

Under Siege:

Campus Racial Climates in Texas Higher Education Amid Anti-DEI Legislation

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RECOMMENDED CITATION

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Introduction

On January 1, 2024, a new bill authored by Sen. Brandon Creighton, SB 17, went into effect in the state of Texas. Signed into law by Governor Greg Abbott, SB 17 effectively prohibits DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) programming and training at public institutions. This legislation is part of a broader wave of anti-DEI laws sweeping across the United States, signaling a significant rollback of decades of progress in fostering inclusive and equitable educational environments (Confessore, 2024).

Initially targeting K-12 schools, at least 18 states now ban the use of public funds for DEI-related initiatives and activities, this movement has expanded to higher education. According to *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (2024), which has tracked this trend since 2023, 73 anti-DEI bills have been introduced across 26 states and in the U.S. Congress. Of these, eight were signed into law in six states, including Florida, Tennessee, Utah, North Carolina, North Dakota, and, of course, Texas.

The passage of SB 17 is not an isolated event but part of a coordinated effort. These bills are modeled on legislation developed by conservative think tanks such as the Goldwater and Manhattan Institutes. These organizations aim to “abolish DEI bureaucracies and restore colorblind equality in public universities” (Rufo et al., 2023, p. 1). However, this narrative is rooted in mischaracterizations of DEI work and ignores the systemic inequities that such initiatives seek to address.

This report, released as the first year under SB 17 draws to a close, provides critical baseline data to understand campus racial climates before the law’s implementation. Drawing on comprehensive survey data from the National Assessment of Collegiate Campus Climates—the nation’s leading survey enterprise for assessing campus racial climate—we examine the state of campus racial climates at 13 public institutions now operating under SB 17.

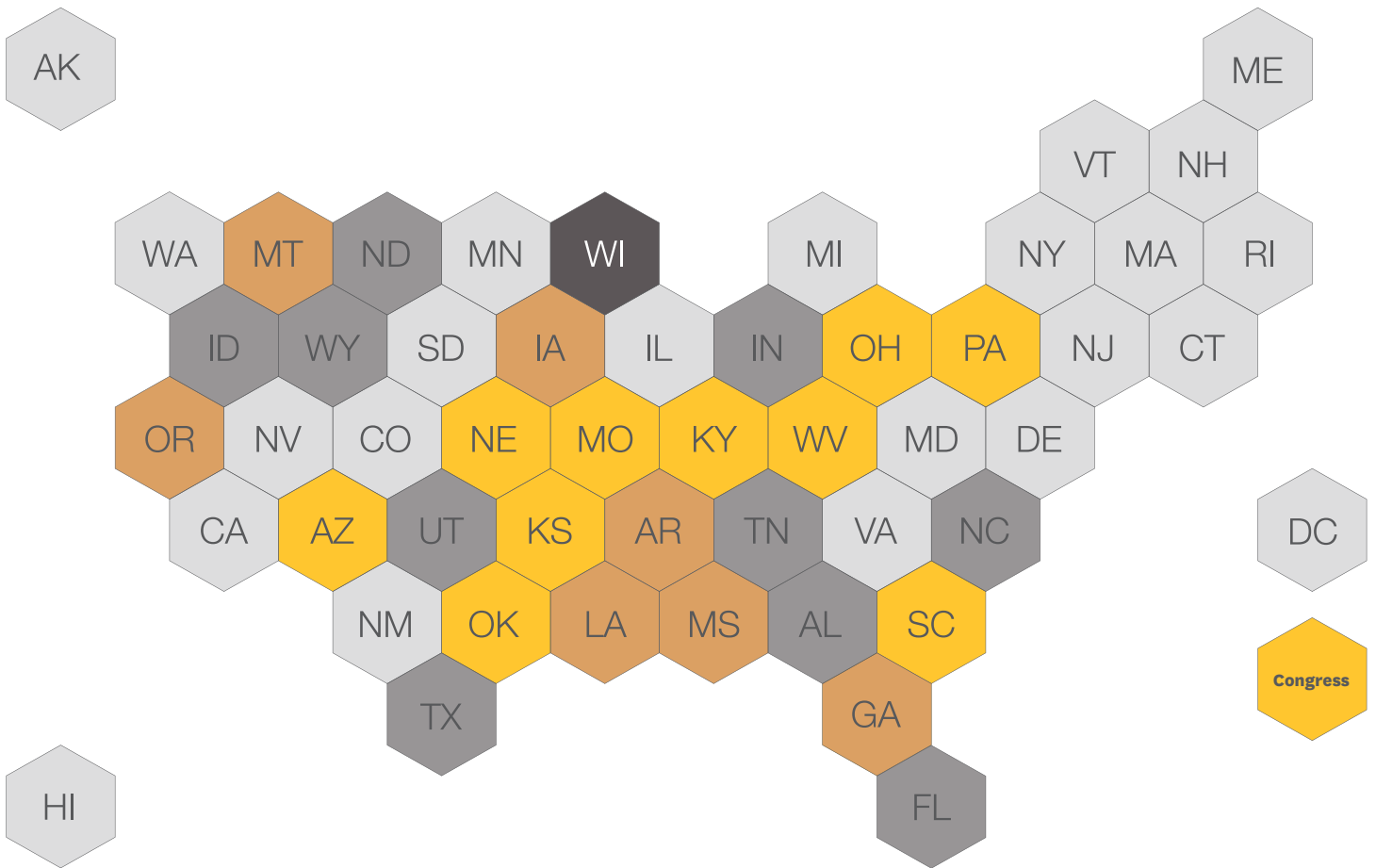
Our analyses offer a foundational benchmark to assess the far-reaching consequences of SB 17 as institutions navigate its constraints. Beyond serving as a pre-legislation snapshot, this report equips institutional leaders, policymakers, and advocates with insights needed to anticipate and mitigate the challenges that will likely intensify under this law. Our findings underscore the stakes for DEI in higher education and the urgency of sustaining progress amid an increasingly hostile landscape.

In the following sections, we provide an overview of the legislative context, followed by a cursory overview of insights from campus racial climate research and DEI initiatives. Next, we provide an overview of SB 17, taking stock of what it bans, and what it does not importantly. After describing the NACCC, we present results from our analysis focusing on students’ perceptions of the campus racial environment, its effects on their academic and psychological wellbeing, perceptions of safety, and from whom they learn about issues of race on campus. We close with implications and recommendations.



Where Anti-DEI Legislation Has Been Proposed

■ No bill ■ Introduced ■ Final legislative approval ■ Signed into law ■ Tabled, failed to pass, or vetoed



Source: *Chronicle of Higher Education* (2024)

Follow the *Chronicle of Higher Education's* Anti-DEI Legislative Tracker at uscrec.info/chronicletracker

Campus Racial Climate and the Role of DEI in Higher Education

Understanding campus racial climate is essential for recognizing the ways in which students experience their educational environments. This section provides a concise overview of campus racial climate and its influence on student success, particularly for those from marginalized backgrounds. It also highlights the role DEI initiatives play in fostering positive perceptions and addressing inequities on campuses.

Campus racial climate refers to the "attitudes, perceptions, behaviors, and expectations around issues of race, ethnicity, and diversity" (Hurtado et al., 2008, p. 205). Negative perceptions of this climate, often stemming from experiences of racism and discrimination, can significantly hinder students' adjustment to college. Such perceptions contribute to feelings of isolation, marginalization, and a diminished sense of belonging—critical factors linked to retention and persistence (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Johnson et al., 2007; Strayhorn, 2018; Solorzano et al., 2000; Yosso et al., 2009; Pedler et al., 2022).

Conversely, a positive campus climate fosters respect, community, and belonging. DEI programs and initiatives have historically played a crucial role in challenging disaffirming messages about students' place and fit on campus. These efforts address discrimination and bias while providing safe spaces for underrepresented students who

may struggle to feel prioritized within the broader campus community.

DEI is not a monolithic concept; it encompasses a wide range of programs and policies that contribute to improving campus climate. Examples include racial and ethnic cultural centers, identity-based student organizations, diversity-focused courses, and cultural awareness programs (Johnson, 2022; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Patton, 2010; Tachine et al., 2017). Additionally, DEI practices often guide the recruitment and retention of diverse faculty and staff, aiming to address systemic inequities that disadvantage candidates of color. These practices are essential, as having diverse faculty and staff enables Students of Color to connect with individuals who share their racial and ethnic backgrounds, fostering more favorable perceptions of the campus climate (Parker III & Trolan, 2020).

However, the prohibition of DEI initiatives in Texas, mandated by SB 17, eliminates critical tools for addressing disparities in campus racial climate. This legislation sends a damaging message to Students of Color and other marginalized groups, suggesting that their experiences and identities are devalued. The likely result is a significant decline in the campus climate.



SB 17, Texas' Anti-DEI Law: What it Bans and What it Does Not

In January 2023, conservative think tanks announced the release of model legislation to abolish DEI initiatives on public postsecondary campuses throughout the U.S. (Goldwater Institute, 2023). The anti-DEI model legislation, part of a larger scheme, was disseminated to conservative lawmakers through strategic and covert social networks (Confessore, 2024). In February, Texas Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick announced his “Top 30 Priorities for the 2023 Legislative Session” (Patrick, 2023). Among the lieutenant governor’s priorities was SB 17–“Banning Discriminatory ‘Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion’(DEI) Policies in Higher Education,” which resembled model legislation developed and released by the Manhattan and Goldwater Institutes (Creighton et al., 2023; Patrick, 2023; Rufo et al., 2023).

Sen. Creighton and colleagues filed SB 17 in March 2023, initiating the official legislative process (Creighton et al., 2023). Over the next two months, SB 17 progressed through the Senate and House chambers, undergoing a series of committee meetings, amendments, public hearings, testimonies, and votes

(Creighton et al., 2023). Throughout the legislative process, students, faculty, staff, and other constituents expressed deep concern about the potential reification of an overtly racist, discriminatory, and inimical law (Stark, 2023; Surovell, 2023). A steadfast coalition of civically engaged constituent activists organized, protested, and provided over 10 hours of public testimony in opposition to SB 17 (Stark, 2023; Surovell, 2023). Despite their valiant efforts, on May 29th, SB 17 passed through the House and Senate and was sent to Gov. Greg Abbott, who signed SB 17 into law on June 17th, with an effective date set for January 1, 2024 (Creighton et al., 2023).

