

# Embedded Inclusive Excellence at a Southern Metropolitan Public University

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**Cite as:** Hunter, A.G., Mendez Smith, J., Haines, S.J., Coakley, T.M., and Gilliam Jr, F.D. (2022). Embedded Inclusive Excellence at a Southern Metropolitan Public University. *Metropolitan Public University*. 33(2), 32-51. DOI: 10.18060/25530

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## Abstract

UNC Greensboro's vision is to be a national model for how a public research university can achieve access and excellence to transform students, the institution, and the community. With origins as the segregated Woman's College (WC), our evolution as a southern metropolitan public university reflects race, place, and intertwined historical legacies. Embedded inclusive excellence, as a heuristic, frames the intentional, synergistic, and organic processes we engage in advancing faculty diversity and a more inclusive learning environment. Specifically, borrowing a central concept from economics, we illustrate cultural, structural/institutional, and social "embeddedness" that has supported significant and positive changes at our university.

**Keywords:** inclusive excellence, higher education, equity, diversity, inclusion, racial equity, UNC Greensboro

## Introduction

In his 2016 State of the Campus Address, Chancellor Franklin D. Gilliam, Jr. introduced the concept of *Giant Steps*, inspired by the great North Carolinian John Coltrane, whose seminal 1959 composition *Giant Steps* was a revelation and set a bold new bar for jazz improvisation. *Giant Steps* was, in the Chancellor's words, a "collective call to action to raise our sightlines and be more ambitious as a university across several dimensions, including around equity, diversity, and inclusion." With notable faculty and student diversity successes, we reflect here on the embedded organizational processes that have supported these outcomes at UNC Greensboro. The American Association of Colleges and Universities (AACU) conceptualization of inclusive excellence represents a fundamental shift in the approach to diversity in postsecondary education. We complement this framing by incorporating the concept of embeddedness as a heuristic device that points to the intentional, synergistic, and organic processes that have supported increased faculty diversity and a more inclusive learning environment at UNC Greensboro. Moreover, embedded inclusive excellence is a collaborative-participatory project. Leadership at the top matters, but so does formal and informal leadership throughout the University. Specifically, we illustrate cultural, structural/institutional, and social embeddedness that have supported critical shifts. As a southern metropolitan public university, UNC Greensboro's current efforts in equity, diversity, and inclusion cannot be divorced from the contexts of race, place, their historical legacies, and our origins as a women's college.

In 2005, AACU commissioned three reports with an emphasis on integrating diversity and educational quality efforts in higher education and placing them at the center of institutional functioning, with the assumption that educational benefits would accrue for all students if it is "done well and is sustained over time." (p. iii). Inclusive excellence was student success focused and framed as an "alloy [that]...re-envision[s] both quality and diversity." (p. iii). This new framing disrupted the diversity vs. quality discourse that characterized much of the previous two decades of diversity and affirmative action debates (Strum, 2006), arguing instead that inclusion drives excellence as opposed to being diametric from it. Moreover, notions of excellence may and should be expanded. From an institutional perspective, inclusive excellence required "multilayered processes" through which this shift could be achieved. Institutional functioning, including administrative structures and processes, and accountability, were also critical.

The AACU report *Toward a Model of Inclusive Excellence and Change in Postsecondary Institutions* (2005) brought inclusive excellence squarely within the lexicon of higher education. Williams et al. (2005) advanced an organizational change model emphasizing multilayered contexts/processes that focus on "external environment, behavioral dimensions, and organizational culture" (see also Schein, 1985) and include targets for impact. Since its publication, the AACU inclusive excellence framework has become a clarion call for many universities; however, with respect to racial equity, many fell short of the aims of the framework. Victor Ray argues (2019:49) that "racial inequality is not merely 'in' organizations but 'of' them, as racial processes are foundational to organizational formation and continuity." In practice, he writes that organizations "decouple formal commitments to equity, access, and inclusion from policies and practices that reinforce, or at least do not challenge, existing racial hierarchies..." (p. 42). And, though shifts in the racialization of organizations may occur as a function of

external sources (e.g., social protest), most social equity policies and practices reflect internal sources of change.

UNC Greensboro's embedded inclusive excellence approach complements the AACU change model. In this paper, following the lead of economics, we highlight the cultural, structural/institutional, and social synergies that support critical shifts which advance our mission of equity, diversity, and inclusion. These shifts, which Chancellor Gilliam has called "inflection points," themselves are embedded within the history and context of UNC Greensboro as a southern metropolitan public university. Moreover, race and place, for a southern university, is not just a nexus of challenge, but also of possibility as the struggle for racial equity and justice in the South, in undeniable ways, defines its economic, political, and cultural history (Chafe, 1980; Roy & Floyd, 2019) and, thus, can be a new national model for higher education.

## From Woman's College to UNC Greensboro: Access, Excellence, and Change

UNC Greensboro is flourishing as the largest (close to 20,000 students) of the 13 colleges/universities in the Piedmont Triad region (Greensboro, Winston-Salem, and High Point) of central North Carolina, where the total estimated population is 1.7M (Piedmont Triad Partnership, 2021), making it the 33rd largest combined statistical population area in the United States. The population of Greensboro alone is 299,035, with 57.4% racial-ethnic persons of color (US Census, 2020). Greensboro has a unique and rich history of access in education, as well as protest traditions from the abolitionist to civil rights movement, and it has long opened its doors to refugee resettlement (Center for New North Carolinians, 2021). But its history is also rooted in southern racial caste systems and racial segregation (Chafe, 1980). These paradoxes shaped the history of UNC Greensboro and have, in many ways, uniquely positioned it to be a vanguard of change. In September 2015, Franklin D. Gilliam, Jr. became the first Black Chancellor of a non-historically Black college or university in North Carolina and kicked off an era where UNC Greensboro became more intentional with equity, diversity, and inclusion efforts and engagement with its complicated history of place (and race) and educational access, excellence, and change.

