climate, with 66% of surveyed administrators indicating it is a method they employ (see Table 8). By contrast, only 5% of student survey respondents indicated that climate surveys were a preferable way for leadership to engage students (see Table 10). During campus site visits, students indicated that they often view campus climate surveys as performative. Some of these students believed that the data from climate surveys result in institutions being more aware of problems but still not acting on the findings. They said that often institutions disseminate climate survey reports that focus on what has been done rather than on what still needs to be done.

*“Climate surveys are one of the most used ways of measuring the effectiveness of efforts to advance racial climate, with 66% of surveyed administrators indicating it is a method they employ.”*

### **Interactions With Law Enforcement**

Students also highlighted the need for more transparency around law enforcement interactions with students. Nearly half of surveyed students (47%) indicated increasing transparency of law enforcement interaction with minoritized students as an important area of focus for advancing racial justice in higher education; however, only 11% perceived it as an area where their institution had made progress (see Table 1). A possible reason for the gap between perceived importance and progress is that surveyed administrators were far less likely to identify this area as a major focus—only 24% indicated that it would help advance racial climate for students (see Table 1).



## Student Involvement in Decision-Making

In focus groups, demand statements (in both 2015 and 2020), survey results, and site visits, students regularly indicated their desire for greater involvement in decision-making, viewing their involvement as a factor that will help advance racial justice both across higher education and at their own institutions. The 2020 statements issued by student activists frequently called for greater representation of racially and ethnically minoritized students in decision-making at all levels of the institution; it was also a focus area stated in statements from 2015. The student activist demands in 2020 listed a range of ways to involve students in decision-making, including calling for the creation of student advisory boards to address ongoing student concerns and DEI initiatives; regularly scheduled meetings between institutional leadership and representatives from student groups for the purposes of accountability and transparency; student representation on any curricular overhaul efforts; involvement of students in hiring processes

for leadership and faculty positions, specifically student representation on search committees and the power to vote on and veto candidates; and demands for a student vote on the board of governors.

Surveyed students had similar ideas about how campus leaders should engage students in racial justice efforts, such as having student representation on campuswide committees (23%) and on the board of trustees (17%; see Table 10). However, despite this significant interest by students in being part of decision-making at the institution, surveyed students indicated that when students are included in these opportunities, they lack influence. Less than half of student survey respondents (47%) indicated that they either strongly agree or agree that students are meaningfully involved in decision-making at the institution (see Figure 3). Surveyed students and administrators felt similarly about whether “institutional leadership is knowledgeable about and responsive to students’ calls for change as it relates to racial justice on campus,” with 44% of students strongly agreeing or agreeing with that statement compared with 48% of administrators (see Figure 3).

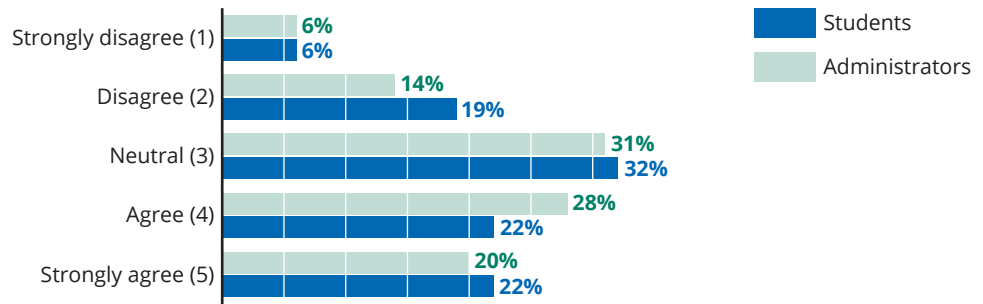
**TABLE 10 | Students: In your opinion, what is the best way for campus leaders to engage students in racial justice efforts? (N = 130)**

Engagement method	Percentage
Having representation on campuswide committees	23%
Bringing in perspectives from individuals in the surrounding community	17%
Student representation on board of regents/trustees	17%
Hosting listening sessions with student panels	15%
Involving students in hiring processes	9%
Engaging student opinions via social media	8%
Conducting student surveys	5%
Other	4%
None of the above	2%
Total	100%

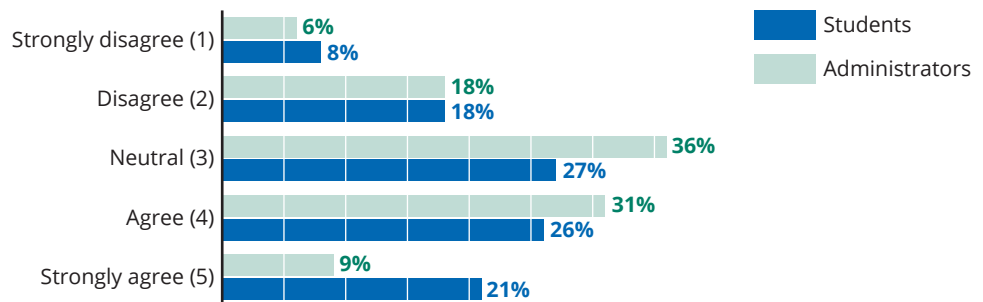


**FIGURE 3 | On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is “strongly disagree” and 5 is “strongly agree,” how would you rate the following statements?**

*Institutional leadership is knowledgeable about and responsive to students’ calls for change as it relates to racial justice on campus.*



*Students are meaningfully engaged in and part of decision-making at the institution.*



Note. Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.

One student focus-group participant reinforced the importance of student voices in decision-making, noting the impact that resulted from being given opportunities to interact with senior leadership on decisions.