Following Gov. Abbott’s ratification of SB 17, many of Texas’ postsecondary education systems—the University of Texas System, Texas A&M System, the University of Houston System, and the University of North Texas System—released guidance about what is permissible under the new law (Alonso, 2023). In less than one month since SB 17 took effect, students reported feeling targeted, isolated, and lost on campus (Saravia, 2024). Further, faculty have been described as reluctant to discuss

anything regarding DEI, potentially indicating a pervasive chilling effect and increased hostile collegiate campus climate conditions (Freeman, 2024; Saravia, 2024).

Noteworthy is the fact that SB 17 does not provide a clear, standalone definition of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion as individual concepts (Creighton et al., 2023). Instead, SB 17 focuses on defining the scope and limitations of programs, policies, and practices considered under the umbrella of DEI initiatives within public institutions of higher education throughout Texas (Creighton et al., 2023). For example, the law specifies that DEI initiatives should not influence hiring or employment practices based on race, sex, color, or ethnicity except in compliance with anti-discrimination laws nor promote differential treatment or special benefits based on these factors (Creighton et al., 2023).

Table 1 provides a glimpse of SB 17's prohibitions and exceptions based on the sources reviewed (Creighton et al., 2023; The University of Texas System, 2023). This summary is not meant to be exhaustive.



Table 1. SB 17’s DEI Related Prohibitions and Exceptions

CATEGORY	PROHIBITION	EXCEPTION
Offices	✓	-
Employees	✓	-
Third-Party Contracts	✓	-
Statements	✓	-
Preferential Treatment or Consideration	✓	-
Training	✓	-
Programs & Activities	✓	-
Academic Course Instruction	-	✓
Scholarly Research & Sharing Findings	-	✓
Creative Work & Sharing Findings	-	✓
Student Organizations**	-	✓
Data Collection	-	✓
Student Recruitment or Admissions**	-	✓
Short-Term Guest Speakers and Performers	-	✓
Policies, Practices, and Procedures***	-	✓
Activities****	-	✓
Grant application and compliance	-	✓
Reports to Grantor or Accreditor	-	✓
Compliance with State and Federal Antidiscrimination Laws	-	✓

**Activities of a registered or recognized student organization at an institution of higher education.

***This exception does not include the prohibition of DEI statements.

****Must be designed and implemented to enhance student academic achievement or postgraduate outcomes without regard to race, sex, color, or ethnicity.

The State of Racial Climate in Texas: Insights from the NACCC



The National Assessment of Collegiate Campus Climate (NACCC) is a trio of quantitative surveys focused on the campus racial climate, administered by the USC Race and Equity Center at the University of Southern California. The NACCC aims to assist leaders in higher education in formally assessing their campus racial climate and using the results to better understand and more strategically address campus racial issues affecting for faculty, staff and students.

This report draws on data from the NACCC student survey, which comprises six content areas essential to understanding campus racial climate: mattering and affirmation, cross-racial engagement, racial learning and literacy, encounters with racial stress, appraisals of institutional commitment, and impact of external environments (see Appendix A for list

of included survey items).

The data for this study, which includes responses from 15,620 students across 13 Texas public institutions (referenced in Table 2), were collected from Spring 2019 through Spring 2021. The demographics of the respondents (detailed in Table 3) show that 33% of respondents identify as Hispanic/Latinx, followed by White (24%), Black/African American (19%), Multi-racial (11%), and Asian/Asian American (10%). In terms of gender identity, 69% identify as cisgender women, 25% identify as cisgender men, and 6% as gender-diverse (i.e., identifying as trans women, trans men, non-binary, genderqueer, genderfluid, or other gender identities). Additionally, 84% of students identify as heterosexual, while 16% identify as part of the LGBTQA+ community (lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, questioning, asexual, pansexual, demisexual, or other sexual identities).

The analysis employed descriptive statistics to summarize the data and identify patterns, with mean difference tests (e.g., t-tests, ANOVA) used to compare means across various groups. Detailed tables of descriptive and inferential statistics are provided in Appendices B–E.





Table 2. Characteristics of Public Higher Education Institutions in Texas.

Total Number of Texas Public Institutions	13	100.0%
<i>Institutional Type</i>		
Public 2-year	5	38.5%
Public 4-year	8	61.5%
<i>Enrollment Size Categories</i>		
1,000 - 4,999	2	15.4%
5,000 - 9,999	4	30.8%
10,000 - 19,999	2	15.4%
20,000 and above	5	38.5%
<i>Minority-serving Institution Designations</i>		
<i>Total sums and percentages do not add to 100.0% because these categories are not mutually exclusive.</i>		
Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs)	10	76.9%
Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs)	2	15.4%
Historically Black College or University (HBCUs)	1	7.7%
Both HSI and AANAPISI	2	15.4%
Neither HSI or AANAPISI	3	23.1%






Table 3. Descriptive statistics for student respondent demographic characteristics.

Racial/Ethnic Identity			
Hispanic, Latino/a/x, or Chicano/a/x (monoracial)		33.3%	5199
White or European American (monoracial)		24.0%	3744
Black or African American (monoracial)		19.4%	3038
Asian or Asian American (monoracial)		9.6%	1499
Another racial group (monoracial)		1.3%	197
Arab or Arab American (monoracial)		0.7%	116
Middle Eastern (monoracial)		0.4%	67
Native American and/or Alaska Native (monoracial)		0.4%	58
Native Hawaiian and/or Pacific Islander (monoracial)		0.1%	18
Two or More Races		10.8%	1684
Gender Identity			
Cisgender Woman		68.9%	10753
Cisgender Man		25.3%	3946
Other Gender Identity (transgender woman, transgender man, non-binary, genderqueer, genderfluid, other non-cisgender identity)		5.8%	905
Sexual Orientation			
Strictly Heterosexual		83.6%	13058
LGBQA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, questioning, asexual, pansexual, demisexual, or other sexual orientation)		16.2%	2537
Non-response		0.2%	25




U.S. Citizenship Status

United States citizen		86.3%	11638
Undocumented, DACA, or Temporary Protected Status		1.8%	249
Lawful permanent resident or other non-citizen		7.7%	1035
On a student visa (e.g., F, J, or M visas)		4.2%	567





Class Year

First-year undergraduate / Freshman		20.1%	3144
Second-year undergraduate / Sophomore		21.9%	3422
Third-year undergraduate / Junior		18.6%	2909
Fourth-year, or beyond, undergraduate / Senior		23.4%	3648
Undergraduate who identifies by credits completed rather than by a particular year		16.0%	2497

Enrollment Category

Full-time		71.9%	11164
Part-time		26.5%	4119
Other		1.6%	253

Age

18-21 years		41.4%	6457
22-34 years		40.2%	6276
35-49 years		14.2%	2223
50 years and older		4.2%	650

Results



Theme 1: Students of Color in Texas Perceive Campus Racial Environment Less Favorably, Especially Black Students

We asked students to rate their perceptions of the campus racial environment in five key areas: campus racial diversity, institutional commitment to hiring faculty and staff of color, perceptions of racial segregation, and perceptions of campus racism (see Appendix A). Our analysis focused on differences in responses between Students of Color and White students, revealing statistically significant findings.

Campus Racial Diversity

The average rating for campus racial diversity was 3.5, indicating a moderate perception of diversity. However, a significant difference emerged when comparing the ratings of Students of Color and White students. Students of Color rated campus diversity at 3.3, while White students rated it higher, at 3.8 ($p < .001$). This finding suggests that Students of Color perceive the campus as less diverse than their White peers. Among Students of Color, Black or African American students reported the lowest perceptions of diversity, with a mean rating of 3.1.

Perceptions of Racial Segregation

Students overall perceived low levels of racial segregation, with an average rating of 1.5 and no significant differences between Students of Color and White students. This suggests a broadly uniform perception of segregation across racial groups. However, Black or African American students and those identifying with two or more races reported slightly higher levels of perceived segregation, with mean ratings of 1.7.

Perceptions of Campus Racism

Similar to perceptions of segregation, perceptions of racism on campus were generally low among all students, with an average rating of 1.5. No significant difference was found between Students of Color and White students, indicating a shared view on this issue. Among racial and ethnic groups, Black or African American students and those identifying with two or more races reported the highest perceptions of racism, with mean ratings of 1.6.

Institutional Commitment to Hiring Faculty and Staff of Color

Overall, students perceived a strong commitment to hiring faculty and staff of color, with an average rating of 4.1. However, Students of Color rated this commitment slightly lower (4.0 for faculty and 4.1 for staff) compared to White students, who rated it at 4.4 for both. These differences were statistically significant ($p < .001$), highlighting varied perceptions of institutional commitment based on racial identity. Among Students of Color, Black or African American students reported the lowest perceived level of commitment, with mean ratings of 3.8 for both faculty and staff.