UNC Greensboro's vision is to be a national model for how a public research university can achieve access and excellence to transform students, the institution, and the community. This vision is rooted in its history and the history of Greensboro. UNC Greensboro opened its doors in 1892 to provide access to high-quality liberal arts education for White women. UNC Greensboro's first president, Dr. Charles Duncan McIver, was an advocate of higher education for women and was instrumental in lobbying the North Carolina Legislature for a college for women who were barred from attending the two-state colleges at the time, now UNC-Chapel Hill and North Carolina State University. The Woman's College, or WC as it was known, became a part of the original three schools that later formed the Consolidated University of North Carolina System. Greensboro was selected because of its central location in the state; the city's financial commitment; and its emergence as an educational center: Guilford College [Religious Society of Friends (Quaker) founded in 1837]; Greensboro College (Methodist, founded in 1838 as a women's college); and Bennett College (Methodist with Freedman Society, founded 1873 for Black women, the first in the nation); and soon to be North Carolina

Agricultural & Technical College, first co-educational, then a college for Black men formed from the same legislative act that created UNC Greensboro (Trelease, 2004).

The educational center of Greensboro was made up of colleges with faith traditions that supported educational access and civil rights. The Quakers and United Methodist Church supported Black literacy and education. New Garden for Friends, founded in 1754, is the oldest Quaker congregation in the Piedmont Triad region of North Carolina. As early as 1819, the Quakers established an Underground Railroad station in Greensboro, one of the major stops in the South. The Quaker's *The Greensborough Patriot* was also the state's only abolitionist paper (Trelease, 2004). More than 100 years later, four Black students from North Carolina A&T – Ezell Blair, Jr., David Richmond, Franklin McCain, and Joseph McNeil – staged a sit-in at a segregated Woolworth's lunch counter on February 1, 1960. By February 5, 300 students, including students from UNC Greensboro and other local colleges, joined the protest (Nittle, 2020). Though a fraught racial history from slavery to Jim Crow, two of the most transformative movements around race, freedom, and equity in the United States had a strong foothold or genesis in Greensboro.

Greensboro's rich Quaker history, with its tradition of religious tolerance, abolition, and progressivism, played a significant role in Jewish settlers establishing themselves in Greensboro at the turn of the 20th century. Greensboro and Guilford County continue this history as an immigrant and refugee settlement site, with over 150 first languages and one hundred forty countries of origin represented, making the county one of the most ethnically diverse in North Carolina (Center for New North Carolinians, 2021). Refugees arrive each year from places such as Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Nigeria, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, and Somalia; Greensboro has the largest population of Montagnard (ethnic Vietnamese) outside of Southeast Asia (Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2021).

The confluence of the desire of Greensboro to move beyond its past, the campus's commitment to engaged scholarship, and the hiring of Chancellor Gilliam provided the impetus for the campus to become even more involved in the city. As it stood, there was a sentiment among some in Greensboro that the university did not robustly engage with the broader community. To become more visible, the university's diverse leadership team (including the Chancellor's wife, Mrs. Jacquie Gilliam) and student body participated in and led many city-wide initiatives, including developing a master plan for the cultural art and establishment of a Cultural Commission; Cinema in the Park; the North Carolina Folk Festival; the development of the Technology Data Institute; and over 600,000 hours of community service in any given year. The university's well-known commitment to EDI, combined with a diverse leadership team and student body, significantly changed the conversation around social justice.

Although considered the progressive South, the modern Black freedom struggle in North Carolina and Greensboro (1945–1975) would still push against the constraining forces of White, southern civility, and racial segregation (Chafe, 1980). Indeed, North Carolina would be among the last states in the South to desegregate public schools in response to *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (Chafe, 1980; Roy and Ford, 2019). The desegregation of the Woman's College preceded the sit-in movement, first admitting Black women in 1956 (though earlier in 1951, with a special Chancellor provision, the college admitted a Native American woman). In