*Another time I felt very like a part of the community was when we were empowered as students to take matters into our own hands, even though it was a lot at times because of the amount of work that goes into trying to change things at the university. But, at the same time, being empowered really made a huge difference—to be able to talk to administration and bring together students and figure out what our common concerns are and where we can take actual steps. I felt part of the university in those moments.*

Surveyed administrators perceived the degree of student involvement in decision-making to an even lesser extent than did students themselves (see Figure 3). When asked how students are involved in decision-making, administrators indicated centering efforts on more sporadic, one-time opportunities (e.g., survey results 83%; focus groups 69%; student panels 52%) as opposed to regular, institutionalized methods of involvement such as representation on the board of regents (47%; see Table 11).

**TABLE 11 | Administrators: How are students involved in decision-making at your institution? (N = 176)**

Involvement method	Percentage
Survey results	83%
Student advisory committees	74%
Focus groups	69%
Student panels	52%
Representation on board of regents	47%
Anecdotal examples	43%
Student person/user design tools	9%
Other	16%
Students are not involved in decision-making at my institution	2%

During site visits, students gave several additional ways that they sought to be involved in decision-making at their institutions. Focus group participants indicated wanting to have real-time ways of providing feedback when there is feedback to give; they also want to be involved in the planning phases of different processes, such as the development of the strategic plan, rather than providing input after plans are already underway. Students in both focus groups and site visits also expressed a desire to have a direct line of communication to executive levels of leadership to voice concerns so that they feel they can engage with those empowered to make decisions at the institution.

*Even if it's like having a board of student organization presidents meeting once a month to discuss policies, and existence on campus, or doing something similar where you're including people from all over campus to have their voices actually be heard, especially from affinity groups like Black student organizations, queer student organizations, Latina-Hispanic, AAPI, that kind of stuff....So, actually making sure that we are able to meet the president or meet the board and have discussions with the board about what our universities can be doing, and actually having our voices matter in terms of those meetings. Unfortunately, having to participate*

*in getting a seat at that table rather than having the ability to create our own, but at least having a seat there before we can go off and create our own table.*

Many focus-group participants and students at site visits believed that the student government association was the only real way for students to engage with leadership—and that such opportunity is available to only a select few students.

*I think maybe having forums where we're able to vote on issues and then the president or leadership, the administration, can actually see what the students want. It may be more compelling even than just the opinions of a couple people who are in student government who are voted in by some of the students on campus, but not everyone even votes because we don't all either get the information or the email or take the time to do it.*

Students also expressed a desire to be involved in search committees at all levels, not just during hiring for vice presidents and senior-level leaders. Finally, students said that there may be more opportunities for them to be involved in decision-making at the institution but that they are not made aware of what those occasions might be.



# Student Advocacy

Student activist demands made clear that students are regularly advocating for institutions to advance racial climate. Administrators and students have similar thoughts on the best way for students to advocate for change on their campuses (see Table 12).

Some perspectives about student advocacy efforts on racial justice are campus-context specific. For example, during one campus site visit, a student indicated the culture is not very conducive to student advocacy. One student indicated that families encourage students to keep quiet because if they don't go to this school (an HBCU), there is nowhere else for them to go that they can afford. Other focus group students voiced frustration with the idea of student advocacy because only so much progress is made and then students leave. The lack of succession planning was seen by students as a barrier to long-term advancements toward racial justice. A student at one campus site visit

questioned where students are supposed to get advocacy skills if they do not come to campus with that mindset already. Students across different campus site visits indicated that there is a need for more support about where students can seek action and who is involved in the processes that they want to have changed. Many students expressed frustration at the assumption that students know where, or to whom, or how to advocate for change. This frustration was echoed by a surveyed administrator:

*Students need to be informed about what advocating for racial justice is. We are a commuter school—I feel our students accept a lot and just go home at the end of the day. I think the abnormal is presented as normal, and there are no formal outlets set up for consultation, support, or awareness of what advocacy can be or how to apply it in an effective way.*

**TABLE 12 | What do you think are the most effective ways for students to advocate for racial justice efforts at your institution?**

Advocacy method	Administrators (N = 176)	Students (N = 130)
Engaging alumni	27%	30%
Engaging senior leadership, including the board of regents	81%	57%
Protesting or civil disobedience	28%	38%
Engaging with faculty or staff	85%	57%
Engaging with community-based racial justice organizations	43%	55%
Taking collective action with student groups	82%	68%
Working with student government	69%	58%





Another administrator put it this way:

*I think it's important for students to understand how institutions function, how decisions are made, and what barriers exist. Understanding these things makes them better advocates.*

One focus group student mirrored that sentiment this way:

*The advisor's position, right now for our clubs—they just approve stuff. If we say we want this, they're like, "Okay, you can go get it." There's no resources or anything. So, they're leaving us on our own. And it's frustrating because some of us are first-gen college students who are trying to make change on campus, and we know nothing of anything to do. So, we're doing a bunch of research and then 3 years in, we're very much behind and we're trying to go with other campuses, but it's really hard to even do much because we don't have any resources at all.*