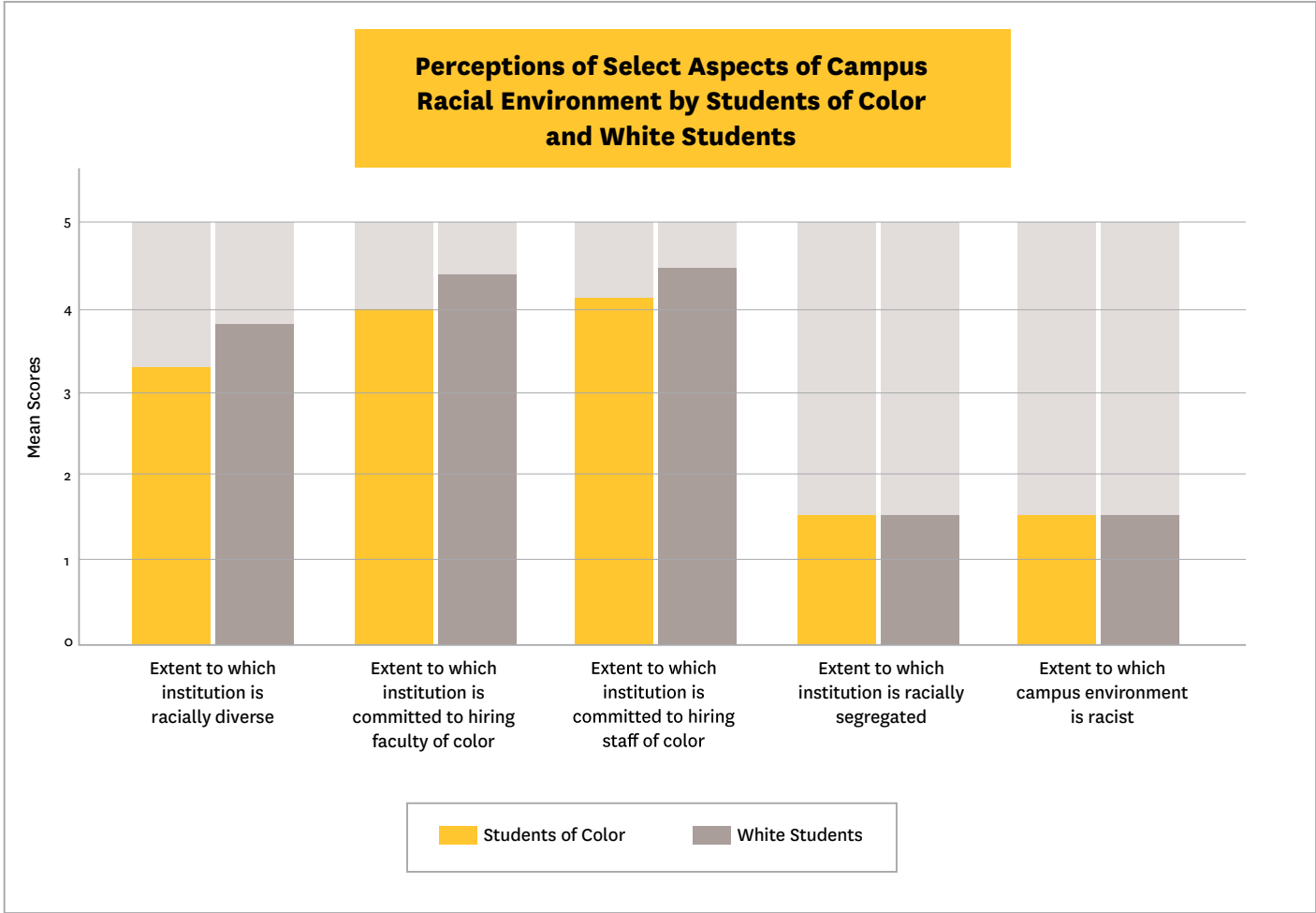


Figure 1. Perceptions of select aspects of campus racial environment by Students of Color and White students.

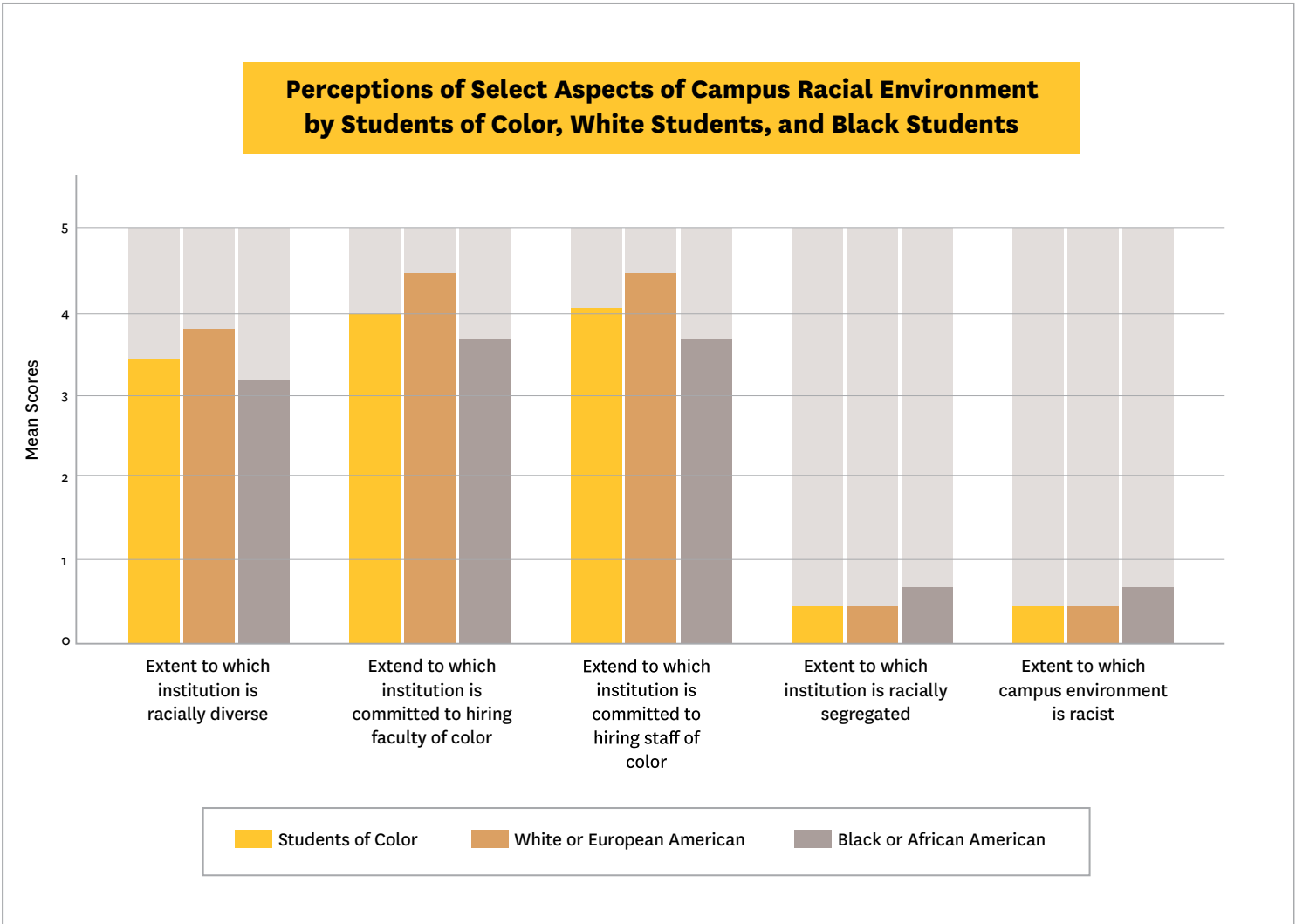


Figure 2. Perceptions of select aspects of campus racial environment by Students of Color, White students, and Black students.

Theme 2: Students of Color in Texas Experience Negative Academic and Psychological Consequences Due to the Campus Racial Environment

The harmful consequences of perceived campus racism extend beyond subjective perceptions; they lead to tangible, adverse outcomes that significantly impact students' academic achievements and mental health. To explore these effects, we asked students to report whether they had experienced specific consequences related to their campus's racial environment (see Appendix A). Our analysis indicates that students who perceive any degree of racism on their campus experience considerable negative effects. These consequences are particularly pronounced for Students of Color, who encounter racism at higher rates than their White counterparts.

Academic Performance and Emotional Well-being

The data reveals a concerning trend: a greater proportion of Students of Color report experiencing declines in academic performance and emotional well-being due to their campus's racial environment compared to White students. These statistically significant differences ($p < .001$) highlight the harmful impact of racist campus environments on the educational experiences and psychological health of Students of Color.

Middle Eastern students and Arab or Arab American students report some of the highest rates of academic decline, at 17.6% and 16.1%, respectively. Additionally, Middle Eastern students (29.4%) and Native American and/or Alaska Native students (29.4%) report declines in emotional well-being at disproportionately higher rates than other racial or ethnic groups.

Loneliness, Not Belonging, and Isolation

Approximately 1 in 4 students (26.4%) report experiencing feelings of loneliness, not belonging, and isolation. These feelings are more pronounced among Students of Color (29.8%) compared to their White peers (15.8%). This significant disparity ($p < .001$) underscores the isolating effects of racial discrimination and highlights the psychological toll on Students of Color. Middle Eastern students (35.3%) and bi-/multiracial students (34.7%) report the highest levels of these experiences.

Frustration and Anger

Approximately 1 in 3 students (36.8%) report feelings of frustration and anger due to the racial climate on campus. These sentiments are most pronounced among Native American and/or Alaska Native students (57.1%) and Arab or Arab American students (51.6%), who experience these negative emotions at the highest rates among all racial and ethnic groups surveyed.

