



EAB

# EAB Focus Groups with UNT Student Affairs Staff

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Prepared for The University of North Texas

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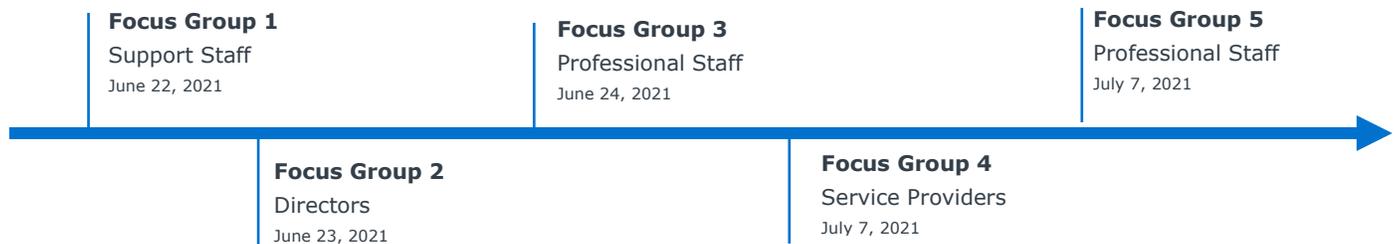
# Table of Contents

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<b>Format and Summary of Focus Groups .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Key Themes Surfaced During Focus Groups .....</b>	<b>4-5</b>
<b>EAB Next Steps and Resource Recommendations .....</b>	<b>6-7</b>
<b>Contact Information and Bios .....</b>	<b>8</b>

# Information Gathering Methodology

Format, participants, and questions asked during focus groups



## Focus Group Format

- 22 participants in total from UNT's Division of Student Affairs
- Each group contained between 3-6 participants
- 60 minute sessions

### The following questions were asked to each focus group:

- 1) Based on the 2018 Climate Study, staff in the Division of Student Affairs were the most likely to report considering leaving UNT. What would be some reasons for this response? Please consider the campus climate, divisional culture, or departmental culture.
- 2) Staff reported that UNT is diverse but not inclusive. Please share more.
- 3) What role, if any, does equity play regarding diversity and inclusion at UNT, and more specifically in the Division of Student Affairs?
- 4) Staff also indicated hesitancy to report harassment and discrimination that occurs. Respondents indicated they may not know how to report or that they didn't think anything would happen. How can the Division address these issues?
- 5) Are staff engaged in their work? Are there connections you observe between engagement and inclusion? If so, what connections do you observe?
- 6) Are the Division's DEI training opportunities offered inclusive and effective? Are there training opportunities the Division should offer? Are other Division training opportunities inclusive?
- 7) Is there anything that we have not discussed that you believe is important for us to know as it relates to the campus climate within Student Affairs and/or University of North Texas as a whole?

# Key Themes Surfaced During Focus Groups

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Key takeaways and opportunities for improvement within University of North Texas' Division of Student Affairs organized by question

**Based on the 2018 Climate Study, staff in the Division of Student Affairs were the most likely to report considering leaving UNT. What would be some reasons for this response?**

- **Career Growth Opportunities:** Staff feels there is minimal opportunity for growth and upward mobility in the division.
- **Manager Support:** Staff expressed a lack of mentorship and advocacy for mid and lower level staff. They voiced a large cultural divide between Student Affairs leadership and staff.
- **Communication:** Staff voiced a lack of transparency around departmental decisions that are made. Staff feel like they do not get full context around why important decisions are made that directly effect their roles (i.e. removal of after-hours compensation and change in staff scholarship policy).
- **Compensation:** Student Affairs staff feels they are not being properly compensated at fair market value. More of their time is being requested, but they feel they are not being properly compensated based on their peers at other institutions.

**Why did staff report that UNT is diverse but not inclusive?**

- **General lack of inclusivity and belongingness in the department:** Staff expressed that they rarely feel they have a seat at the table to express their opinion. They expressed a sense of "favoritism" and "exclusivity" amongst the divisions leadership and a fear of speaking up, as they do not feel like they will be heard.
- **Inclusivity in departmental decisions:** While staff recognized some decisions must be made without input, they expressed a desire to be more involved in key decisions that effect their roles and their ability to support students.
- **Lack of diverse representation amongst Student Affairs leadership:** Staff feel the divisional staff is diverse, but the divisional and institutional leadership is not.

**What role, if any, does equity play regarding diversity and inclusion at UNT, and more specifically in the Division of Student Affairs?**

- **Staff feels like there is not equitable distribution of funding and resources,** particularly when it comes to DEI related issues. The staff expressed that UNT brings in so many diverse students, but those diverse students cannot get the help they need on campus. Staff of color in Student Affairs are taking on an extra role of supporting students of color, when they don't have access to proper support.
- **New job opportunities do not feel equitable:** When it comes to career growth within student affairs, there is a feeling that roles are created for certain people without giving others the opportunity to apply.