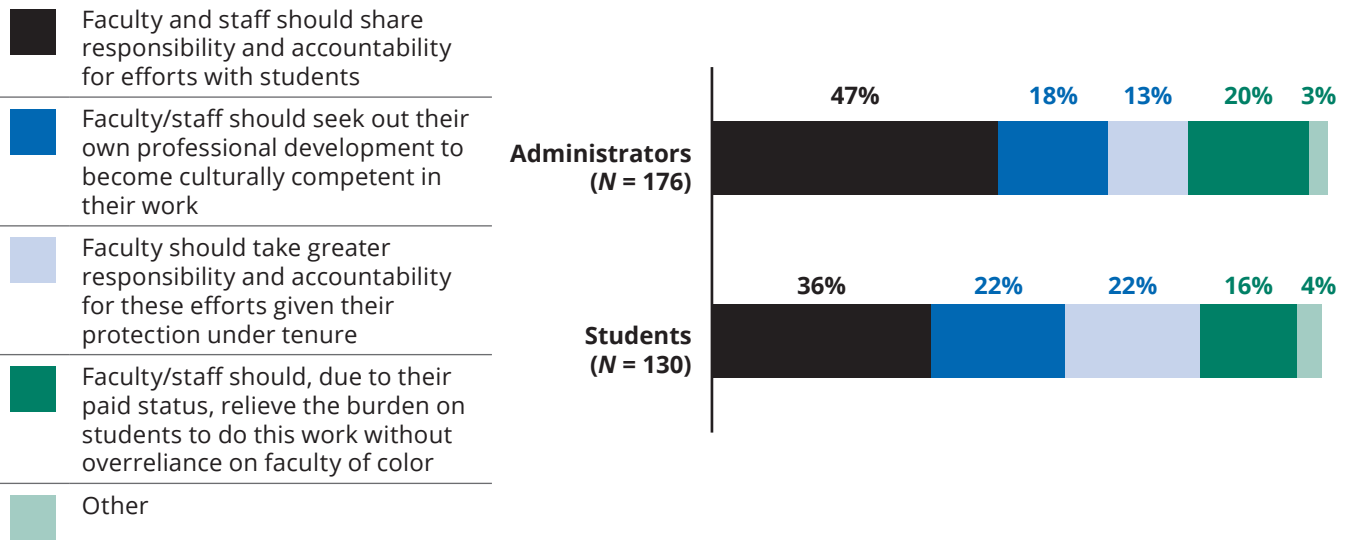
# Faculty/Staff Involvement and Responsiveness

Both students and administrators recognized the importance of institutionwide collaboration in advancing racial justice efforts. A large majority of administrators (80%) indicated that institutionwide collaboration is one of the primary factors for advancing racial justice in higher education (see Table 2) and that a lack of campuswide efforts to enact change is one of the greatest barriers to advancing racial justice efforts at their specific institution (32%; see Table 4). Surveyed students similarly agreed that higher education broadly must engage in institutionwide collaboration to advance racial justice (48%) and that the absence of such partnerships constitutes a barrier at their own institutions (41%; see Figures 2 and 4). The emphasis on collaboration was especially apparent in campus site visits, during which students, faculty, and staff separately indicated that they knew specific efforts

were underway but were generally unaware of what institutionwide efforts were taking place or how progress was being measured.

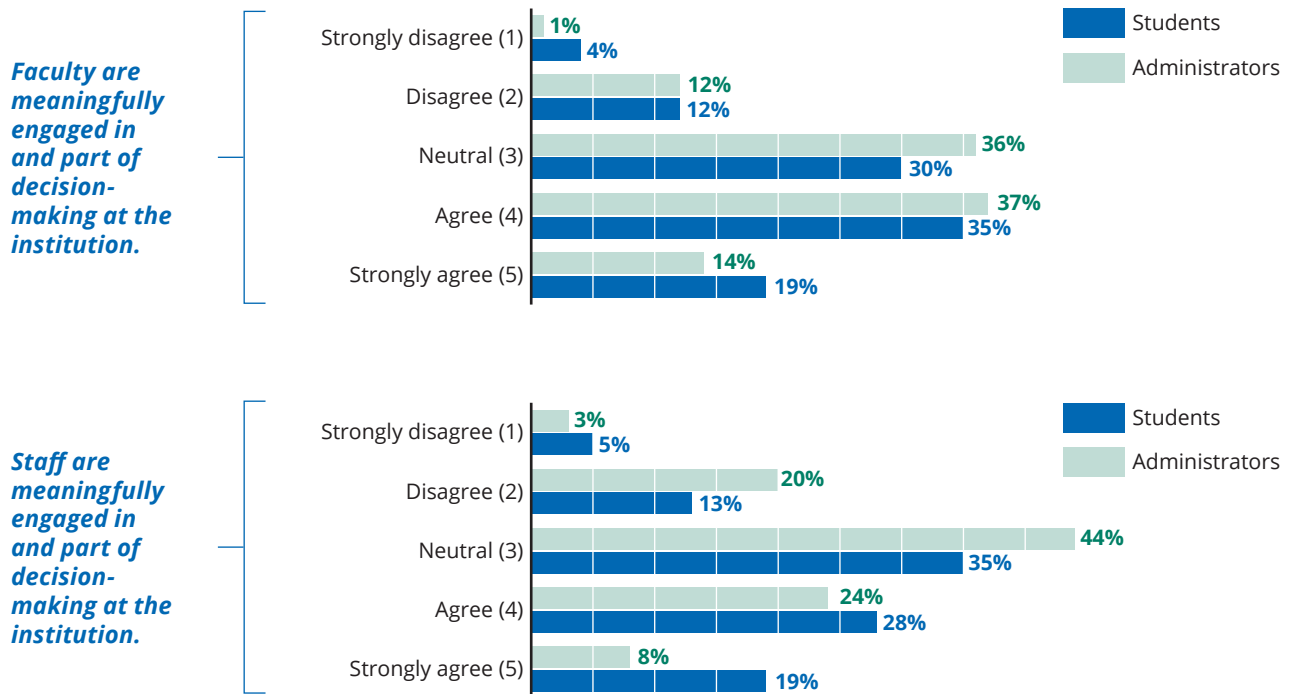
Both administrators and students believe that the responsibility for advancing racial justice efforts on campus lies with students, faculty, staff, and senior leaders. Surveyed administrators noted that the support of faculty (56%) and the support of staff (47%) are key components of improving racial climate in higher education broadly (see Table 2). Students had similar feelings, although they felt slightly more strongly about staff support than did the administrator surveyed (see Table 2). Administrators (47%) and students (36%) indicated that faculty and staff should have shared responsibility with students for advancing racial justice. Interestingly, 20% of administrators responded that faculty and staff should bear a greater responsibility for advancing racial justice, but this was not echoed in the student responses (see Figure 4).

**FIGURE 4 | What do you think the primary role of faculty and staff should be in advancing racial justice efforts on campus?**



Note. Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.

**FIGURE 5 | On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is “strongly disagree” and 5 is “strongly agree,” how would you rate the following statements?**



Note. Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.