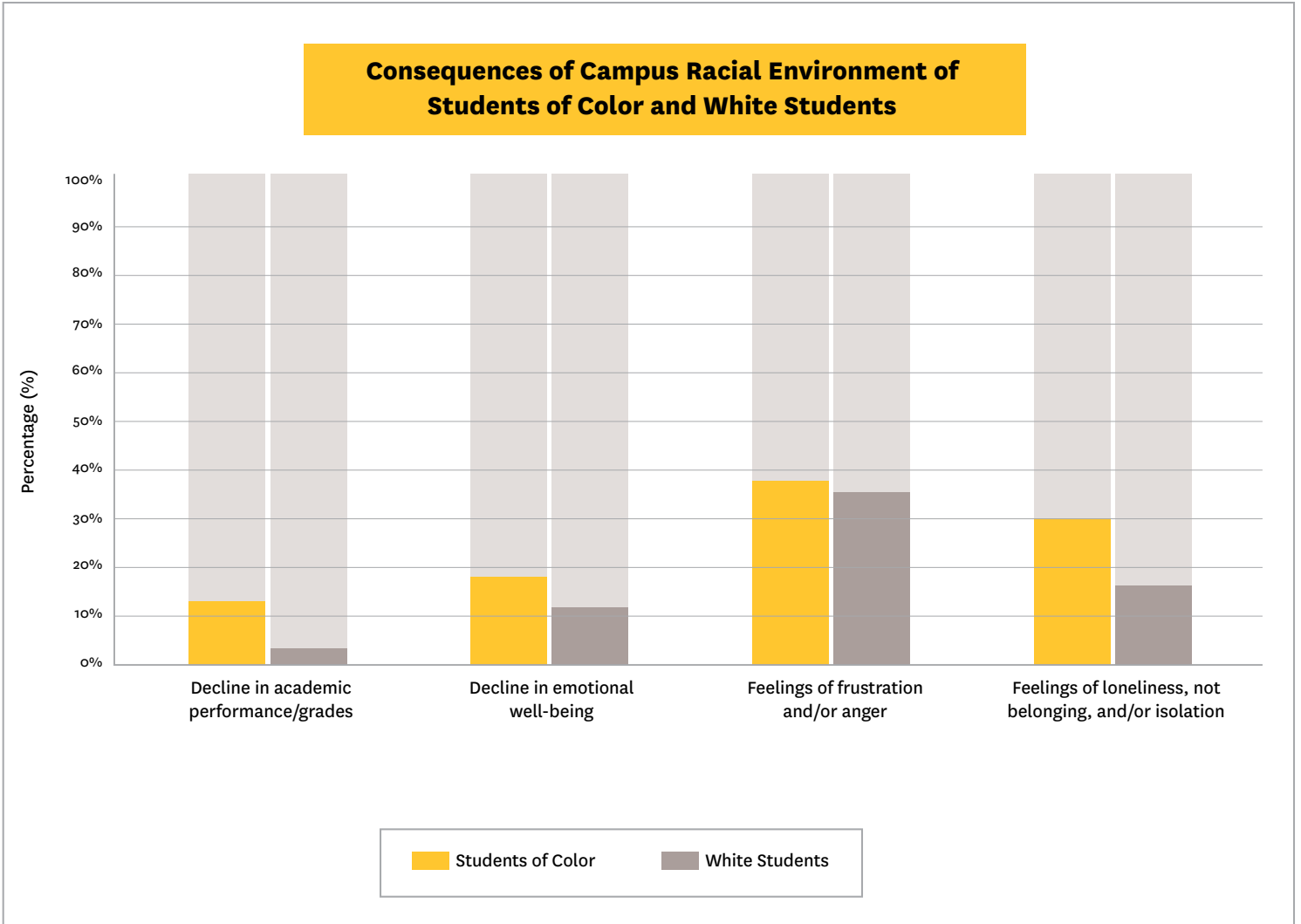


Figure 3. Consequences of campus racial environment on Students of Color and White students.

Consequences of Campus Racial Environment on Students, Disaggregated by Racial/Ethnic Identity

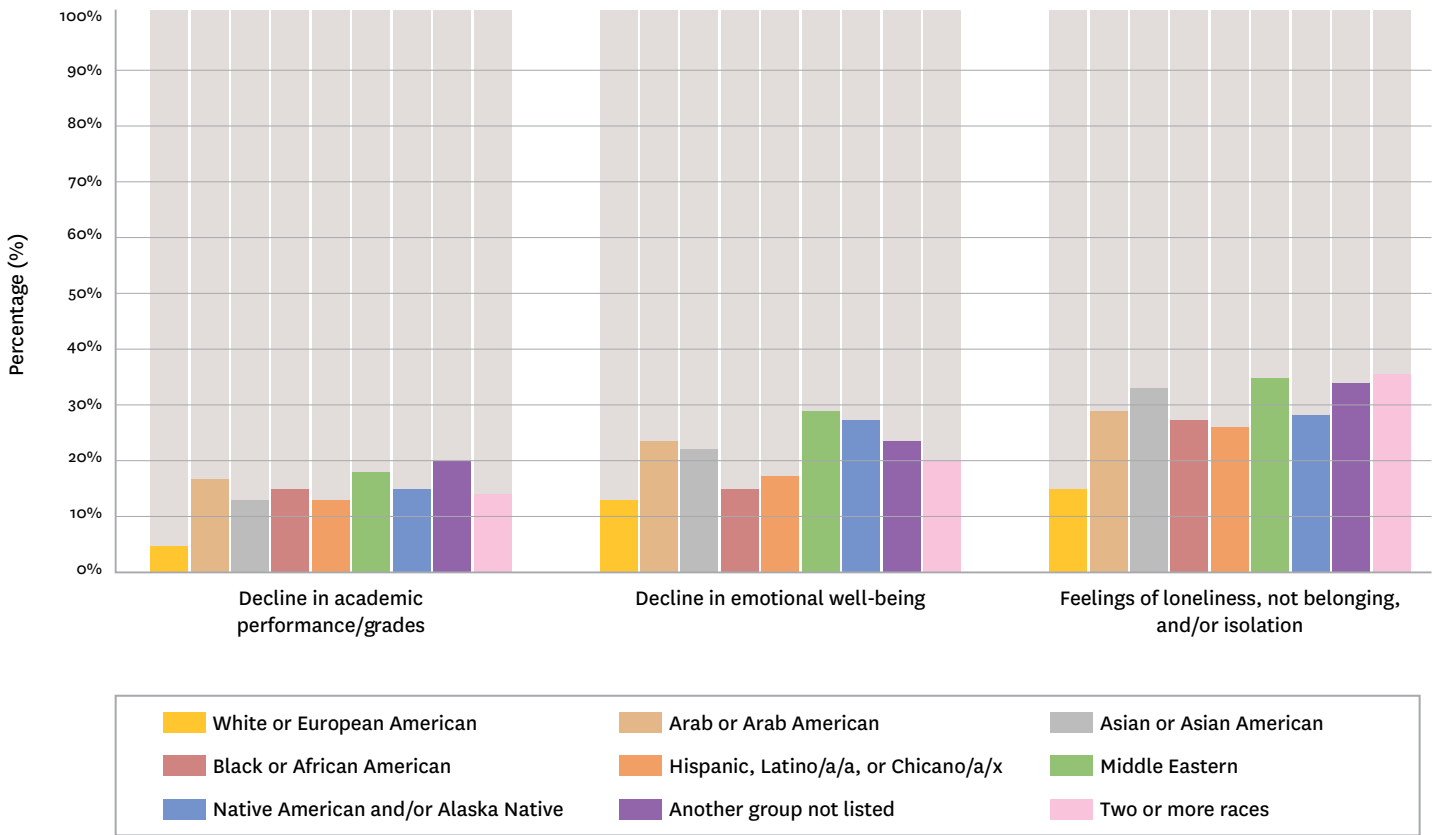


Figure 4. Consequences of campus racial environment on students, disaggregated by racial/ethnic identity.

Theme 3: Disparities in LGBTQ+ and Non-binary Students

Perceptions of Campus Safety and Inclusiveness Observed on Texas Campuses

We sought to understand students' perceptions of campus safety, welcomeness, and inclusion in Texas, with a particular focus on how these perceptions vary across different racial, gender, and sexual orientation groups (see Appendix A). Our findings reveal notable differences in student perceptions based on gender identity and sexual orientation.

Feeling safe/in-danger on campus

The overall mean score for campus safety was 5.9, with Students of Color (5.9) and White students (6.0) reporting similar perceptions of safety. Among racial groups, Asian or Asian American students reported feeling the least safe on campus, with a mean score of 5.6.

Gender differences in perceived safety were also observed, with cisgender women (5.8) and gender-diverse students—including trans women, trans men, non-binary, genderqueer, genderfluid, and other non-cisgender identities (5.7)—reporting significantly lower mean safety scores compared to cisgender men (6.0). Additionally, lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, questioning, asexual, pansexual, demisexual, and other sexual minority (LGBQA+) students reported significantly lower perceptions of safety (5.7) compared to their heterosexual peers (5.9).

Feeling included/excluded on campus

The overall mean score for feelings of inclusion on campus was 5.6, with no significant difference between Students of Color and White students.

Among racial groups, bi-/multiracial students reported feeling the least included, with a mean score of 5.4. Gender-diverse students reported feeling less included on campus (5.5) compared to cisgender men (5.7) and cisgender women (5.7), although these differences were not statistically significant.

Heterosexual students reported significantly higher mean scores for inclusion (5.7) compared to their LGBQA+ peers (5.4), indicating that LGBQA+ students feel less included on campus.

Feeling welcome/unwelcome on campus

The overall mean score for campus welcomeness was 6.0, with no significant difference between Students of Color and White students. Among racial groups, Asian or Asian American students reported feeling the least welcome on campus, with a mean score of 5.8.

Gender differences in perceptions of welcomeness were observed, with both cisgender men (6.0) and cisgender women (6.0) reporting significantly higher scores compared to gender-diverse students, who reported a mean score of 5.8. Similarly, LGBQA+ students reported significantly lower mean scores (5.8), indicating they feel less welcome on campus compared to their heterosexual peers (6.1).