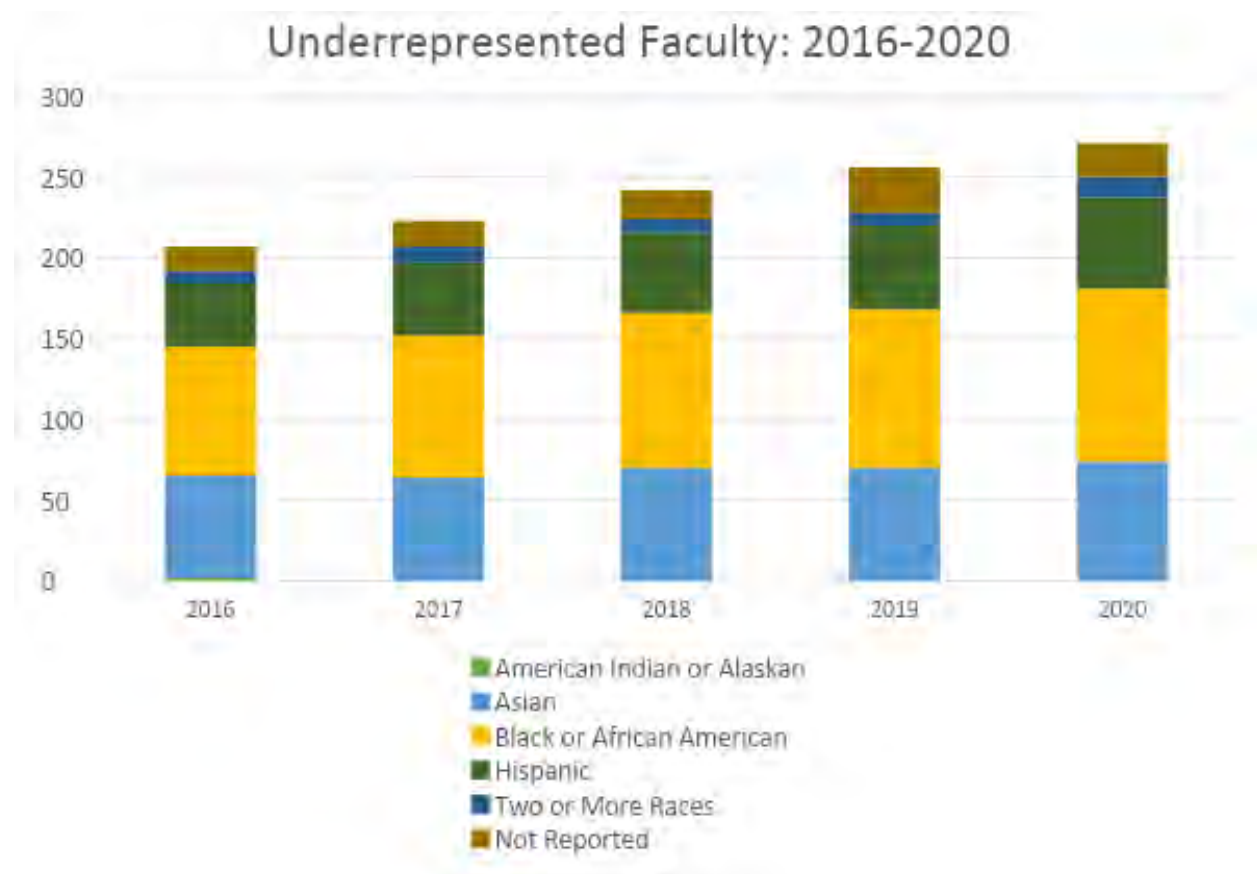
1964, UNC Greensboro became a co-educational institution (Trelease, 2004), and in fall 2015, the university became federally recognized as a minority-serving institution (MSI) and Title III university. By 2020 more than one-half (54%) of the student body identify as people of color, and over 40% are Pell-eligible, making it one of the most diverse institutions in North Carolina.

UNC Greensboro has been on the vanguard of increased student diversity and closing gaps in retention and graduation. For instance, African American undergraduate students grew from 22.9% in 2010 to 29.4% in 2020, exceeding their proportion in the state, which remained at 22%. Latinx undergraduate population has also grown from 4.5% (2010) to 11% (2020), surpassing the Latinx population in the state, 9.9% in 2020, and 8.4% in 2010. As a result of Latinx enrollment gains, UNC Greensboro was eligible for membership and joined the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, one of two public universities in North Carolina to hold such a membership. Focusing on Black-White achievement rates, *The Education Trust* (2017) report notes: “One standout institution is the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, where the graduation rate for Black students exceeds the rate for White students by 3.0 percentage points. Not only do Black students at this institution complete their degree requirements at rates higher than their White peers, but these students also surpass the average graduation rate of Black students at all institutions by 12.1 percentage points (57.7 percent vs. 44.6 percent).” (pp. 4–5) (Nichols and Evans-Bell, 2017).

Over the last five years, UNC Greensboro has also made notable strides in faculty diversity and hiring, as noted in *The Chronicle of Higher Education’s* (2021) report on *Diversifying Your Campus: Key Insights for Models for Change*. From 2016 to 2020, the number of Black faculty increased from 80 to 107; and the Hispanic faculty increased from 39 to 56. Overall, there has been a 30% increase in under-represented faculty over the 5 years, outpacing the total faculty growth (11%) (Figure 1). Moreover, in a landmark success that has eluded most American universities, UNC Greensboro has exceeded the national growth rate of underrepresented faculty members at the baccalaureate through doctoral-granting institutions. (Vasquez Heilig et al., 2019). It should also be noted that perhaps not coincidentally, extramural funding increased by almost 40% over the same period. These successes, Chancellor Gilliam stated, come from “years of hard work by faculty members working to change their departments and build the foundation, and then leadership that makes a real commitment” with resource allocation and strategic messaging. Indeed, “the bus is leaving the station, [a]nd either you’re on it or you’re not” (The Chronicle, 2021, pp. 62-63).

**Figure 1**

*Underrepresented Faculty Members and Growth from 2016 to 2020*



This begs the question: “How did you do it”? In what follows, we articulate how UNC Greensboro has used embedded inclusive excellence as a heuristic device – a discovery guidepost, if you will – to push back against the false dichotomy of access versus excellence. Doing so provides a clear signal of how university actors can align their priorities with institutional priorities.