One way to increase buy-in for institutionwide efforts to improve racial climate is to include faculty and staff in decision-making. Both students (54%) and administrators (51%) surveyed strongly agreed or agreed that faculty are meaningfully engaged in making decisions at the institution. Both students (47%) and administrators (32%) also strongly agreed or agreed that staff are meaningfully involved (see Figure 5). One focus-group student wished faculty would teach students the skills they need to advocate for change:

*I just think that faculty should be helping students. I mean, the lifetime of an average student at a 4-year university is 4 years, and so that's usually the active effort for DEI efforts a*

*lot of times, which I think is why we see these rise and falls of movements, because movements have to outlive students, and that's really hard to maintain on a student organizational level—to upkeep that infrastructure as a 20-year-old and to make sure that that's all in line. And so, I think what faculty could help students with is keeping track of initiatives and helping them navigate: “Who should I talk to about this? Who’s the best person to move through? What are the steps for making this happen through an institutional lens?”*



Another student agreed, expressing a desire for faculty and staff to show them how to advocate effectively:

*How are we, as students, supposed to be able to organize and fight for justice when this faculty and staff who teach us won't do so because they're afraid of getting fired or whatever, and can't lead the fight like we can, and can only support from the sidelines, and not give us the true support that we actually need in order to help for those causes?*

Another student phrased faculty involvement as an obligation:

*I would argue that one individual faculty member is in a position to make more of a difference than one individual student, and because of [a faculty member's] actions, they can help such a huge body of students, I almost feel as if it's [their] responsibility to do so.*

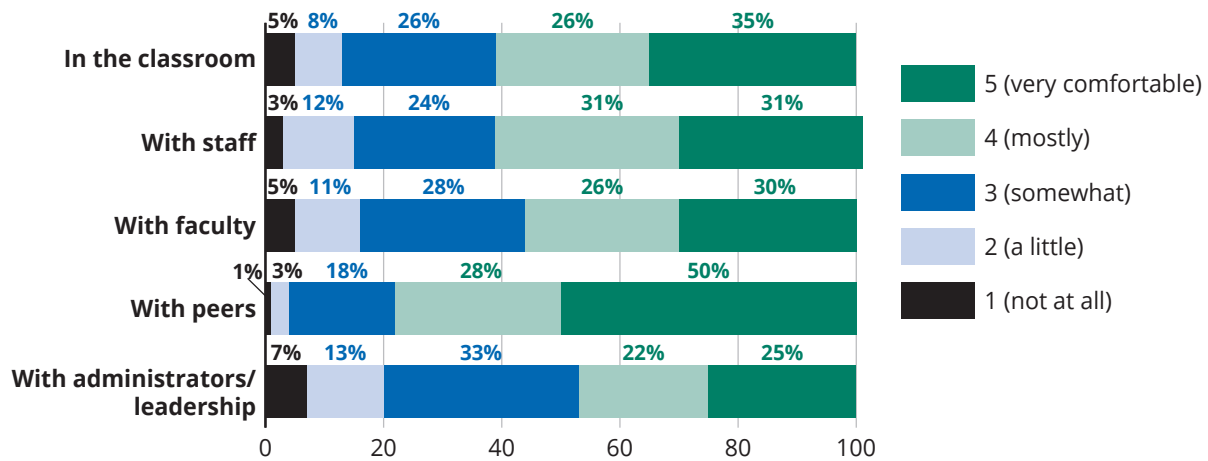
Most surveyed students felt mostly or very comfortable talking about issues of racism in the classroom (61%) and with faculty (56%) and staff (62%) individually (see Figure 6). This speaks to a responsiveness by both faculty and staff that is recognized by students in their daily interactions on campus.

Most (85%) surveyed administrators indicated that students should engage with faculty and staff when advocating for racial justice (see Figure 5), suggesting a belief that those members of the campus community would be responsive to student engagement. But some administrators noted that it is hard to group all faculty and staff together when discussing willingness to advance racial justice efforts. One survey respondent stated,

*It is hard to group all faculty and staff in categories as unsupportive, as there are many working to create change. I would characterize it as resistance within the faculty/staff/leadership ranks.*



**FIGURE 6 | Students: On a scale of 1 to 5, to what extent are you comfortable talking about issues of racism in the following areas at your institution?**



Note. Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.

During focus groups, students indicated that having faculty support is essential for advancing racial justice efforts on campus. But students also noted the fatigue they saw among faculty and staff of color. Students said that these members of the campus have too much on their plates and are tired from carrying the ongoing burden of the work of advancing racial justice. Students noted that faculty and staff of color leave their roles because they feel underappreciated and overworked around DEI issues. Interestingly, students were also keenly aware of which faculty and staff of color have the freedom to advocate for change and be open about inequities on campus. Students recognized that this freedom to advocate for change rests on both the level of leadership that people have within the institution and the level of seniority they have in that role.





# Closing Takeaways

Those students and senior administrators who participated in NASPA's research shared a range of nuanced perspectives about the challenges and opportunities facing institutions in their efforts to advance racial justice. Recognizing that analysis of the breadth of data collected could fit into several different narratives about future needs, NASPA's researchers nonetheless found several throughlines that stand out. Both students and administrators agreed (to at least some extent) on much of the "what" that needs to happen on campus to positively influence racial climate. Students and administrators were critical of performative efforts and advocated for structural changes that ensure the following:

1. Racial/ethnic diversity exists at all levels of the institution.
2. Spaces and engagement opportunities within campus and the surrounding community are well supported, welcoming, and accessible.
3. Reporting mechanisms for bias incidents are in place and individuals are held accountable for causing harm.
4. Commitments for change are tied with actions validated by students.
5. Progress is measured, transparently reported, and ongoing.

Comparison of student and administrator survey data shows a degree of agreement about a range of important changes that need to happen—but also the belief that progress on those changes has been limited.