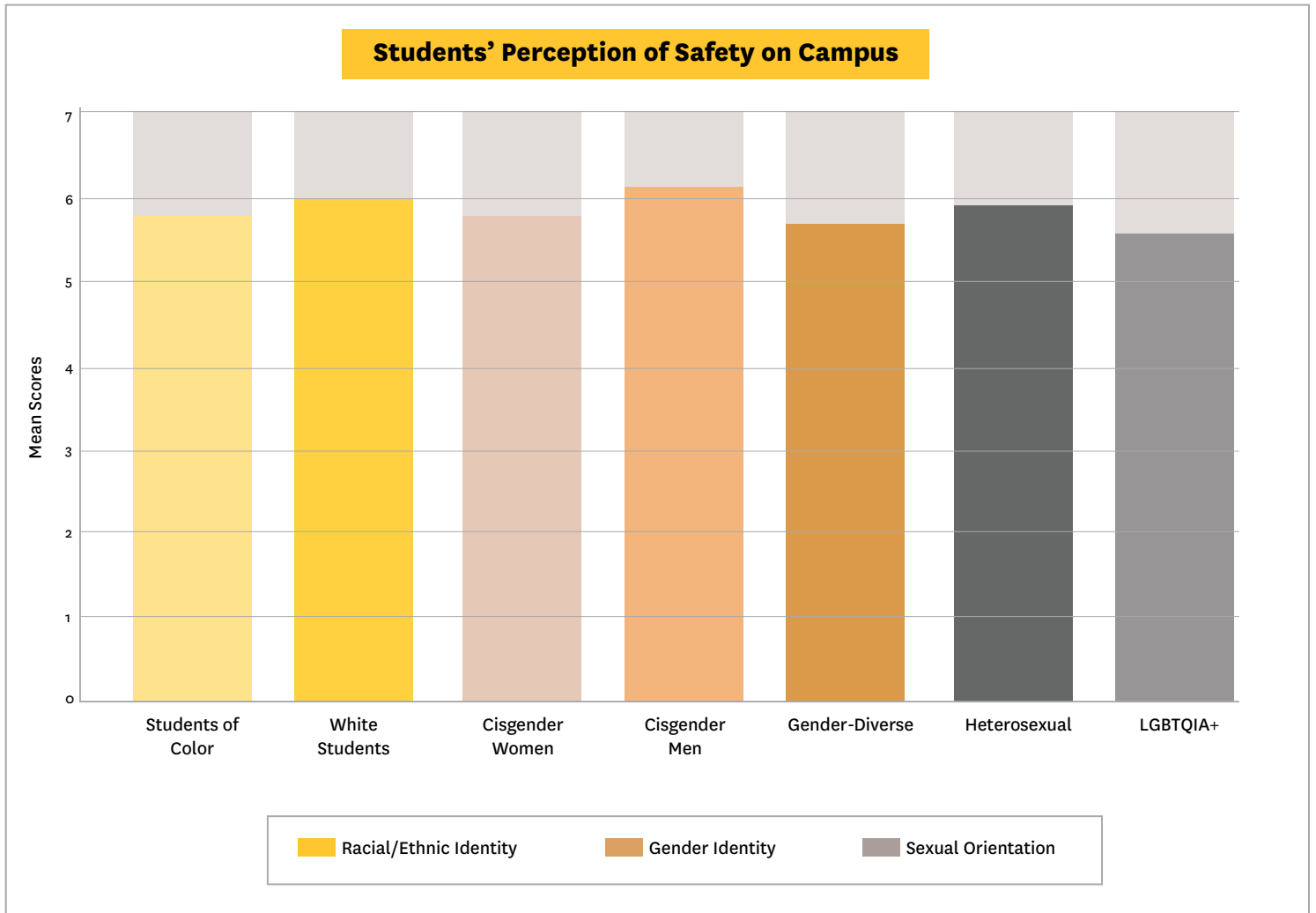


Figure 5. Students' perception of safety on campus.

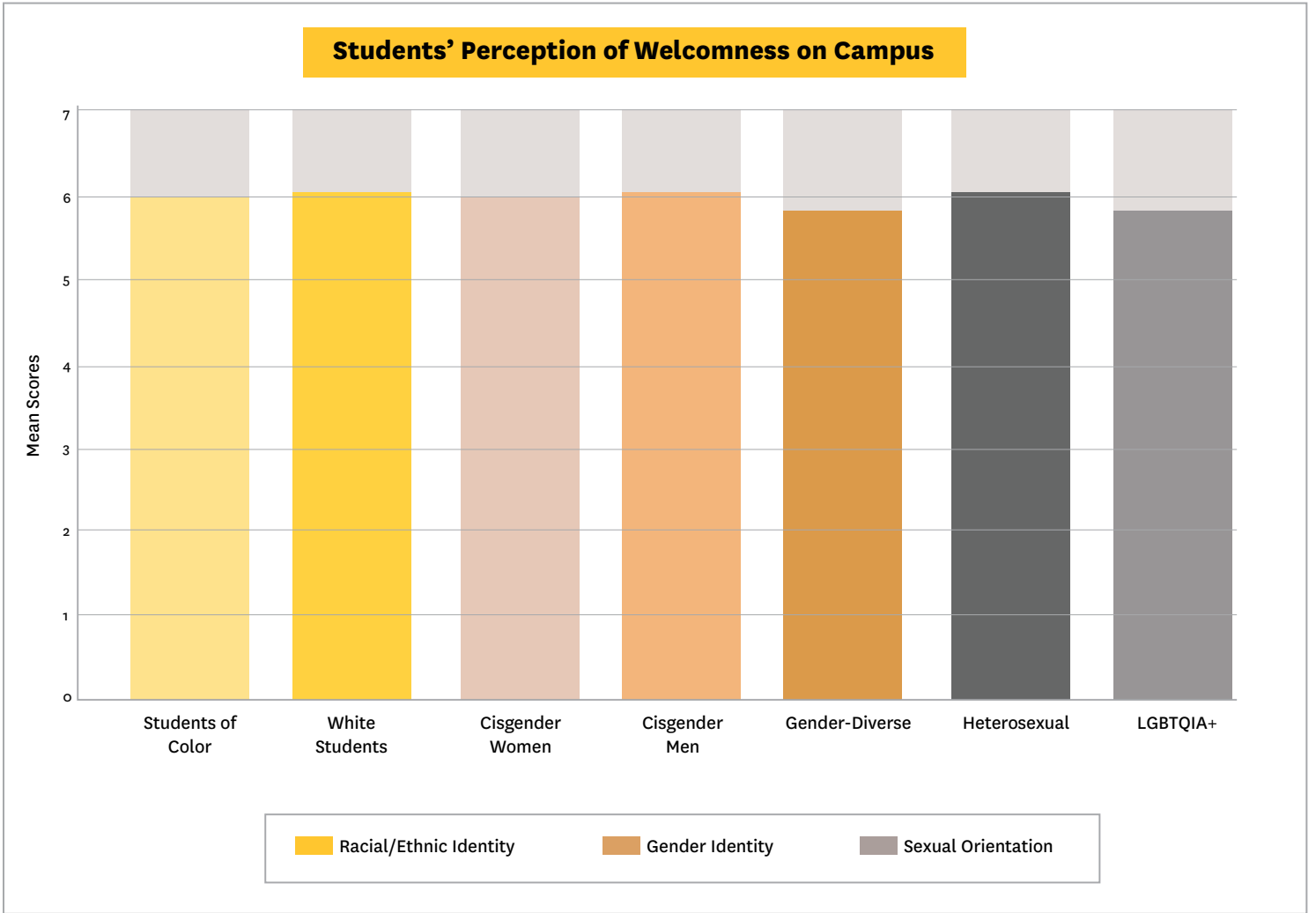


Figure 6. Students' perception of welcomeness on campus.

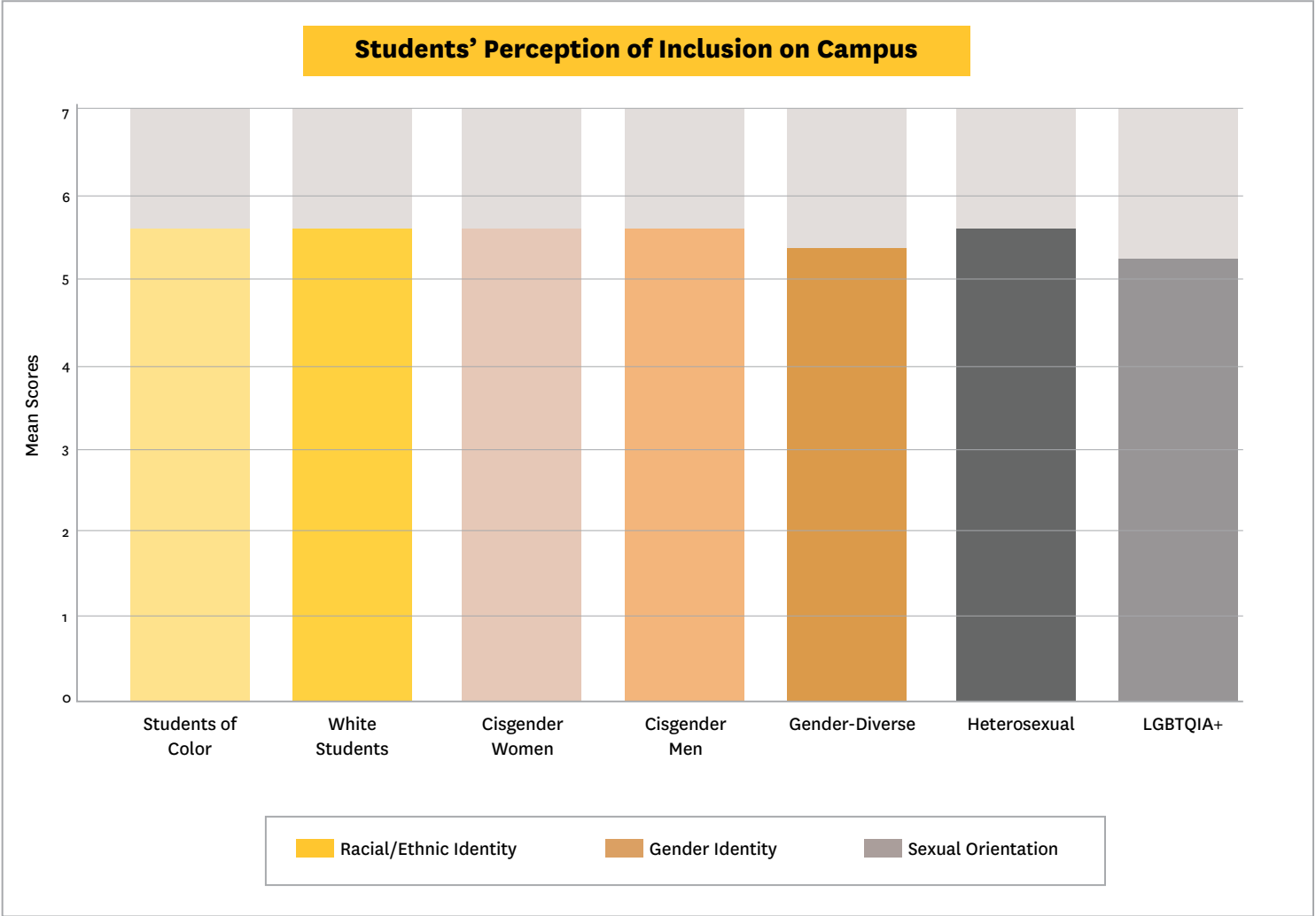


Figure 7. Students' perception of safety on campus.

Theme 4: Diverse Educators and Multicultural Programs Key to Bridging Racial Learning Gaps among Students in Texas

Students' experiences with learning about race on campus reveal critical insights into the sources and spaces that facilitate racial education. When asked to identify where and from whom they learn about race (see Appendix A), some students highlighted meaningful interactions with Faculty of Color and engagement in multicultural programs. However, a significant number of students—including many Students of Color—report insufficient opportunities to engage in meaningful racial learning on campus, pointing to gaps in the availability or accessibility of these critical educational experiences.