# Key Themes Surfaced During Focus Groups

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Key takeaways and opportunities for improvement within University of North Texas' Division of Student Affairs organized by question

**Are staff engaged in their work? Are there connections you observe between engagement and inclusion? If so, what connections do you observe?**

- Staff expressed a strong passion for supporting students and doing their jobs effectively, but **feel burnt out, under supported, and not heard**.
- **Staff expressed feeling disconnected from the division's leadership**, which causes disengagement. They feel that with inclusivity, comes engagement. Staff voiced the feeling that leadership does not understand what mid and lower-level staff do on a daily basis in an effort to support students, particularly students of color.
- **Staff voiced a desire to be given the opportunity to formally offer feedback on their own managers during annual or bi-annual career review cycles**, which they currently do not have the opportunity to do.

**Staff also indicated hesitancy to report harassment and discrimination that occurs. Respondents indicated they may not know how to report or that they didn't think anything would happen. How can the Division address these issues?**

- **Lack of accountability and follow through when issues are being reported:** Staff expressed that when issues are reported, action is rarely taken or takes far too long to be addressed.
- **Staff conveyed a fear of being retaliated against:** Many expressed a sense of power and privilege in the department and a lack of approachability amongst the division's leadership. They fear that if an issue is reported, it will come back to negatively affect their career. Certain individuals recounted specific examples of why they felt this way, based on direct experience or an experience from one of their peers.

**Are the Division's DEI training opportunities offered inclusive and effective? Are there training opportunities the Division should offer? Are other Division training opportunities inclusive?**

- **Staff voiced that the current trainings on DEI being offered** through LinkedIn are not effective and do not translate to their role and division.
- Staff noted that there is **no follow through coming out of these trainings**. They are eager to see a more concrete plan and action steps taken to improve DEI on campus.
- **Trainings need to be more language inclusive:** A few staff members voiced that there are a lot of Hispanic staff that cannot complete these trainings because they do not speak English. They suggested you offer a translated version of DEI trainings for certain staff.
- **Lack of leadership representation at DEI trainings:** Staff expressed feeling discouraged that leadership often does not attend DEI trainings. They suggest the trainings are mandatory for everyone.

# EAB Next Steps and Resource Recommendations

\*\*To follow up on these next steps with EAB, contact UNT's Strategic Leader: Allison Major ([amajor@eab.com](mailto:amajor@eab.com))

Issue Raised During Focus Groups	Suggested Next Steps for EAB Support	EAB Resources for Review
<p><b>Supporting DEIJ initiatives on campus</b></p>	<p><b>*Schedule EAB Led Workshop: Uprooting Systemic Racism at Your Institution- Systems Thinking Application</b> – EAB experts can lead cabinet in a workshop to help you articulate key decisions and prioritize anti-racism initiatives at UNT</p> <p><b>*UNT DEIJ Plan Review</b> (completed) – EAB experts conducted a full audit of UNT's current DEI plan and produce a report with feedback and strategic suggestions. Our experts can review this report live with the committee as needed.</p> <p><b>*Schedule DEIJ Institutional Metric Selection Workshop</b> - Our experts will facilitate this workshop with your campus committee to identify the most important metrics to track progress on your campus.</p> <p><b>*Schedule DEIJ Divisional Alignment Exercise</b> - EAB experts will facilitate an exercise to cascade institutional goals and metrics to divisions and departments.</p>	<p><b>*<a href="#">The Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Resource Center</a></b>- This resource center brings together EAB's vast library of best practice DEIJ research, tools, and insights dedicated to helping university leaders cultivate diversity, foster inclusion, promote equity, and fight for justice for their students, faculty, and staff.</p> <p><b>*<a href="#">Institutional DEIJ Plan Starter Kit</a></b> – Although UNT has already created a DEI plan, there might be a need to re-adjust this plan. EAB analyzed 50 DEIJ strategic plans from a wide array of universities in the US and Canada, and we crafted this toolkit to guide you through the process – from planning to implementation with the aim of ensuring that UNT has a differentiated, accessible, and actionable plan.</p>
<p><b>Improving Student Affairs Staff Retention and Engagement</b></p>	<p><b>*EAB's Self-Care Audit for Student Affairs Staff (attached)</b> – UNT to have one team member and/or your engagement committee review the tactics in EAB's audit and check the strategies your division is currently using to support staff during and post pandemic. Next, send the completed audit form to your Strategic Leader (Allison Major). After reviewing your audit, the research team will send personalized recommendations and tactics based on your responses.</p> <p><b>*Schedule a call with EAB experts to review tactics for supporting staff self-care and well being</b></p>	<p><b>*<a href="#">Three Strategies For Retaining a Diverse Staff Workforce</a></b>: This expert insight reviews strategies university and department leaders can use to support staff retention based on EAB's best practice research across advancement, facilities, and other divisions. For example, we recommend building communities of support through affinity-based resource groups like <b>Grand Valley State University's</b> Positive Black Women group or <b>University of Texas-San Antonio's</b> Pride Faculty &amp; Staff Association.</p> <p><b>*<a href="#">Performance Management Resources for HR Leaders and Administrative Supervisors</a></b>: This white paper reviews eight out-of-industry-inspired best practices to get the most from your performance management process. This resources also includes seven downloadable tools your staff can use to put our recommendations into practice. For instance, <b>Practice Six: Values-Based Conversation Starters (page 36-39)</b> explores how managers can bring behavioral expectations to life during team meetings by regularly sharing stories of employees who exemplify desired behaviors and soliciting feedback about how to incorporate the behaviors into daily work.</p> <p><b>*<a href="#">How to Support Staff Self-Care and Well-being during COVID-19</a></b>: While originally written through the lens of the pandemic, these strategies should extend beyond the pandemic as well. For example, the University of Miami sent out a poll to student affairs staff to gauge interest in various events with the goal of discerning how to best engage staff in support activities.</p> <p><b>*<a href="#">Four Proven Methods to Engage and Retain Frontline Service Staff (attached)</a></b>: This excerpt from a presentation contains several engagement strategies that can be adapted to all staff. Specifically, <b>slide 13</b> profiles examples of staff engagement initiatives at nine institutions. For example, the <b>University of Cincinnati</b> holds quarterly employee recognition luncheons to recognize and reward excellent employees.</p>