It is also worth reiterating that students are not a monolithic group and that some students shared more skeptical views about institutional efforts than did others. Disentangling perspectives on the "how" for advancing racial justice reveals that many students point to a lack of cultural

competency from leadership and recognition of racism on campus as the most significant barrier to change. While education and awareness building are critical for all (fellow students, faculty, staff), students are especially attuned to the power of individuals in leadership positions to be change agents on campus. Students who view campus efforts positively also seem to center those beliefs on the extent to which leadership proactively shows up for students through in-person efforts to listen and respond to their demands for change. These students shared a desire for such outreach efforts to be ongoing, noting that too often these moments occur only when institutions are responding to specific crisis events on campus or nationally.

Moreover, students—especially student activists in focus groups—emphasized the importance of decisions for students to be made by students. Students shared that system redesign efforts should not only be made in co-creation with students but that the voices included in those processes reflect a range of perspectives and levels of privilege at the institution. Data also suggest that some institutions use student survey data as a representation of student voice without actually including students themselves in decision-making. Perhaps paradoxically, students shared that while they know they need a seat at the table with decision-making, they are simultaneously overwhelmed with the burden of driving institutional change while balancing classwork, employment commitments, and more.

NASPA's research reinforces the notion that efforts to positively influence racial climate and advance racial justice should be made in connection with each other and with the buy-in and support from everyone on campus. As colleges and universities reflect on ways to continuously improve or scale out the successes of their existing work, this report's findings can help spur planning discussions and provide a field-level perspective about student priorities for campus efforts.

# Key Conditions

NASPA's research suggests that students and administrators believe several key elements contribute to an institution's racial climate. Within each element identified, this report offers high-level

guidance about opportunities and considerations for advancing campus efforts. Ideally, an institution may have the following conditions in place:

 <p><b>Compositional Diversity:</b> Individuals across all levels on campus are racially/ethnically diverse. Resources, policies, and practices are designed to support and retain racially minoritized students, faculty, staff, and leadership.</p>	 <p><b>Assessment and Accountability:</b> Both qualitative and quantitative data for assessing institutional progress toward racial justice and climate goals are collected. Indicators of progress are well defined and shared proactively using varied methods.</p>
 <p><b>Student Interactions and Space:</b> Identity-based spaces and groups are well resourced and attentive to equity and student needs. The institution facilitates opportunities and creates space for positive engagement across student groups and recognizes multiplicity and intersectionality of student identities.</p>	 <p><b>Transparency and Communication:</b> Data about institutional efforts to advance racial climate and racial justice efforts are being used to inform improvements and ensure accountability for commitments to progress. Findings and data-informed actions are reported to the campus community.</p>
 <p><b>Mindsets and Learning Opportunities:</b> An institutionwide understanding about the breadth and depth of inequities on campus is established through meaningful, ongoing educational opportunities for leadership, faculty, staff, and students.</p>	 <p><b>Student Involvement in Decision-Making:</b> Students are routinely involved early on in decision-making at the institution and are continuously engaged. Students are given power in decision-making, and mechanisms are in place to ensure that voices included reflect the wide range of minoritized student experiences at the institution.</p>
 <p><b>External Forces:</b> The surrounding community is integrated into campus efforts to advance racial justice, and the institution seeks to understand and respond to ways that policies at all levels (local, state, federal) influence student experiences.</p>	 <p><b>Student Advocacy:</b> In addition to ensuring that racially minoritized students are involved in institutional decision-making, the institution empowers and builds the capacity of students to advance change on campus through adequate funding and educational opportunities.</p>
 <p><b>Leadership Commitment:</b> Leadership ensures that there are a variety of opportunities to engage with students, faculty, and staff about campus racial justice efforts and to share updates about institutional progress.</p>	 <p><b>Faculty/Staff Involvement and Responsiveness:</b> Faculty and staff are part of an institutionwide effort to advance a positive racial climate. Professional development opportunities and supporting policies are in place to facilitate faculty/staff involvement in the institutionwide effort.</p>

# References

Ali, D., Bradley, K., Dunlap, J., & Chamberlain, A. W. (2023). *Student affairs perspectives on anti-critical race theory state policies and national narratives*. NASPA–Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education. <https://naspa.org/report/student-affairs-perspectives-on-anti-critical-race-theory-state-policies-and-national-narratives>

Milem, J. F., Chang, M. J., & Antonio, A. L. (2005). *Making diversity work on campus: A research-based perspective*. Association of Colleges and Universities. [https://web.stanford.edu/group/siher/AntonioMilemChang\\_makingdiversitywork.pdf](https://web.stanford.edu/group/siher/AntonioMilemChang_makingdiversitywork.pdf)

National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education. (2021). *A framework for advancing anti-racism strategy on campus*. <https://www.nadohe.org/statements/antiracism-framework>

# Appendix A

## Campus Case Studies

The survey data outlined in this report highlight the broad perspectives of administrators and students across the country. To better understand how the perspectives of students, faculty, and staff align or differ within a specific campus context, NASPA staff conducted three site visits in fall 2022. NASPA agreed not to identify the names of the institutions to ensure that participants would feel safe to speak freely during the focus groups. As an additional confidentiality measure, no focus groups were recorded. All three institutions were public institutions; they represent a range of sizes and geographic locations and include a 2-year community college, a large 4-year predominantly White research institution (PWI), and a 4-year public historically Black college or university (HBCU).

Each site visit included separate meetings with faculty, staff, and students. The format of the focus groups was semistructured, and the questions were primarily the same across groups. Administrators and faculty were additionally asked how they supported students working toward racial justice at their institutions. Students were specifically asked how they believe students are included in decision-making at their institutions.

The common themes that arose were issues around transparency, accountability, and perceived lack of communication from leadership, which was echoed across faculty, staff, and student participants. Participants at all site visits acknowledged the importance of having compositional diversity among leadership, faculty, staff, and student populations. Although there were themes that arose across the site visit focus groups that mirrored the survey findings, some notable differences were campus-context specific. The ways in which students experience the community surrounding campus were also highlighted across all three site visits. And of particular note were the differences in perspectives across faculty, staff, and students within the same institution on issues such as the importance of compositional diversity. The campus-specific themes are discussed as follows, although they represent a snapshot of the challenges and opportunities within a single institution and are not generalizable to all institution types.