Campus spaces for racial learning

Regarding campus spaces for racial learning, approximately 1 in 7 students (14.0%) report learning about race through multicultural or advocacy programs at their institution. Asian and Asian American students are the most likely to benefit from these programs, with 18.3% reporting participation, while Middle Eastern students are the least likely, at only 1.6%.

Notably, over 1 in 3 students (37.9%) report not learning about race from any campus spaces. This lack of engagement is particularly pronounced among Middle Eastern students (49.2%) and Native American and/or Alaska Native students (48.1%).

Racial learning from campus community members

Overall, students report learning more about race from Faculty of Color (34.2%) than from White faculty members (27.0%) and more from Staff of Color (19.7%) than from White staff (13.7%). These findings underscore the positive contributions of both faculty and staff of color to students' racial learning. However, Students of Color report learning less about race from all faculty and staff groups compared to their White peers ($p < .001$).

Notably, over 2 in 5 students (44.5%), regardless of racial background, report not learning about race from anyone on campus. This lack of engagement is more pronounced among Students of Color (45.7%) compared to White students (40.7%), with Middle Eastern (57.4%) and Native American and/or Alaska Native students (56.1%) reporting the highest rates of not learning about race from any campus sources.

Proportions of Students Reporting Learning About Race From Multi-cultural or Advocacy Programs and Learning From Race From Nowhere on Campus

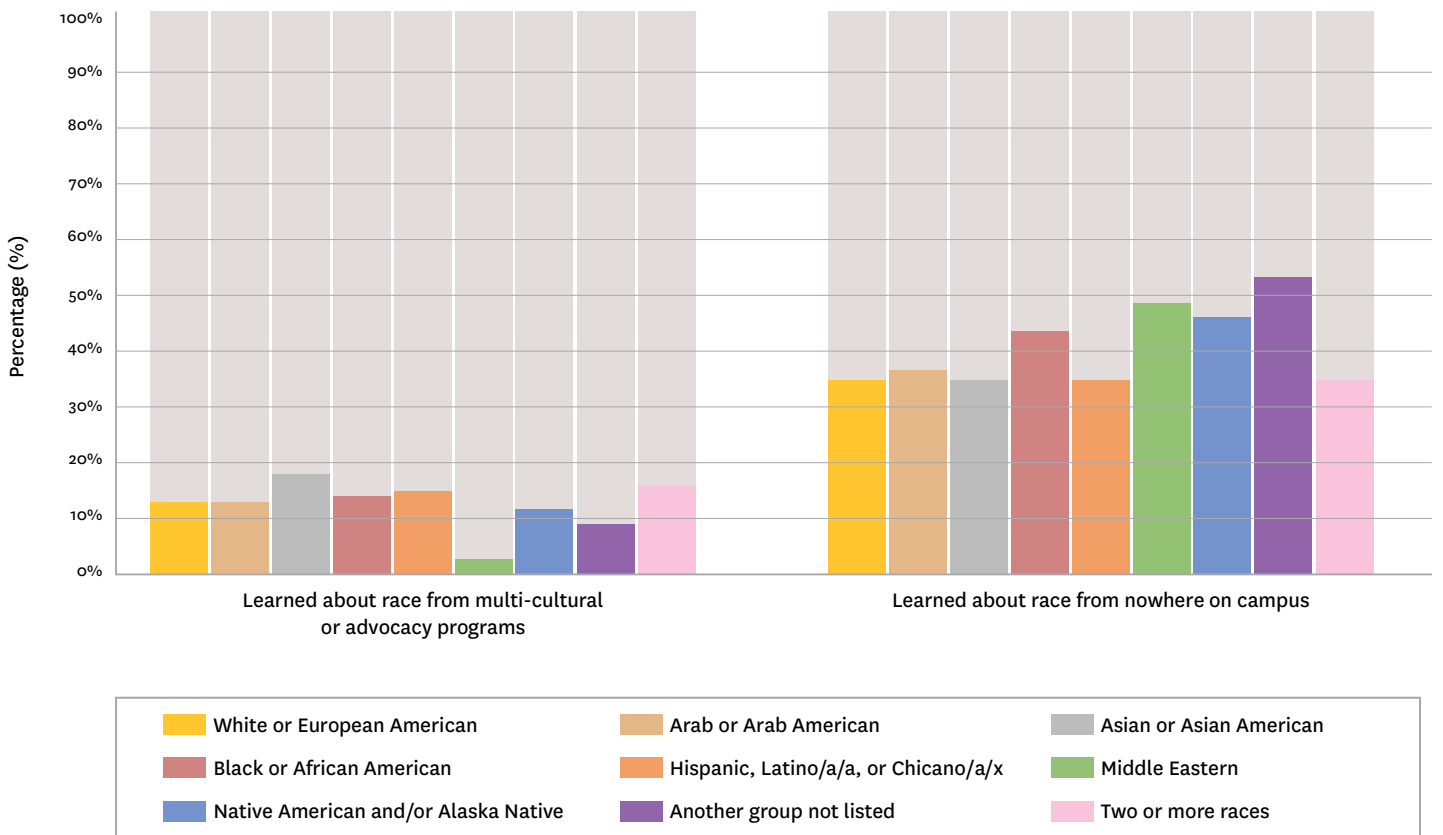


Figure 8. Proportions of students reporting learning about race from multi-cultural or advocacy programs and learning from race from nowhere on campus.

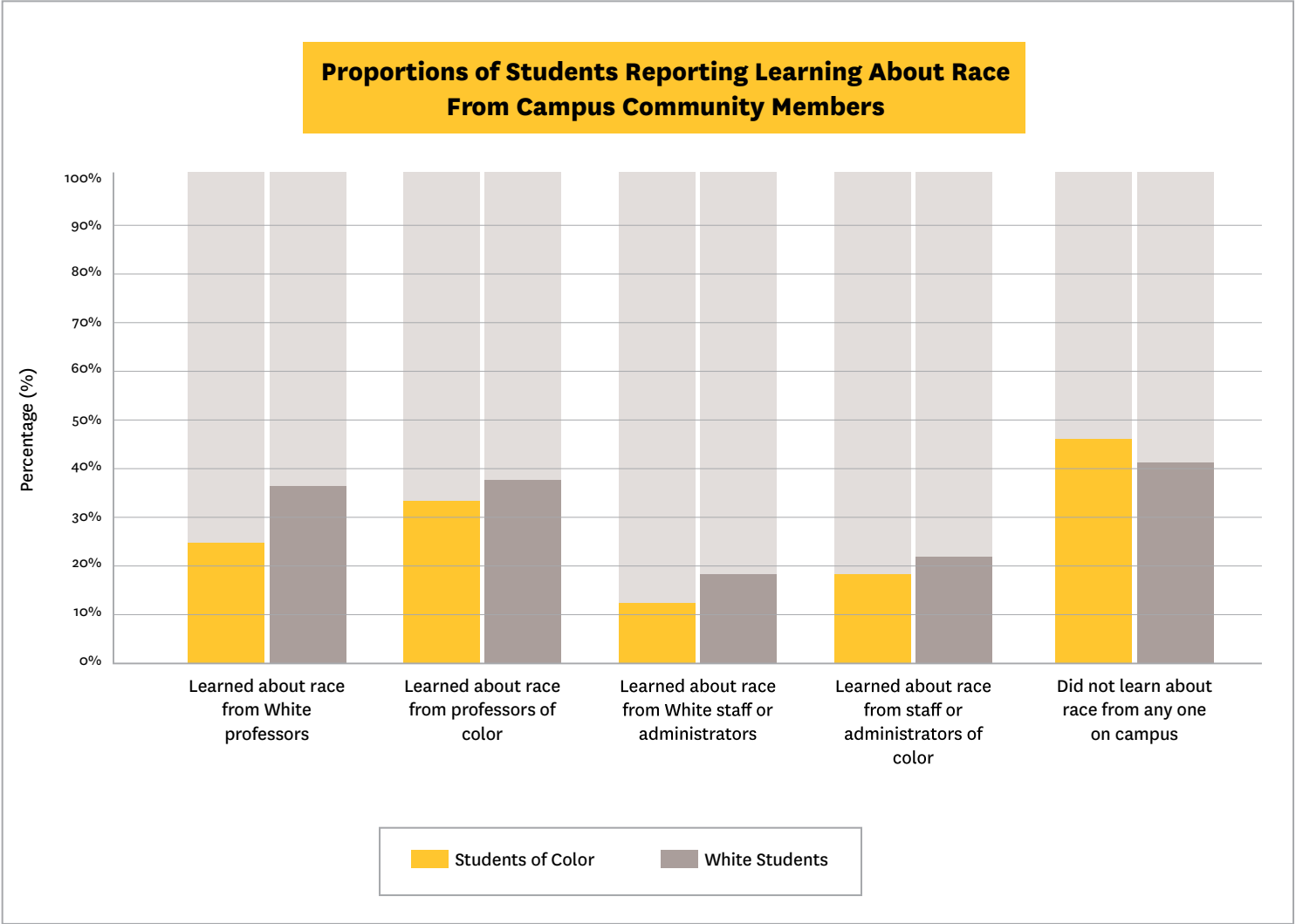


Figure 9. Proportions of students reporting learning about race from campus community members.

A Call to Action for Texas Leaders

The findings presented in this report provide critical insights into the state of equity in higher education in Texas prior to the implementation of SB 17. **In no uncertain terms, this policy will, if it hasn't already, exacerbate pre-existing inequities across the state. SB 17 eliminates vitally important mechanisms designed to address these disparities.** Indeed, campuses have lost critical tools for fostering more inclusive and welcoming environments, enhancing students' racial learning and cultural competencies, and addressing issues of safety for marginalized groups.

