



Diversity, Equity, Belonging, and Inclusion Climate Assessment Report for Delta College

Executive Summary

August 2021

Delta College is an important center of regional cultural, economic and educational development in the Great Lakes Bay Region of Michigan. Through listening sessions/focus groups, quantitative data collection and analysis, document review and conversations with key campus leaders, we have compiled our findings and recommendations in this report. Implementing new approaches to meet the needs of the unique communities served in the region will strategically set up Delta College for the next level of community-centered impact. The report is in three major sections: (a) Areas of Success, (b) Areas of Growth and (c) Recommendations.

Areas of Success

As the consultants gathered and analyzed information it was quickly apparent that Delta College has many strengths related to DEBI.

- ***DEBI is a Topic of High-Engagement for the Entire Campus Community***
- ***Establishment of the President's DEI Committee***
- ***In-House Professional Development Programs***
- ***Employee Resource Groups***
- ***Updates to Campus Facilities***

In addition to these success areas, Delta's report titled *Summary of Commitment to Diversity and Work: 2005 - 2021* (May 7, 2021) effectively summarizes previous achievements.

Areas for Growth

Our results of the data analysis are delineated into six themes for areas of growth:

Inconsistent DEBI Framework

Delta College has numerous DEBI efforts that are making great impacts on the college and broader community; however, the overall vision and strategy were incoherent to many campus members. A common vision, structure, and core components of DEBI work would assist with guiding efforts and ensuring all efforts are aligning with a sustainable strategic priority. Subthemes highlight a gap in equity-minded literacy across campus, cultivating trust through

sharing data with the community and establishing sustainable strategies to challenge dominant identities and frameworks at all levels of the organization.

Campus Climate Challenges

Campus climate challenges are often difficult to recognize, identify, and make tangible, especially during a global pandemic. The culture and climate are often a sense of “how things are”. A common theme at Delta was people felt like they did not belong, or their identity was not valued, especially those from minoritized identities. Subthemes highlight a desire for more spatial symbols of inclusion across campus, enhanced focus on enrollment, graduation and achievement for Black and Latinx students, disability access strategies beyond compliance, inclusive academic curriculum and classroom experiences and updated training and competency for campus public safety. Employees who identify as Black, LGBTQ, Hispanic/Latinx and with disabilities shared a sense of distrust of words and behaviors by campus leaders, especially when bias events occur and wanted more transparent processes and responsiveness.

Communication and Collaboration

While there are many talented employees on campus, a key theme was lack of awareness of specific DEBI resources on campus, communication practices and processes along with opportunities and willingness to collaborate across academic and staff areas to develop innovative DEBI strategies. The campus can benefit from centralized communication strategies, distributing timely and effective responses, and bridging current structural silos across campus, all through a DEBI lens.

Human Resources and Institutional Capacity

Bringing in more representative employees and enhancing campus DEBI capacity are immediate priorities for the campus. While the current recruitment and retention, professional development, and reporting processes are well intentioned, a longitudinal vision and allocation of resources to enhance these areas will greatly benefit the campus and the broader community. A significant area of development is supporting mid-level managers, senior leaders, and faculty through targeted professional development series and accountability systems.

DEBI Organizational Infrastructure and Accountability

Numerous groups expressed feeling as if they did not belong to the Delta community resulting in recruitment and retention barriers and lack of faith in campus initiatives. Establishing a visible and well-funded DEBI office and hiring well-trained team members and leadership, along with centralizing direct student services (e.g., supporting student parents, students facing housing and food insecurities, and undocumented, DACA, and students from mixed-status citizenship families), and enhancing accountability measures across campus is essential.

Community Relations

Delta College is unique from many other community colleges in its relationship to not one but three counties, cities, and communities. Although significant work has been done to bridge these communities and empower cultural, social and economic growth, the campus will need to

focus heavily on creating an equitable set of resources for each satellite campus, fostering genuine relationships and visibility in the community, enhancing support for employee resource groups, and developing an accessible and comprehensive transportation system across the four campuses.

Recommendations

We offer specific recommendations and strategies to address these challenges. The recommendation areas are presented in ideal chronological sequence while recognizing several elements will and should overlap to maintain progress and sustainability.

Create a Diversity, Equity, Belonging and Inclusion Framework

A comprehensive framework will guide Delta College in understanding why and how DEBI work is being accomplished at all levels. We offer an intersectional sense of belonging and a detailed equity framework for cultural transformation to consider for the campus. Specifically, a framework should include developing shared DEBI language across campus and sharing data openly with campus, and community leaders.