## PWI

At the predominantly White large research institution, students cited identity-based spaces on campus as a major issue, indicating that the institution had a designated area that housed spaces for students from varying racial/ethnic/sexual identities. But these students expressed frustration that this space seemed to be used as a catch-all solution for the institution. The students felt that the designated building for identity-based groups left these groups competing for program funding and for space reservations within that building. They felt that the way the space was structured left them fighting for limited resources; it was not a space where collaboration was fostered. One student also indicated that the building felt segregated from the rest of campus. Although most of the students in this focus group felt like the multicultural building was valuable and provided a safe space for them, they still felt like the rest of the campus was unsafe for non-White students.

This specific campus was also facing a housing crisis, a problem that many institutions have experienced in recent years. These students felt that this was a major factor contributing to racial climate on campus. They indicated that students with fewer resources, often students of color, were forced to move farther away from campus to obtain affordable housing. The students indicated they heard from administrators that students of color weren't attending as many programs, which students thought was a clear lack of understanding about how the housing crisis was affecting these students. They said that the farther away they lived from campus, the less likely they were to return to campus after class for evening programs.

The faculty and staff believed the large size of the institution often led to siloed efforts to improve racial climate on campus. They saw the role of the chief diversity officer (CDO) as valuable but mostly as one of protector of the institution's interests to

advance racial climate from hostile legislators in a politically charged environment. The faculty and staff felt that the CDO played the role of appeaser, which created space for midlevel professionals to enjoy more autonomy to do DEI-related work.

Interestingly, some of the efforts that faculty and staff noted as areas of progress were perceived differently by students. Campus climate surveys, an ethnic studies course requirement, DEI-related programming, and scholarships for minority students were just a few examples. Students believed that these were mechanisms that the institution held up as examples of progress, but students felt that these efforts were performative. Survey and focus group data support the implication that without clear communication from campus leaders about changes made as a result of climate surveys or DEI programming, such efforts are viewed as symbolic not substantive. Staff echoed these concerns, indicating that the results of campus climate surveys were not readily accessible to the campus. Faculty, conversely, seemed to have a different view of the availability of campus climate results. One faculty member noted, "The 2021 [campus climate survey] report is online. It's 121 pages. If you wanted to have access to it, you could."

Some staff members also agreed that scholarships for minoritized students—without additional support to student recipients once admitted to the institution—meant very little. One staff member said, "Programs are for access. We use them as a proxy for climate, but that isn't what their goal is. The expectation is for students to change the climate by proxy of just being here."

Another example of a disconnection in perception was one in which a point of pride for faculty members was experienced by students very differently. One faculty member noted that the accrediting body for their specific field of study requires a DEI component within the curriculum, which they saw as valuable. The faculty member talked about how a key component of one course



was to develop a project and then identify how the resulting project would affect marginalized communities. Coincidentally, one of the student focus-group participants was from that same program and said in a separate meeting that as a minoritized student, because of his race, he was constantly relied on by his peers to explain how the project might affect marginalized communities. The curricular requirement left him feeling very tokenized in his class, in which he was one of the only students of color.

This site visit highlighted the challenges of advancing racial progress at a very large PWI. Staff perceptions at this campus overlapped and aligned with student perceptions, while faculty seemed to have different perspectives about the underlying challenges and opportunities in advancing the racial climate for minoritized students at the institution. This difference in perspectives was primarily due to the historical knowledge the faculty had about where efforts had fallen short in the past. The students highlighted the desire for campus leaders to check in about how their efforts to advance racial justice are experienced by the students themselves.

## HBCU

The HBCU site visit had a very different feel in that there were differing opinions about the need for efforts to improve racial climate because of the racial makeup of the student body. Staff members at this institution seemed to believe that their primary efforts to improve racial climate came in the form of meeting individual student needs as they arose. They did not feel like broad efforts in the form of campus climate surveys or efforts to increase belonging were necessary given that the mission of the institution was to serve minoritized students.

Faculty, in contrast, identified the need for the institution to move beyond seeing the entire student population as a monolith. They highlighted the need for the campus to better understand the

diversity of student backgrounds and experiences and to acknowledge the myriad struggles that students with intersecting minoritized identities face. Faculty members mentioned the specific needs of low-income, LGBTQIA+, and/or first-generation students and how those needs can vary widely. Staff, however, believed that their individualized attention to students and ensuring their needs were met were the ways that they created a sense of belonging on campus.

There was only one student focus-group participant at this campus, so although the feedback here was valuable, it was limited to that one student's experience. This student identified challenges faced by the campus that included infrastructure needs and lack of student engagement. When asked about student activism on campus, staff members echoed some of the feedback from the student focus group participant—that students at HBCUs are sometimes encouraged by family members to “not raise a fuss” about issues when they arise. These staff members indicated that students really wanted to be at the institution and that the low tuition and the return on investment in terms of the quality of their education keep students at the institution from an economic standpoint. One staff member said that the result is students are “just going to take it” when issues arise. This staff member said that students are not actively being empowered or trained in becoming advocates at the institution or in the community—and that this campus hasn't seen the student leaders or grassroots movements that have occurred on other HBCU campuses.

Faculty agreed that students need to be taught the skills to advocate for themselves within the institution. They highlighted differences they see among HBCUs regarding student advocacy. The faculty felt as though students at elite HBCUs are taught by faculty how to be advocates in ways that they were not at their own institution. They said that the notable difference in student advocacy between

those elite HBCUs and students at their institution was due to a lack of mentorship by faculty. Like the themes raised during other campus site visits, student safety in the surrounding community was seen as a challenge to the student experience by faculty, staff, and the student participants at this institution. Staff and faculty members indicated that students felt safe on campus, but that even a block or two removed from campus, the surrounding community has safety challenges. Although respondents identified student safety in the community as a challenge, they also realized the limitations that the institution has in addressing factors that are outside of its control. The student participant also noted having feelings of unease about their safety when being off campus in the surrounding community—although, notably, this was not a feeling of being unsafe due to their race but to higher crime rates in the surrounding community.