For instance, the report highlights alarming declines in academic performance and emotional well-being among students, particularly Middle Eastern, Arab or Arab American, and Native American students. These students already reported some of the highest rates of academic struggles and emotional distress. **Without the support of DEI programs, such as affinity spaces and targeted academic resources, these declines are likely to worsen, leaving many students without the resources needed to navigate hostile or exclusionary environments.**

Findings from our analyses also reveals that opportunities for racial learning and engagement are critically low, with only 14% of students reporting meaningful education about race on campus. These programs are vital for preparing students to engage thoughtfully in an increasingly diverse and multicultural world. **Under SB 17, the removal of DEI-driven multicultural education and cultural competency initiatives will leave students even more underprepared for diverse workplaces and society.**

Perhaps most troubling, the findings reflect rising frustration and disengagement among marginalized students. Over one-third of students expressed frustration with their campus racial

climates, with Native American and Arab or Arab American students reporting the highest levels of anger and dissatisfaction. This growing distrust in institutional leadership and commitment to equity signals a crisis of credibility. **Without DEI programs to serve as a bridge between student concerns and institutional responses, these frustrations will likely escalate, eroding trust, retention, and the overall sense of campus community.**

Feelings of safety and belonging are foundational to student success, yet these remain elusive for many marginalized groups. LGBTQ+ students, Asian students, and gender-diverse students report some of the lowest perceptions of safety and inclusion on campus. **The dismantling of programs that foster affirming spaces for these students—such as LGBTQ+ centers and multicultural resource initiatives—will only deepen these feelings of exclusion, pushing already vulnerable students further to the margins of campus life.**

What is happening in Texas should concern not only those who reside in the state but also individuals across the country. These trends mirror broader attempts to dismantle DEI in higher education nationwide. The failure to address these inequities undermines the promise of higher education as a transformative space, jeopardizing the success of students and the institutions that serve them.

These findings are a call to action. SB 17 poses significant challenges, but it also presents an opportunity for institutions to demonstrate bold leadership and unwavering commitment to DEI. The stakes could not be higher.

Recommendations for Action

The findings in this report highlight a pivotal moment for higher education in Texas, underscoring the significant risks posed by SB 17. To counter the erosion of DEI on campuses, Texas stakeholders must take bold and intentional steps to preserve the vital work of fostering equitable educational environments.

1. Sustain Equity Work Through Creative Strategies

While SB 17 restricts state-supported DEI initiatives, institutions must explore alternative avenues to support marginalized students and sustain progress:

- **Leverage Private Partnerships and Alumni Networks:** Engage alumni, foundations, and local businesses to fund scholarships, mentorship programs, and community-building initiatives that foster a sense of belonging and academic success.
- **Pursue External Grants:** Collaborate with philanthropic organizations and federal grant programs to secure funding for initiatives designed to uplift historically excluded groups.
- **Innovate Within Constraints:** Design programming that aligns with SB 17's legal parameters while achieving the same objectives of inclusion and support, such as integrating cultural competence training into broader leadership or academic skill-building efforts.

The absence of state support must not mean the absence of progress.

2. Counter Misinformation with Data-Driven Advocacy

Combatting false narratives about DEI is essential to preserving its value and impact:

- **Use Evidence-Based Advocacy:** Leverage the findings from this report and similar research to highlight the benefits of DEI programs for student success, campus cohesion, and workforce readiness.
- **Advocate for Funding:** Push for investments in equity-focused initiatives, emphasizing their role in addressing entrenched disparities and improving institutional outcomes.
- **Demand Transparency:** Encourage institutions to publicly report disaggregated student success metrics by race, gender, and socioeconomic status. Transparency ensures that disparities are visible and that there is accountability for addressing them.

By centering data and lived experiences, advocates can challenge misconceptions and underscore the necessity of equity-focused work.

3. Monitor and Document the Costs of Disinvestment

To build a compelling case for reform, institutions must document the tangible impacts of SB 17:

- **Track Student Outcomes:** Use tools like the NACCC to collect ongoing data on retention, graduation, and student satisfaction, disaggregated by demographic group.
- **Quantify Institutional Impacts:** Highlight declines in reputation, competitiveness, and student success as measurable consequences of disinvesting in DEI.
- **Communicate the Costs:** Share these findings with policymakers, emphasizing the long-term risks to institutional excellence and Texas's workforce pipeline.

Data collection and reporting must remain a cornerstone of advocacy to illustrate the broader implications of disinvestment in equity.

4. Reframe the Economic Argument

Equity and inclusion are not just moral imperatives; they are economic necessities:

- **Strengthen Texas's Workforce:** A diverse and successful student body translates to a robust, innovative workforce that enhances Texas's competitiveness in the global economy.
- **Emphasize ROI:** Highlight the return on investment of equity-focused initiatives, from improved graduation rates to stronger alumni networks and greater institutional resilience.
- **Engage Policymakers:** Use economic data to frame equity as a driver of regional and state prosperity, appealing to bipartisan priorities of workforce development and economic growth.

This framing ensures that equity is seen as central to the state's future success, not an optional initiative.

Conclusion

This report is both a reflection of what is at stake and a call to action for all who are committed to the promise of equitable higher education in Texas. Faculty, staff, institutional leaders, policymakers, and advocates must collectively navigate this contested moment with determination, creativity, and resolve.

SB 17's restrictions jeopardize critical programs that empower students, foster inclusion, and address systemic disparities. Institutions must act boldly to protect these efforts through alternative funding models, innovative program designs, and relentless advocacy.

The future of public higher education in Texas depends on our collective ability to reaffirm our commitment to DEI, ensuring that every student—regardless of background—has the opportunity to thrive. Let this report serve as a catalyst for preserving and advancing the work of DEI in higher education, even amidst significant challenges.

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Appendix A

List of Selected Survey Items from the National Assessment of Collegiate Campus Climate.

In your opinion, how racially diverse is [School Name]?

(By “racially diverse,” we mean the extent to which there are a variety of different racial groups represented on campus.)

- Not at all racially diverse
- Slightly racially diverse
- Somewhat racially diverse
- Mostly racially diverse
- Strongly racially diverse

In your opinion or experience, how committed are administrators at [School Name] to each of the following?

Response options: Not committed at all, Slightly committed, Somewhat committed, Mostly committed, Strongly committed, I don't know

1. Hiring faculty of color
2. Hiring staff of color

In your opinion, how racially segregated is the overall environment of [School Name]?

(By “racially segregated,” we mean the extent to which different racial groups are isolated or separated from one another on campus.)

- Not at all racially segregated
- Slightly racially segregated
- Somewhat racially segregated
- Mostly racially segregated
- Strongly racially segregated

In your opinion, how racist is the overall environment of [School Name]?

(By “racist,” we mean that the environment includes specific harmful acts, behaviors, or attitudes directed at individuals or groups of students based on their race.)

- Not at all racist
- Slightly racist
- Somewhat racist
- Mostly racist
- Strongly racist

Has the overall racial environment on your campus resulted in any of the following?

Select any that apply.

- Decline in your academic performance/grades
- Decline in your emotional well-being
- Feelings of frustration and/or anger
- Feelings of loneliness, not belonging, and/or isolation

How do you feel at [School Name]?

Perceptions of Safety

- Completely in danger
- Moderately in danger
- Slightly in danger
- Neither safe nor in danger
- Slightly safe
- Moderately safe
- Completely safe

Perceptions of Welcomeness

- Completely unwelcome
- Moderately unwelcome
- Slightly unwelcome
- Neither welcome nor unwelcome
- Slightly welcome
- Moderately welcome
- Completely welcome

Perceptions of Inclusivity

- Completely excluded
- Moderately excluded
- Slightly excluded
- Neither included nor excluded
- Slightly included
- Moderately included
- Completely included

At [School Name], where have you learned about race?

Select any that apply.

- In class discussions
- In campus clubs or organizations
- Through multi-cultural or advocacy programs offered on campus
- In conversations with other students outside of class
- In readings professors assign to me
- Nowhere on campus

At [School Name], who helps you to learn about race?

Select any that apply.

- White professors
- Professors of color
- White college/university staff or administrators
- College/university staff or administrators of color
- White students
- Students of color
- No one on my campus

Appendix B

Data Table for *Theme 1: Students of Color in Texas Perceive Campus Racial Environment Less Favorably, Especially Black Students*

Table B. Descriptive and statistical analysis on student perceptions of campus racial environment by racial/ethnic identity.

		Overall	Student of Color	White or European American	T-test p-Value [^]	Arab or Arab American	Asian or Asian American	Black or African American	Hispanic, Latino/a/x, or Chicano/a/x	Middle Eastern	Native American and/or Alaska Native	Another group not listed	Two or more races
Extent to which institution is racially diverse [Range: 1 - 5]	Mean	3.5	3.3	3.8	< .001	3.3	3.3	3.1	3.4	3.4	3.4	3.6	3.6
	SD	1.4	1.4	1.2		1.6	1.5	1.4	1.5	1.5	1.3	1.4	1.3
	N	13771	10446	3325		100	1361	2655	4506	60	53	161	1534
Extent to which institution is committed to hiring faculty of color [Range: 1 - 5]	Mean	4.1	4.0	4.4	< .001	4.1	4.0	3.8	4.2	4.1	4.3	4.0	4.0
	SD	1.2	1.2	0.9		1.2	1.1	1.4	1.1	1.2	1.2	1.3	1.2
	N	8345	6431	1914		53	862	1690	2691	40	29	82	976
Extent to which institution is committed to hiring staff of color [Range: 1 - 5]	Mean	4.1	4.1	4.4	< .001	4.2	4.0	3.8	4.2	4.1	4.4	4.1	4.1
	SD	1.1	1.2	0.9		1.0	1.2	1.3	1.1	1.2	1.0	1.2	1.2
	N	8366	6458	1908		57	857	1700	2710	41	29	82	974
Extent to which institution is racially segregated [Range: 1 - 5]	Mean	1.5	1.5	1.5	0.661	1.5	1.5	1.7	1.4	1.5	1.4	1.6	1.7
	SD	0.9	0.9	0.9		0.9	0.8	1.1	0.8	0.8	0.7	1.1	1.0
	N	13790	10462	3328		101	1360	2655	4518	60	53	163	1536
Extent to which campus environment is racist [Range: 1 - 5]	Mean	1.5	1.5	1.5	0.453	1.5	1.5	1.6	1.4	1.4	1.4	1.7	1.6
	SD	0.8	0.8	0.8		0.9	0.8	0.9	0.8	0.6	0.8	1.1	0.9
	N	13843	10501	3342		101	1364	2663	4540	60	53	164	1540

SD = Standard Deviation

N = Sample Size

[^] = p-values for mean comparisons tests (t-test) between Students of Color and White or European American students

Appendix C

Data Table for *Theme 2: Students of Color in Texas Experience Negative Academic and Psychological Consequences Due to the Campus Racial Environment*

Table C. Descriptive and statistical analysis on the impacts of campus racial environments on students by racial/ethnic identity.