<p><b>Scaling Support for Students to Eliminate Staff Burnout</b></p>	<p><b>*Schedule virtual session with EAB experts around scaling UNT’s wellness resources for students on campus</b></p> <p><b>*Webinar with Student Affairs Leadership around “Serving Students of the Pandemic” (This is already scheduled through Dr. With on July 26<sup>th</sup> )</b></p>	<p><a href="#">Mental Health Resource Center</a> – This is a compilation of our best research, tools, and resources to help members pursue strategies and address demand on campus.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Implementation Guide: Meeting the Escalating Demand for Campus Mental Health Services</a> – The 11 tools in this toolkit guide campus leaders and teams to target interventions to key students segments and further efforts to maximize existing resources</li> <li>• <a href="#">Establishing a Sustainable Scope of Care</a> – Designed to help you keep pace with students concerns and address expectations about availability of care through a scope of care statement</li> </ul>
<p><b>Leadership Development</b></p>		<p><a href="#">EAB Leadership Development Resource Center</a>- This collection of leadership development materials, compiled during over 100 research interviews with senior academic leaders, association heads, and directors of on-campus and external programs. The materials— documents, templates, samples, and tools developed at colleges and universities across the country—are organized in two ways: 1) by sub-topic area and 2) according to the role (e.g. chair, dean) that the materials support. Because creating effective leadership development programming often requires a substantial time investment, this resource center can be used as a starting point, or it can serve to build on existing on-campus programming.</p>

# Contact Us

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## Melanie Overton

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Melanie Overton is a Director in EAB's Research Advisory Services. A member of the Academic Strategy Team, she provides decision support for partner institutions around academic, advancement, and student success strategy. Melanie's prior administrative experience includes tenures as Chief Student Affairs Officer, Vice President of Advancement, and Vice President of Enrollment, and she led the network of United Methodist-related colleges from 2011 to 2016. She has benefited from extraordinary leadership development opportunities, which most recently included the Council of Independent Colleges' Presidential Vocation and Institutional Mission fellowship. Melanie holds an Ed.D. in Higher Education Leadership and Policy from Vanderbilt University, where her research focused on the interplay of student and institutional success, particularly in stressed colleges.



## Allison Major

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Allison Major is Strategic Leader in EAB's Research Partner Success division. As a Strategic Leader, Allison's primary role is serving as an advisor for EAB's partner universities to provide strategic guidance and ensure that they are receiving maximum value and return on investment from EAB research resources. Allison works primarily with EAB's large public and private institution partners. Prior to joining EAB in January of 2019, Allison spent 5 years at EAB's former sister company, The Advisory Board, now part of Optum Insights, serving as an Associate Director overseeing health system partnerships. She worked to drive coordination across multiple complex service initiatives, while providing strategic guidance around integrating Optum's research and technology solutions. Allison is originally from Atlanta, GA and currently resides in Charlotte, NC. She graduated Cum Laude from The University of Georgia with a Bachelor's degree in Business Affairs with a concentration in Marketing Strategy.