## Community College

The community college site visit also revealed many of the same themes found in student activist focus groups and survey data noted elsewhere in this report. There was a general optimism about the potential for advancing racial climate at this specific institution, due to the hiring of a new president and a new senior diversity officer, both of whom are women of color. The faculty at this institution addressed a significant history of mistrust between faculty and campus leaders, specifically related to racial climate. This issue of mistrust came up in each of the focus group meetings, except for the meeting with students. The wariness between faculty, staff, and campus leadership was one of the greatest challenges to advancing racial climate among the faculty and staff participants. Faculty at this institution felt that the lack of supportive staff members represented a significant challenge in the institution's efforts to advance racial climate. Part of the mistrust developed between previous campus leadership and faculty and staff was the lack of

accountability for reports of racist attitudes and action by employees at the institution. In contrast with the feedback received during the other two campus site visits, the faculty at this institution felt that the institution's compositional diversity was lagging behind that of the surrounding community. One faculty member noted that although the institution talks a lot about DEI, its actions do not match its words. They noted that the data about employment and hiring practices show that not enough progress has been made. They noted that the region in which the institution is situated is growing ever more diverse, while the representation among full-time faculty and staff mirrors the demographics of the greater community from 20 years ago. Students and staff, however, mentioned the lack of compositional diversity among the faculty only in comparison with that of other institutions.

Students indicated a general lack of awareness about DEI-related efforts broadly or even specific DEI-related programs and events on campus. Ironically, a large cultural event was happening in the main campus public space when the focus groups took place, a fact that reinforces the idea that communicating with students about such efforts is essential. One staff member echoed this sentiment about the importance of communication: "It comes back to communication. Making sure that [campus leaders] are connecting with the students at different times and in different pockets. Those types of things have to be ongoing." Students at this campus also noted that it is difficult for some students to attend DEI-related programming due to their work schedules or taking classes primarily online.

In addition to communicating to students, faculty, and staff about efforts to advance racial climate, campus leadership must actively solicit feedback from students about these efforts and their impacts, according to staff. One staff member said that campus leaders should "host regular listening sessions. If you aren't out there regularly, you can't

have these conversations. Students won't approach you unless they see you as part of change-making at the institution."

In all, the campus site visits yielded many themes that were echoed by student activist focus groups and survey data. What was noteworthy were the different ways that students, faculty, and staff within a given institutional environment experienced efforts to advance racial climate. At some institutions, faculty perspectives aligned closely with those of students; at other campuses, staff feedback more closely mirrored that of students at their institution.

Over and over again during campus site visits, students, faculty, and staff called for greater transparency and accountability about progress toward racial justice. Calls for greater communication and student involvement in advocating for change to improve racial climate at these institutions were also takeaways from the campus site visits; these calls echoed those made in focus groups and surveys.

# Appendix B

## Student Focus-Group Respondent and Institutional Characteristics

**TABLE B1 | What is your academic class standing?**

Academic class standing	Percentage	Frequency
First year	0%	0
Sophomore/second year	15%	10
Junior/third year	37%	24
Senior/fourth year or more	48%	31
Total	100%	65

**TABLE B2 | What is your institution type?**

Institution type	Percentage	Frequency
Public 4-year	51%	33
Private 4-year	45%	29
Public 2-year	4%	3

**TABLE B3 | What is your current enrollment status?**

Enrollment status	Percentage	Frequency
Full-time (12 or more credits)	95%	62
Part-time (less than 12 credits)	5%	3

**TABLE B4 | With which racial/ethnic categories do you identify? Select all that apply.**

<b>Race/ethnicity</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
American Indian, Alaska Native, Indigenous, and/or First Nations	6%	4
Asian, Asian American, and/or Desi American	29%	19
Black and/or African American	35%	23
Latinx/a/o and/or Hispanic	25%	16
Middle Eastern, Southwest Asian, and/or North African	3%	2
Multiracial or biracial	9%	6
Native Hawaiian and/or Other Pacific Islander	N/A	N/A
White and/or European American	21%	14
Prefer not to answer	N/A	N/A
Prefer to self-describe	1%	1

**TABLE B5 | With which gender categories do you identify? Select all that apply.**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Agender	1%	1
Gender non-binary	8%	5
Genderqueer	3%	2
Man	20%	13
Transgender	0%	0
Transman or transmasculine	1%	1
Transwoman or transfeminine	0%	0
Woman/womxn/womyn	72%	47
Prefer to self-describe	0%	0
Prefer not to answer	1%	1



# Appendix C

## Student Survey Respondent and Institutional Characteristics

**TABLE C1 | What is your academic class standing as of fall 2022?**

Academic class standing	Percentage	Frequency (n = 130)
First year	16%	21
Sophomore/second year	38%	50
Junior/third year	22%	28
Senior/fourth year or more	24%	31
Nondegree-seeking undergraduate student	0%	0
Graduate or professional student	0%	0
Total	100%	130

**TABLE C2 | What will be your enrollment status as of September 2022?**

Enrollment status	Percentage	Frequency (n = 130)
Full-time (12 or more credits)	92%	119
Part-time (less than 12 credits)	8%	11
Total	100%	130

**TABLE C3 | With which racial/ethnic categories do you identify? Select all that apply.**

Race/ethnicity	Percentage	Frequency (n = 130)
American Indian, Alaska Native, Indigenous, and/or First Nations	5%	6
Asian, Asian American, and/or Desi American	11%	14
Black and/or African American	31%	40
Latinx/a/o and/or Hispanic	35%	45
Middle Eastern, Southwest Asian, and/or North African	2%	3
Multiracial or biracial	9%	12
Native Hawaiian and/or Other Pacific Islander	0%	0
White and/or European American	32%	42
Prefer to self-describe	2%	3
Prefer not to answer	2%	3