Improve Campus Climate

Given current experiences on campus, a new campus climate must include a shift to ensure marginalized communities do not feel like their role is to simply educate dominant communities or increase campus data points. The campus can progress in this area by assessing visual symbols of art, building names, access to diverse food options, openly naming race and race-based discrimination and standardizing Universal Design elements across campus.

Communication and Collaboration

Given the size of Delta College and limited resources, there are many opportunities for campus departments to share more information, staffing and financial resources, and community connections to enhance DEBI work on campus and in the region. Delta College can improve communication methods, websites, and structures to ensure the campus community has a better understanding of basic principles, and activities around equity. Beyond communication, each campus must share resources by establishing an intercampus collaborations fund, developing regular intercampus shuttle services and intentional movement of faculty and staff across the campuses.

Invest in Human Resources and Employee Professional Development

To truly embody DEBI values on campus, Delta College must focus on structural alignment of resources with DEBI, developing staff and faculty, enhancing students' experiences of belonging and continuing strategic recruitment and retention initiatives for underrepresented employees. The campus will benefit from an equity-minded review of positions and reporting lines, developing and implementing effective onboarding processes, offering comprehensive professional development series, and incorporating DEBI questions into annual evaluations and recruitment processes for all employees.

Strategic Recruitment and Retention

Strategic recruitment and retention of students and employees of color, LGBTQ+ people, people with disabilities, women, veterans, first-generation students and other marginalized identities will be a critical tool for enhancing DEBI efforts on campus. Specifically, Delta will benefit from addressing high attrition rates for Black and Latinx males through community partnerships and direct support services. Students will benefit from increased support for student affinity programs, updating campus marketing material with actual student images, funding incentives for dual-enrollment students and establishing regular listening sessions across all campuses. For employees, the campus can enhance recruitment and retention by incorporating clear DEBI values throughout the application process, reevaluating required qualifications for open positions, empowering HR to be more active in the selection process, and developing targeted outreach strategies. For current employees, Delta can support affinity spaces and individuals by providing equitable funding for ERGs, establishing a campus DEBI ERG council offering leadership and succession training and increasing visibility, and engagement with these organizations at all levels of campus. With regard to diverse faculty, the campus would benefit from reestablishing the Presidential Scholars' Program with a cohort model and offering structured support and mentorship with senior scholars throughout the fellowship. Finally, comprehensive college-wide bias reporting and mitigation process needs to be created that includes a reporting system with clear protocol and campus-wide education.

Institutionalizing DEBI Infrastructure

At the heart of this project is a desire from Delta College leaders to learn how to embed DEBI as an institutional value in practice. In an ideal world all students and employees would feel welcome and sense of belonging while on all parts of campus. Developing plans to establish a DEBI Center that serves students and employees, is centrally located, provides education and training and guides campus structural change initiatives will greatly influence the college's ability to recruit and retain diverse communities. The structure for any impactful climate transformation must include an executive leadership level position with additional staffing support for the DEBI programs on campus. The position and offices will be a balance between student-centered programs, policy-level influence and being a bridge between academic and student affairs departments.

Community Relations

Serving three distinct counties and communities is a challenge and building equitable and genuine relationships across the regions is a key step in changing Delta's image. Especially in Saginaw where Delta is interested in increasing enrollment, presence, and empowerment. Building trust with community leaders, churches, non-profits, families, and organizations takes time but is well-worth the effort. Delta can enhance their presence and relationships by holding community listening sessions, offering a community engagement grant, supporting employees attending local community events and enhancing campus awareness of local history and social movements.

Conclusion

Delta College has immense potential for becoming a national community college model for fostering belonging and inclusive campus climate through a DEBI lens. These recommendations are structured to reflect the perspectives we heard from Delta College community members in context with consultants' work and understanding of transformative community college environments. While there is great work happening at Delta, addressing these areas of growth and continuing the areas of success will bring the mission of the college to "serve the Great Lakes Bay Region by educating, enriching and empowering our diverse community of learners to achieve their personal, professional and academic goals" to fruition.

About Bhattar Consulting Group

Bhattar Consulting Group is a collective of national and international leaders, scholars and facilitators committed to individual, interpersonal, and institutional cultural transformation. We represent over 80 years of professional and scholarly expertise in diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. We have supported numerous nonprofit, higher education and corporate organizations and individuals in cultural transformation, equity-based leadership practices and community capacity building strategies. We honor the indigenous people on whose land the organizations we work with are located. We commit to reinvesting into the local communities by contributing a percentage of our earnings to support local indigenous peoples. For more information, visit: www.rajabhatar.com/consulting.