### Embedded Inclusive Excellence: A Heuristic Approach

As a decentralized campus without a central office of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI), UNC Greensboro has engaged in an approach that accommodates multi-tiered formal and informal leadership and change agents, creating multiple pathways for change are intentional but also serendipitous. The embeddedness of our efforts, emphasizing cultural, structural, and social processes, is key, as we will illustrate. And while we like to think that all the strong work is intentional, sometimes successes come because of the unexpected positive by-product of people of good faith working toward a common goal.

## Cultural Embeddedness: Giant Steps, Shared Fate

Cultural embeddedness refers to “the role of shared collective understandings in shaping economic strategies and goals” (Dequech, 2003, p.462). Moreover, Dacin and colleagues (1999:328-329) write, “shared understandings and meanings give form to organization activity, structures, and process... and [they] shape organizational strategies and goals, ideologies that prescribe conceptions of the means and ends of individual action,” and to organizational controls. The concept of culture may also be viewed as a mechanism for both producing and measuring values (Friedland & Alford, 1991). Cultural embeddedness suggests that “values” and action are connected via interdependent beliefs, customs, and ways of doing things or conducting business which individual actors may adopt or may resist. Without accountability (reward, sanction, oversight), actors may decouple ascendant values from meaningful institutional action as old structural memory or language persists (Ray, 2020; Whittington, 2015).

When Chancellor Gilliam arrived at UNC Greensboro, “changing the culture” was one of his top priorities. In one of his first speeches in the community (City of Greensboro’s annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Day Breakfast, 2016), Chancellor Gilliam framed the conversation around race in terms of values. He stated:

Values are ways of understanding what an issue is about and why it matters. They are the perceptual lens through which people perceive public issues... Values that lead to a different pattern of thinking about how to solve problems like racial disparities. The first is the value of *shared fate*. In practice this means we must understand that true progress will only be made when we realize that we must lift all boats....this means that we have to think clearly and equitably about how we invest in our communities, who’s at the table, how all of our communities are impacted by decisions, policies, and statutes.

“A function of rhetoric is agenda setting—to place or keep certain topics in mind,” Dacin et al., 1999 write; and as they note Hart’s (1996) caveat that, “rhetoric tells people what to think about, not what to think” (p.1546). In his 2016 State of the Campus Address, Chancellor Gilliam introduced the concept of *Giant Steps*, inspired by the North Carolinian John Coltrane’s seminal jazz composition, “to raise our sight lines,” including around equity, diversity, and inclusion. “Shared fate,” as he further explains, involves social ties and a sense of common futures. “First, we need to imbue our culture with a clear understanding of shared fate...of community – of being in it together.” But as Gilliam noted, “we all need to hold ourselves accountable for the shared fate of our community.” Indeed, “we will need this kind of culture if we are going to take “*Giant Steps*.”

Cultural embeddedness is the most elusive of the three domains, as culture and values, when shared, are a kind of institutional paradigm or worldview, it is a university’s “first principles” (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Culture and values inform and are expressed within the structural/institutional and social domains, as they are drivers of action. Moreover, a sense of shared fate (“in this together”), which may galvanize action, is supported by shared meanings. This does not mean there is groupthink. Instead, culture informs how individuals are expected to act to serve the institution’s mission. Dequesch (2003) notes, “[d]ifferent cultures may imply different ways in which actors, in this case, collective actors as organizations, apply a specific

logic of action...” (p.468). What the efforts at UNC Greensboro illustrate, too, is that structural/institutional and social embeddedness is necessarily bound to a cultural project and a multipronged one at that.

One of the implicit hallmarks of our approach is that power should be distributive. In other words, it is not solely concentrated in the university’s administration. The appropriate entailment, therefore, is accountability. And it is here where the central administration holds downstream actors to clearly stated expectations. Perhaps the most important is that searches for faculty and staff must be intentional about ensuring that the applicant pool is diverse across any number of dimensions. How can one find the “best” possible candidates if a search, a priori, exclude or favors certain categories of applicants over others?

The result of such a process does not always or necessarily produce a “diverse” finalist. But it surely heightens the odds. These expectations have contributed to a significant increase in Black faculty at our university. And just as importantly, we believe it has sustained a more robust conversation about EDI at the university. Now is this approach fail safe? Of course not. The adage that “most politics are local” implies that the greatest challenges to embeddedness occur at the unit level. In this instance, distributed authority can work against EDI efforts because oppositional forces are also structurally embedded, and progressive actors rarely have comparable authority over decision-making to displace systemic bias. Nonetheless, a small but committed cadre can overcome these things when receiving support and cover from the central administration. This telling has a symbiosis between shared authority, shared governance, and university leadership.

### Rhythms of Change: UNC Greensboro’s Jazz Education Program

What has been accomplished at UNC Greensboro has not all happened overnight. Rather, it has resulted from persistent and intentional efforts by faculty and staff in the trenches. As Elsa Barkley Brown (1991) has written, jazz as a metaphor for history is a kind of gumbo ya ya, a Creole term meaning everyone talking at once where “multiple rhythms are played out simultaneously” (p.85). Jazz education at UNC Greensboro is an apt illustration of the multiple rhythms and discordance that may occur on the long walk toward change. More than a decade before Black students could matriculate, the first jazz band at UNC Greensboro began in 1942, with a group of White women called the Darlinettes. They rehearsed in secret on campus. Doris Funderburk Morgan, the pianist, recalls when caught playing jazz in the practice hall, she was asked by an incensed professor of organ: “What do you think you are doing?!” (Ford, 2015). Sherrie Tucker, the trumpeter, explains, “For White women to play music that was associated with African-Americans gets at the very taboos on which the black/white color line is based, and it’s very threatening (Ford, 2015). In 1984, 40 years after the Darlinettes, a jazz concentration was added to the BA. Music degree.