		Overall	Student of Color	White or European American	T-test p-Value [^]	Arab or Arab American	Asian or Asian American	Black or African American	Hispanic, Latino/a/x, or Chicano/a/x	Middle Eastern	Native American and/or Alaska Native	Another group not listed	Two or more races	
Decline in academic performance / grades	Mean	10.9%	13.0%	4.3%	< .001	16.1%	12.1%	13.1%	12.4%	17.6%	14.3%	20.3%	13.7%	
	SD	0.3	0.3	0.2		0.4	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.3
	N	4515	3418	1097		31	471	969	1249	17	14	59	606	
Decline in emotional well-being	Mean	17.0%	18.7%	11.9%	< .001	22.6%	22.3%	15.7%	18.3%	29.4%	28.6%	23.7%	20.1%	
	SD	0.4	0.4	0.3		0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.5	0.5	0.4	0.4	
	N	4515	3418	1097		31	471	969	1249	17	14	59	606	
Feeling frustration / anger	Mean	36.8%	37.2%	35.6%	0.338	51.6%	35.0%	35.8%	35.7%	23.5%	57.1%	39.0%	42.7%	
	SD	0.5	0.5	0.5		0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.4	0.5	0.5	0.5	
	N	4515	3418	1097		31	471	969	1249	17	14	59	606	
Loneliness, not belonging, isolation	Mean	26.4%	29.8%	15.8%	< .001	29.0%	32.1%	28.8%	27.2%	35.3%	28.6%	33.9%	34.7%	
	SD	0.4	0.5	0.4		0.5	0.5	0.5	0.4	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	
	N	4515	3418	1097		31	471	969	1249	17	14	59	606	

SD = Standard Deviation

N = Sample Size

[^] = p-values for mean comparisons tests (t-test) between Students of Color and White or European American students

Appendix D

Data Tables for *Theme 3: Disparities in LGBTQ+ and Non-binary Students Perceptions of Campus Safety and Inclusiveness Observed on Texas Campuses*

Table D1. Descriptive and statistical analysis on student perceptions of their campus environment by racial/ethnic identity.

		Overall	Student of Color	White or European American	T-test p-Value ^a	Arab or Arab American	Asian or Asian American	Black or African American	Hispanic, Latino/a/x, or Chicano/a/x	Middle Eastern	Native American and/or Alaska Native	Another group not listed	Two or more races
Feeling safe / in-danger on campus [Range: 1 - 7]	Mean	5.9	5.9	6.0	< .001	5.9	5.6	5.9	6.0	6.1	6.2	5.7	5.8
	SD	1.3	1.3	1.3		1.4	1.4	1.3	1.2	1.2	1.3	1.6	1.4
	N	13714	10403	3311		99	1356	2642	4484	60	53	160	1533
Feeling welcome / unwelcome on campus [Range: 1 - 7]	Mean	6.0	6.0	6.0	0.068	6.0	5.8	6.0	6.1	5.9	6.0	5.7	5.9
	SD	1.3	1.3	1.3		1.3	1.3	1.3	1.2	1.3	1.6	1.6	1.4
	N	13710	10401	3309		99	1354	2641	4485	60	53	160	1533
Feeling included / excluded on campus [Range: 1 - 7]	Mean	5.6	5.6	5.6	0.311	5.8	5.6	5.7	5.7	5.8	5.5	5.3	5.4
	SD	1.5	1.5	1.5		1.4	1.4	1.5	1.4	1.3	1.7	1.7	1.6
	N	13705	10399	3306		99	1354	2641	4483	60	53	160	1533

SD = Standard Deviation

N = Sample Size

^a = p-values for mean comparisons tests (t-test) between Students of Color and White or European American students

Table D2. Descriptive and statistical analysis on student perceptions of their campus environment by gender identity.

		Overall	Cisgender Woman (CW)	Cisgender Man (CM)	Gender-Diverse (GD)	ANOVA p-Value [^]	Group Comparisons
Feeling safe/in-danger on campus <i>[Range: 1 - 7]</i>	Mean	5.9	5.8	6.0	5.7	< .001	CM > CW; CM > GD
	SD	1.3	1.3	1.3	1.5		
	N	13714	9403	3527	771		
Feeling welcome/unwelcome on campus <i>[Range: 1 - 7]</i>	Mean	6.0	6.0	6.0	5.8	< .001	CM > GD; CW > GD
	SD	1.3	1.3	1.3	1.5		
	N	13710	9401	3525	771		
Feeling included/excluded on campus <i>[Range: 1 - 7]</i>	Mean	5.6	5.6	5.7	5.5	0.025	-
	SD	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.7		
	N	13705	9398	3524	770		

SD = Standard Deviation

N = Sample Size

CW = Cisgender Woman

CM = Cisgender Man

GD = Gender-Diverse; including: transgender women, transgender men, non-binary, genderqueer, genderfluid, and other gender identities

[^] = p-values for mean comparisons tests (ANOVA) between the three gender identity groups

Table D3. Descriptive and statistical analysis on student perceptions of their campus environment by sexual orientation.

		Overall	Heterosexual	LGBQA+	T-test p-Value [^]
Feeling safe/in-danger on campus <i>[Range: 1 - 7]</i>	Mean	5.9	5.9	5.7	< .001
	SD	1.3	1.3	1.4	
	N	13714	11433	2261	
Feeling welcome/unwelcome on campus <i>[Range: 1 - 7]</i>	Mean	6.0	6.1	5.8	< .001
	SD	1.3	1.3	1.4	
	N	13710	11429	2261	
Feeling included/excluded on campus <i>[Range: 1 - 7]</i>	Mean	5.6	5.7	5.4	< .001
	SD	1.5	1.5	1.6	
	N	13705	11424	2261	

SD = Standard Deviation

N = Sample Size

LGBQA+ = Lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, questioning, asexual, pansexual, demisexual, and other sexual identities

[^] = p-values for mean comparisons tests (t-test) between heterosexual and LGBQA+ students

Appendix E

Data Table for *Theme 4: Diverse Educators and Multicultural Programs Key to Bridging Racial Learning Gaps among Students in Texas*

Table E. Descriptive and statistical analysis on sources of racial learning for students by racial/ethnic identity.

		Overall	Student of Color	White or European American	T-test p-Value [^]	Arab or Arab American	Asian or Asian American	Black or African American	Hispanic, Latino/a/x, or Chicano/a/x	Middle Eastern	Native American and/or Alaska Native	Another group not listed	Two or more races	
Learned about race from multi-cultural or advocacy programs	Mean	14.0%	14.3%	12.7%	0.015	12.5%	18.3%	13.1%	13.9%	1.6%	11.1%	8.1%	16.1%	
	SD	0.3	0.4	0.3		0.3	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.1	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.4
	N	14428	10958	3470		104	1408	2785	4769	61	54	173	1588	
Learned about race from nowhere on campus	Mean	37.9%	38.7%	35.6%	0.001	37.5%	35.9%	43.2%	37.0%	49.2%	48.1%	52.6%	35.6%	
	SD	0.5	0.5	0.5		0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5
	N	14428	10958	3470		104	1408	2785	4769	61	54	173	1588	
Learned about race from White professors	Mean	27.0%	24.1%	36.2%	< .001	22.1%	24.4%	17.1%	25.5%	21.3%	24.1%	22.2%	32.4%	
	SD	0.4	0.4	0.5		0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.5	
	N	14372	10907	3465		104	1400	2773	4744	61	54	171	1584	
Learned about race from professors of color	Mean	34.2%	33.3%	37.1%	< .001	29.8%	31.5%	28.8%	35.0%	21.3%	33.3%	24.0%	39.6%	
	SD	0.5	0.5	0.5		0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.4	0.5	0.4	0.5	
	N	14372	10907	3465		104	1400	2773	4744	61	54	171	1584	
Learned about race from White staff or administrators	Mean	13.7%	11.9%	19.1%	< .001	12.5%	13.4%	8.0%	12.1%	6.6%	20.4%	11.1%	17.2%	
	SD	0.3	0.3	0.4		0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.4	0.3	0.4	
	N	14372	10907	3465		104	1400	2773	4744	61	54	171	1584	
Learned about race from staff or administrators of color	Mean	19.7%	18.8%	22.6%	< .001	13.5%	18.7%	16.4%	18.8%	14.8%	20.4%	13.5%	24.2%	
	SD	0.4	0.4	0.4		0.3	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.3	0.4	
	N	14372	10907	3465		104	1400	2773	4744	61	54	171	1584	
Did not learn about race from any one on campus	Mean	44.5%	45.7%	40.7%	< .001	50.0%	44.0%	50.8%	44.4%	57.4%	51.9%	56.1%	39.8%	
	SD	0.5	0.5	0.5		0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	
	N	14372	10907	3465		104	1400	2773	4744	61	54	171	1584	

SD = Standard Deviation

N = Sample Size

[^] = p-values for mean comparisons tests (t-test) between Students of Color and White or European American students

The University of Southern California is home to a dynamic research, professional learning, and organizational improvement center that helps leaders strategically develop and achieve equity goals, better understand and correct climate problems, avoid and recover from DEI-related crises, and foster sustainable cultures of inclusion. Our rigorous approach is built on research, scalable and adaptable models of success, and continuous feedback from partners, clients, and communities.

The mission of the USC Race and Equity Center is to illuminate, disrupt, and dismantle racism in all its forms. We do this through rigorous interdisciplinary research, high-quality professional learning experiences, the production and wide dissemination of useful tools, trustworthy consultations and strategy advising, and substantive partnerships. While race and ethnicity are at the epicenter of our work, we also value their intersectionality with other identities, and therefore aim to advance equity for all persons experiencing marginalization.

The Center annually serves hundreds of K-12 schools and districts, colleges and universities, government agencies, businesses and firms, and other organizations spanning a multitude of sectors. More than \$22 million in grants from Atlantic Philanthropies and the Bill and Melinda Gates, ECMC, Spencer, Ford, Lumina, Kellogg, Kresge, Sloan, College Futures, Annie E. Casey, and Open Society Foundations have funded our research and partnerships.

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