**TABLE C4 | With which gender categories do you identify? Select all that apply.**

Gender	Percentage	Frequency (n = 130)
Agender	0%	0
Gender Nnonbinary	5%	7
Genderqueer	1%	1
Man	28%	36
Transgender	2%	2
Transman or transmasculine	1%	1
Transwoman or transfeminine	2%	2
Woman/womxn/womyn	60%	78
Prefer to self-describe	2%	3
Prefer not to answer	4%	5

**TABLE C5 | Which of the following best describes your political ideology?**

Political ideology	Percentage	Frequency (n = 130)
Very conservative	3%	4
Somewhat conservative	5%	7
Moderate	15%	20
Somewhat liberal	24%	31
Very liberal	25%	33
Don't know	15%	20
Prefer not to answer	12%	15
Total	100%	130

**TABLE C6 | With which of the following do you identify? Select all that apply.**

Identity	Percentage	Frequency (n = 130)
First-generation college student	55%	71
Pell Grant eligible	44%	57
Veteran or military connected	9%	12
Justice system impacted student	4%	5
Undocumented	4%	5
Former foster youth	2%	3
Transfer	11%	14
A salient identity of mine is not listed	8%	11
Prefer not to answer	19%	25

**TABLE C7 | Institution sector**

Institution sector	Percentage	Frequency
Public, 4-year	48%	63
Private non-profit, 4-year	22%	29
Public, 2-year	28%	36
Other	0%	0
Unknown	2%	2
Total	100%	130

**TABLE C8 | Institution size**

Institution size	Percentage	Frequency
Under 5,000	27%	35
5,000–9,999	34%	44
10,000–19,999	15%	19
20,000 or above	23%	30
Other	0%	0
Unknown	2%	2
Total	100%	130

**TABLE C9 | Institution type**

Institution type	Percentage	Frequency
Not MSI	51%	66
HBCU	0%	0
HSI	19%	25
AANAPISI	3%	4
Emerging HSI	7%	9
HSI/emerging HSI and AANAPISI	18%	24
Unknown	2%	2
Total	100%	130

**TABLE C10 | Institution locale**

Institution locale	Percentage	Frequency
City	50%	65
Suburb	36%	47
Town	10%	13
Rural	2%	3
Unknown	2%	2
Total	100%	130

# Appendix D

## Administrator Survey Respondent and Institutional Characteristics

Note. Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.

TABLE D1   Respondent member organization		
Organization	Percentage	Frequency
NADOHE	49%	87
NASPA	51%	89
Total	100%	176

TABLE D2   What is your position title at the institution? Select all that apply.		
Position title	Percentage	Frequency
Vice president of student affairs or equivalent	47%	83
Senior diversity officer or equivalent	41%	73
Academic diversity officer or equivalent	3%	6
Other	15%	27
Total	N/A	176

TABLE D3   How long have you been employed at your current institution?		
Length of time	Percentage	Frequency
Under 1 year	13%	22
1 to 3 years	22%	39
3 to 5 years	14%	25
5 to 10 years	23%	41
More than 10 years	28%	49
Total	100%	176

**TABLE D4 | With which racial/ethnic categories do you identify? Select all that apply.**

Race/ethnicity	All (n = 176)	
	Percentage	Frequency
American Indian, Alaska Native, Indigenous, and/or First Nations	4%	7
Asian, Asian American, and/or Desi American	7%	13
Black and/or African American	50%	88
Latinx/a/o and/or Hispanic	11%	20
Middle Eastern, Southwest Asian, and/or North African	0%	0
Multiracial or biracial	5%	9
Native Hawaiian and/or Other Pacific Islander	0%	0
White and/or European American	36%	63
Prefer to self-describe	1%	1
Prefer not to answer	0%	0

**TABLE D5 | With which gender categories do you identify? Select all that apply.**

Gender	Percentage	Frequency (n = 176)
Agender	0%	0
Gender nonbinary	0%	0
Genderqueer	1%	2
Man	41%	72
Transgender	0%	0
Transman or transmasculine	0%	0
Transwoman or transfeminine	0%	0
Woman/womxn/womyn	57%	100
Prefer to self-describe	2%	3
Prefer not to answer	1%	1
Total	100%	178

**TABLE D6 | Institution sector**

Institution sector	Percentage	Frequency
Public, 4-year	48%	84
Private nonprofit, 4-year	41%	72
Public, 2-year	10%	17
Other	2%	3
Total	100%	176



**TABLE D7 | Institution size**

Institution size	Percentage	Frequency
Under 5,000	38%	67
5,001–9,999	23%	40
10,000–19,999	17%	30
20,000 or above	20%	35
Other	2%	4
Total	100%	176

**TABLE D8 | Institution type**

Institution type	Percentage	Frequency
Not MSI	63%	110
HBCU	1%	2
HSI	11%	19
AANAPISI	12%	21
Emerging HSI	7%	12
HSI/emerging HSI and AANAPISI	7%	12
Total	100%	176

**TABLE D9 | Institution locale**

Institution locale	Percentage	Frequency
City	56%	98
Suburb	25%	44
Town	16%	29
Rural	2%	3
Not in IPEDS universe	1%	2
Total	100%	176

**TABLE D10 | Does your institution have a senior diversity officer or equivalent position that is responsible for efforts across the institution?**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
No	20%	21
Yes	80%	82
Don't know	0%	0
Total	100%	103

**TABLE D11 | How long has your institution had a senior diversity officer in place?**

<b>Length of time</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Under 1 year	11%	9
1 to 3 years	26%	21
3 to 5 years	26%	21
5 to 10 years	22%	18
More than 10 years	13%	11
Don't know	2%	2
Total	100%	82



**NASPA**<sup>®</sup>

Student Affairs Administrators  
in Higher Education