After establishing the jazz program, its status, the investment, and student and faculty diversity were incremental. It was not until fall 1999 that jazz was permissible at the students’ weekly convocation performance. The following year, the first jazz scholarships were offered. All eleven of the students enrolled in the jazz concentration were White, with three White faculty. Today, the Miles Davis Jazz Studies Program, named in 1998, has tripled in size, and 50% of the



students are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. Black faculty are 29% of the jazz faculty, and fundraising for a new Ella Fitzgerald Endowed Chair in Jazz Studies is in full swing. After several years of advocacy, this spring (2021), a jazz music education course, *Jazz for Music Teachers*, now a part of the curriculum, was taught for the first time. The recruitment and hiring of Black faculty, performing Black American music, scholarships and performance opportunities for students, mentoring, and a reframing of jazz education pedagogy toward authenticity and cultural connectivity (Phillips, 2017), and invited world-class musicians, such as Branford Marsalis and Herbie Hancock, have created a vibrant and high-quality contribution to the University as well as the broader community.

Change, whatever its pace, is a concerted journey. Equity, diversity, and inclusion engages, like jazz, multiple rhythms, and encourages “each member[to] listen to what the other is doing and know how to respond while each is, at the same time, intent upon her improvisation” (Barkley Brown, 1991: 85). But even as institutions seek to advance racial equity and EDI, the reality is colleges and universities were rarely founded on such principles. Yet, the stronghold of countervailing values often goes unnamed and unacknowledged (Ray, 2020). Thus, to throw structural/ institutional levers in alignment with ascendant values (or culture) is paramount for change, as is engagement in transparent and frank dialogues about anachronistic “logics of action” implicated in systemic inequality.

#### Structural/Institutional Embeddedness: Institutional Principles, Policies, and Practices

Structural embeddedness involves the policies and practices that guide work and, importantly, how policies are implemented via practices such that groups receive equitable treatment. Describing the links between structures and individual actors (i.e., structuration), Whittington writes, (2015:149) “agents draw on the various rules and resources of their systems; as they do so, they either reproduce or amend the structural principles that organized their activities...” Using language as a metaphor, Whittington describes the stability of structural principles that encode common knowledge(s) and new words/usages that accommodate changing needs. The policy may be lacking, unclear, or out of compliance with changing regulations or best practices, e.g., as we have seen with Title IX and its evolutions.

Embedded inclusive excellence represents what was once on the margins of taken-for-granted structural principles in higher education. Equity, diversity, and inclusion, as well as racial equity frameworks, codify new institutional needs to address vestiges of racial caste and the practices, policies, and discourses through which systemic equities are maintained. With the change, individual actors learn new languages, practices, and policies, but the old comforts are difficult to release. In his 2018 message to the campus, Chancellor Gilliam wrote about UNC Greensboro being at an “inflection point” – a turning point after which a dramatic change is expected. Inflection points transcend small, incremental day-to-day progress, and their effects are often experienced as a well-known, widespread “sea change.” He telegraphed that a new language (i.e., structural principles) was ahead; but also acknowledged a gathering of innovations, social resources, or new words and ways that must take hold to prime or seed an inflection point.

Institutional processes are levers of access, opportunity, and resource allocation. Inclusive, just, and equitable outcomes are promoted by intentional policies, management of best practices, and

data-driven results. We uncover inconsistencies in policy or lack of standardized policy around EDI concerns through evaluation and policy review. An example of this was inconsistencies in UNC Greensboro's search and hiring policy and practices. As a result, we focused on greater awareness and monitored how search committees were established, the training they received, and the use of best practices (e.g., Fine & Handelsman, 2012). Upon review, only a few deans used standardized procedures to establish search committees; there was no widespread knowledge about search committee policy among the greater faculty. In response, the Provost updated university policy on search committees added a required implicit bias module for search committee members, and emphasized the strong need for diversification among the faculty. We then began engagement in a series of activities (see next section) to standardize our approach across schools, departments, and in some cases, with specific search committees as requested, to provide consultation and support for learning and implementing best practices in accordance with the university policy.

### Recruitment and Retention of an Excellent, Diverse Faculty

Diversity and equity committees across campus engaged in a series of discussions with the faculty and deans about why recruitment of a diverse pool of talent was necessary to pursue excellence, increase faculty diversity, and provide models within the faculty ranks for an increasingly diverse student body. Some notable achievements were: a series of "Diversity Conversations" held in the College of Arts and Sciences; the College of Visual and Performing Arts revised their internal search handbook and required diversity training for all search committee members; and other departments and units began to explore or require diversity statements as a part of the application process. In addition, Department chairs received required training about search committee best practices in hiring and a copy of the best practices manual to share with faculty. These efforts signified the administration's priority to increase faculty diversity. The examples also illustrate that change is multi-determined; each action by a network of institutional actors committed to EDI can create synergistic conditions, leading to structural and long-lasting change among the faculty ranks.

Put differently, deans, department heads, and search committee chairs recognized that they were to be held accountable and led with their commitments. For instance, the School of Education (SOE) has a stated commitment to equity and gender diversity equity (School of Education, 2021) and has established a Diversity Fellow, equity and access committees for faculty and staff, and committees on language and internationalization. The SOE (2016–2017) developed a strategic plan where equity and diversity became an area of distinction. Similar committees have been established across academic units to focus work and move forward in new ways. To support efforts toward faculty diversity, the College of Arts and Sciences and the College of Visual and Performing Arts have developed best practice manuals for faculty searches. The University's Weatherspoon Art Museum, with a new director, has developed a racial equity strategic plan for the university's museum that intentionally incorporates a lens through which to make the museum more accessible and inclusive. The museum's plan outlines its commitment to institutional change—culturally embedded practices within the museum—as critical to supporting access across the campus and engagement with our local community (Weatherspoon Art Museum, 2021). Another prime example is the University of Teaching and Learning Commons (UTLC), which has provided clear and stalwart support for faculty mentoring

(including focused efforts on faculty of color), inclusive pedagogy, and EDI training for teaching faculty (e.g., including the Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Institute, UTLC, 2021). We have also received the Higher Education Excellence in Diversity Award in 2018, 2019, 2020, and again in 2021, noting new programs that emerge from our broad commitments to inclusive excellence each year.

Institutional embeddedness ensures that units and stakeholders develop EDI knowledge across campus and have opportunities to build skills. As there are more opportunities for learning and exchanging ideas, an EDI lens will increasingly become part of the University's language and practice. When these processes unfold and mutually reinforce each other, they further embed these concepts and expectations into the practices of the University. This, of course, is not a seamless process, as one must "keep your foot on the gas." Disruption of what was taken for granted is also difficult for many. Unfolding shifts do take hold, however, and pursuing them signals our purpose and commitment to new talent. Notably, UNC Greensboro's success with a diverse student body attracts equity-minded faculty. Thus, a synergy of practice and culture shifts can lead to tipping points in local places (e.g., departments, units) and, ultimately, the university.

One notable contextual factor is the importance of the enrollment growth funding model employed by the UNC system. This approach allocates extra money when campuses increase their student credit hour production (typically increasing enrollment). UNC Greensboro relied on a managed growth strategy that saw consistent increases in the student population for four years in a row. As a result, extra resources were allocated to the campus used to hire almost 400 additional faculty [about two-thirds were replacements (departures/retirements), one-third were new]. With clear mandates from the administration and deans both believing in the goals and being held accountable for meeting them, the university made significant strides in diversifying the faculty. Diversifying the faculty under financial exigencies makes it much more difficult to implement the approach we used at UNC Greensboro.

Challenges remain in folding an EDI lens into the university's regular business, which impacts the experiences of faculty from underrepresented groups once they arrive (Hunter and McGill, 2015; Hemphill, Boyce & James, 2021). Faculty retention is impacted by mentoring and investment, campus climate, salary inequities, and evaluative bias; these are talent management and investment matters. Racial disparities in faculty retention and career progression persist nationally (Kelly, Gayles, & Williams, 2017; Piercy, Giddings, Allen, Dixon, Meszaros, & Joest, 2005; Taylor, Beck, Lahey, & Froyd, 2017; Zajac, 2011). Furthermore, implicit and evaluative biases are critical to address, as they influence how faculty are engaged and supported and influence high-stakes evaluations such as promotion and tenure (Abdul-Raheem, 2016; Ro & Villarreal, 2021). Faculty of color are also less likely to be considered for early promotion, are more likely to be discouraged from applying or resigning before a review, and are more likely to feel their scholarship is devalued by department heads and faculty peers than are White faculty (Jones, Hwang, & Bustamante, 2015). An example of EDI leadership in faculty governance to address implicit and evaluative bias in promotion and tenure reviews is The School of Health and Human Sciences Promotion & Tenure Committee's implementation of annual implicit bias training for all continuing and incoming members. The committee also initiated a proposal to develop new training content for EDI modules tailored to the promotion and tenure reviews and

evaluations; other unit committees could adopt these.

To support faculty and leadership development focused across career life stage, we launched new initiatives, which include funding tenure-track faculty to attend the National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity faculty success program, an affinity-based faculty mentoring and support network for underrepresented faculty (developed and led by a senior faculty member), and piloted a Faculty Leadership Program for Scholars of Color. In addition, the Spartan ADVANCE grant supports the recruitment, retention, and advancement of mid-career women and faculty of color in STEM fields. The National Science Foundation (NSF) ADVANCE grant is led by four women of color. It has a strong advisory board composed of campus faculty leaders, researchers, and administrators committed to equity. The ADVANCE team is implementing workshops to create a system of allyship to support underrepresented faculty at UNC Greensboro and training for department chairs and deans about the importance of retaining minority and female faculty in all areas of study, not just STEM fields. (Dunn et al., 2019; Taylor et al., 2017).

As the faculty has diversified, senior ranks have also progressed, including leadership in faculty governance who have advanced an inclusive excellence agenda. These leaders carry forward questions about “what we need to think about.” The Chancellor’s Fellows for Campus Climate, established in 2016, is one example of elevating local and informal EDI leaders and developing a leadership pipeline. Fellows serve as advisors, bridge builders, strategic leaders, and partners, enabling leaders across the institution to identify and execute initiatives to effect lasting institutional change. Given the budget and political constraints, the Chancellor created the Chancellor’s Fellows for Campus Climate in recognition that though UNC Greensboro was on the vanguard around student diversity and success efforts, it had much work to do around faculty diversity. Unlike many EDI offices driven by administrative staff, the Chancellor wanted EDI efforts to be led by tenured faculty members.

Similarly, Provost Fellows were established to mentor, develop and support faculty interested in impacting the institution as a whole, broadening their experience, and learning more about administration. They partner with the Provost and Chancellor’s Fellows around specific areas of interest, such as developing a mentoring program for faculty from underrepresented communities, integrated student success, or the university-wide theme on equality. Provost and Chancellor’s Fellows are selected from the senior faculty who have demonstrated university service and leadership potential. They are compensated with stipends, summer salary, and course buyouts. In addition, they are embedded in senior leadership meetings.

With enrollment growth and retirements, UNC Greensboro had an opportunity to reshape the faculty. In campus communications and meetings with the Provost and senior leadership, the Chancellor had already clarified that leadership would be held accountable around EDI. As Fellows partnered and collaborated on faculty diversity initiatives, people on campus knew they spoke for and were conduits to the Chancellor. The Fellows can also elevate and highlight the work being done at the local level and promote a campus-wide approach for systemic action (Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, 2021; Racial Equity at UNCG, 2021). In sum, the Fellows programs at UNCG are another intentional way to ensure that expectations for EDI would be supported across the campus and would bring people together across rank, department, position,

and discipline in support of EDI work, thereby ensuring no one person would be tasked with the execution of these complex initiatives. Synergy across EDI at UNCG was enhanced via investments in the Fellows programs.

### Social Embeddedness: Networks Seeding Change

Social embeddedness refers to ongoing networks of social relations between people and individuals as social actors who guide their choices based on past interactions and engage trusted relations (Dacin et al., 1999; Granovetter, 1985; Little, 2012). Dacin and colleagues (1999:319) also note that Granovetter viewed “embeddedness as the contextualization of economic activities in ongoing patterns of social relations,” where institutional, as well as cultural and political contexts, remain relevant, as does the aspects of the individual (e.g., cognition, bias, meaning) (Dacin et al., 1999; Zukin and DiMaggio, 1990). Social ties within organizations, which are diverse, nested, channeled, and bound, “provide opportunities for interconnected social actors” (Dacin et al., 1999, p. 326). Baker and Faulkner (2009) further argue that transformational mechanisms explain how the interactions of individuals turn into collective action or outcomes, which may be intended or not (Hedstrom & Swedberg, 1998). They note (2005:1546) the role of network diffusion as a transformational mechanism, where “[d]iffusion is the spread of ideas, attitudes, values, products, and so on through interpersonal communication and influence...” Social embeddedness, thus, can create opportunities to engage, spread, and support values leading to institutional action. We extrapolate the contextualization of activities that promote faculty diversity and inclusive curriculum/pedagogy within ongoing patterns of social relations and organizational activity.

### Network Diffusion: Best Practices for Faculty Diversity

We recognized that if UNC Greensboro were to recruit and retain a diverse faculty successfully, we would need to create social expectations across potentially interlocked and cross-functional networks. Therefore, for almost three years, UNC Greensboro partnered with a Greensboro-based firm with national reach and expertise to deliver racial equity training to campus leaders. We ran a series of two-day, all-day training sessions, with invitations to administrators, faculty, staff, and student leaders to participate and ultimately share their learning with their home units or departments and the impact on the work being done at UNC Greensboro. Nearly 100 people participated in the training, and many referred others to participate. This initiative provided a common set of experiences to examine race equity deeply. Evaluation data collected from about one-third of all participants indicated they were extremely likely (78%) or somewhat likely (22%) to “apply the information learned at the Racial Equity Institute training regarding racial disparities to your future actions in your workplace or place of learning.” This effort, led by the Provost and Dean of the Libraries, was guided by an interdepartmental committee in partnership with the Chancellor’s Campus Climate Fellow. The activities, along with others, provided a basis of trusted relations for campus members with the racial equity training.

Our Sustained Dialogue Efforts were another example of building networks among staff and faculty members with EDI interests and talents. We partnered with Sustained Dialogue Institute to provide training experiences in having difficult conversations about EDI and use dialogue

approaches to develop a deeper understanding of racial identity among our community members. Our Teaching and Learning Center and our Office of Intercultural Engagement were leaders in these efforts, giving many of our faculty and staff new tools in their toolbox to use when talking with students both inside and outside of the classroom. To this day, the UTLC and our OIE continue to offer dialogue programs to create a space for learning about EDI and to have deep, meaningful conversations about race that help build new relationships and closeness within our student body and our EDI faculty and staff networks.

### Double Embeddedness: Building General Education for Our Times

There is an interrelationship between structure and culture within which social ties (i.e., social capital) reside (Baker and Faulkner, 2009). According to Baker and Faulkner (2009), this kind of double embeddedness exists when “both networks and culture are bases of action, sometimes working together, impelling people in the same direction, but sometimes in conflict, producing contrary guides to action.” (p.1530). For example, a university’s general education curriculum binds faculty in a shared vision of and mission for student education and success. Recently, Chancellor Gilliam and the Provost asked the faculty to deliver a general education program that suited not just where we have been but where we are going.

UNC Greensboro pursued a 3-year process to revise the general education curriculum and implement new approaches, resulting in the university’s new foundational competency-based curriculum. As foundation to this effort, a prior dedicated group of faculty worked to ensure that global and intercultural engagement, already a strong emphasis area on our campus, was the focus of our 2014 - 2019 Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP). The QEP is a component of the reaffirmation and accreditation process of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges that aims to enhance the quality of higher education in the region and to focus attention on student learning outcomes. Following this step, the General Education Committee was able to continue the dialogue to add more emphasis on diversity and inclusion within U.S. society. Faculty debated, and disagreed, about whether these competencies should be developed within the core curriculum.

These engagements among faculty were hard, difficult, and, at times, contentious. All were hard-fought, but we believe it is no accident that we endorsed diversity and inclusion as a core student learning competence. Ultimately, the diversity and inclusion competency, emphasizing the humanities or the social sciences, would focus on systems of advantage and oppression, structures of power, and institutions while making connections to US or global societies and examining intellectual traditions that address systems of injustice. In this way, our campus commitment to education around diversity, equity, and inclusion had expanded and deepened through the revision to our general education program and is likely the by-product of early efforts in the Chancellor’s tenure to build EDI networks of faculty and staff to lead during this revision process when it mattered.

Moving forward, the general education program has led to campus-wide curriculum development (including an infusion of diversity and inclusion competencies) and mentoring and training in inclusive pedagogy with the University Learning and Teaching Center, and more faculty have engaged in online diversity training (DiversityEDU). Together, this builds a network of teacher-

scholars from various backgrounds and across disciplines who are committed to inclusive pedagogy and curriculum. With an increasingly diverse faculty, UNC Greensboro is ready to prepare the incoming fall 2021 cohort to engage with content and develop competencies that address and navigate some of the most pressing issues of our time.

## Conclusion

As a heuristic, embedded inclusive excellence is one framework that integrates diversity, equity, inclusion, and access as actionable values at all levels of an educational institution. Inclusive, just, and equitable practices embedded across cultural, structural/institutional, and social domains create access and opportunity and achieve excellence by promoting the management of best practices, policies, and data-driven results. The result is that desired outcomes are sustained, and supporting organizational processes are mutually reinforced across all divisions.

As a southern metropolitan university, we have been bolstered and challenged by a place with legacies of racial caste and social movements for racial equity. The New South includes diverse multiracial/ethnic populations, new migrants and immigrants, and an increased global footprint. We are uniquely positioned as a university to be a change agent and address racial and social disparities as a matter of scholarship and in closing racial gaps in equity and social mobility in our local communities and state.

Gains in faculty diversity and racial equity depend on local leadership (including informal leaders) to engage the emotional and political labor to create change, build alliances, and engage in aspirational dialogue. Centralized rhetorical and institutional support gives additional energy (and cover) to leadership in local places to help catalyze the will and urgency to move forward. But, in the main, an over-centralization of a university's equity efforts may more easily lead to isolation and marginalization. Embedding work across and throughout the institution, on the other hand, can create a sense of common identity.

This paper offers a different perspective of racial equity, both in theory and practice. We have shown that UNC Greensboro has both increased diversity and enhanced excellence. For the third year in a row, the campus met or exceeded its annual targets on all five of the priority metrics (low-income enrollment; graduation of low-income students; five-year graduation rates; degree efficiency of underrepresented minorities; and critical workforce credentials) as specified in the UNC System strategic plan. Indeed, UNC Greensboro was the only UNC System institution to meet all priority goals in 2020 and 2021. In addition to meeting educational access and student success goals, the complete list of metrics includes substantially increasing the number of graduates with critical workforce credentials and expanding the university's knowledge-creation enterprise. As a research university and national leader in social mobility, UNC Greensboro is providing students with the knowledge and skills to transform their intellectual and economic lives, make new discoveries that help build our shared future, and work toward a more inclusive and equitable world.

Leadership at the top matters, but so does formal and informal leadership throughout the university. Leadership sets the "rhetoric" to inform values, establishes accountability, and pushes

for best institutional practices. But as “all diversity work, like politics, is local,” deep systemic change requires leadership at all levels and tailored efforts for local change. Accordingly, UNC Greensboro has embraced embedded inclusive excellence as a heuristic that integrates equity, diversity, and inclusion as actionable values such that, as Chancellor Gilliam has often said, is to be “a part of our DNA.”

Here, we illustrate how an embeddedness heuristic applied at this public southern metropolitan university has led to successes that may also have wider applications across diverse organizational models to address racial equity, equity, diversity, and inclusion across all social differences and identities. Although our successes are many and varied, there remains much work to be done in expanding faculty diversity throughout the disciplines, developing a leadership pipeline, and increasing diversity within the administrative ranks. To succeed on these fronts, efforts must be embedded in culture, structures, social relations, and the pull of countervailing values lessened.

With final reflections on jazz as a metaphor for equity, excellence, and change, we are reminded of Ojeda Penn, a jazz pianist who, Barkly Brown (1991) writes, “called jazz an expression of true democracy, for each person is allowed, required, to be an individual, to go his own way, and yet do so in concert with the group.” (p. 85). Yet, as EDI and racial equity in higher education progress, some still call: “What do you think you are doing?” Our response is, “We are taking Giant Steps.”



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