

**Organizational Needs Assessment Technical Report**

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SWK351-01D: Generalist Practice III: Communities Groups and Organization

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **INTRODUCTION TO FONTBONNE**

Fontbonne University (FBU) is a private Catholic University that was founded in 1923. Fontbonne is in Clayton, MO which is a suburb of St. Louis. The mission of the university is to care for the dear neighbor. In Fall 2022 there were 944 students enrolled. 90% of undergraduate students are registered in school full-time. 59% of undergraduate students live off-campus. The Fontbonne census does not recognize genders outside of the binary, and according to their census 59% of students are female, and 41% are male.

### **INTRODUCTION TO DEIB AND RESEARCH**

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) is a practice that originated in the 1960's and has gained recent traction as a marketing tool to get more consumers. DEIB is meant to increase diversity and equal opportunities for all humans by recognizing that a diverse community is stronger than one that excludes others (University of Washington, 2020). DEIB practices are relatively new within institutions of higher education. A barrier to adhering to DEIB practices is the societal trend of capitalism, which stems directly from white supremacy. When a university does not practice DEIB, marginalized students are more likely to experience academic distress than those that do not come from marginalized backgrounds (Taff & Clifton, 2022). Research shows that students from marginalized backgrounds minimize the unfair treatment they experience because they believe they are being overly sensitive even though there is research that shows that marginalized student are at higher risk of academic struggles due to receiving different treatment than their peers (Cheng et al., 2020). While many universities claim to practice DEIB, they often use appealing statements online to market and get students which creates a situation where students are doubly harmed (Rankin et al., 2022). College institutions must be willing to be honest and look at implicit biases and privilege to develop anti-racist and more inclusive practices (Bell, 2021).

### **INTRODUCTION TO THE COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT**

The DEIB department at Fontbonne was created in June 2022 and is a branch off Multicultural Affairs (MCA). Deanna Williams is the only staff member in the department. The role that Deanna Williams has is to, "produce programs and different workshop opportunities for faculty/staff to learn more about issues surrounding DEIB". Social Work students at Fontbonne recognized the need to conduct a Needs Assessment to evaluate how needs related to DEIB are being met on campus and if the department involved with DEIB has the resources needed. The goals of the assessment:

1. Identify the resources needed for the DEIB department to engage in supportive practices to its community
2. Examine barriers and gaps to providing DEIB practices
3. Evaluate if community needs are being met by Fontbonne

### **METHODOLOGY**

The research team utilized an online survey that was distributed through convenience sampling to collect quantitative data. The survey was adapted from many sources and looked at quality of life (QOL), disabilities and impairments, academic performance, belonging, and student support and success. Forty-nine surveys were completed and analyzed. The team conducted an interview

with Deanna Williams, Special Advisor to the President for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion to gather qualitative data. The researchers asked 11 key questions that looked at different roles the DEIB department plays on campus, and how DEIB practices are taught and used.

## **RESULTS**

### ***Demographics***

Out of the 49 surveys that were completed and analyzed, 37 participants identified as White. 3 identified outside of the gender binary, and 40 identified as female. 18 of the students that completed the survey are commuters. 16 students identified as having a disability, and 8 identified as being part of a marginalized group.

### ***Quantitative Results***

Data showed that 3 individuals do not feel comfortable being themselves at Fontbonne, 6 students do not feel like they are a part of the student community, and 6 students do not believe that the messages about diversity and belonging at the University (marketing/website) are consistent with their personal experiences.

### ***Qualitative Results***

There is a committee within faculty that meets to talk about DEIB practices at FBU. There is no required professional development for faculty and staff specifically around DEIB practices. Programming and groups through DEIB target students that live on campus. With Deanna Williams being the only employee in her department, she often gets pulled from working on mezzo level needs to focus on micro level emergencies.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### ***Recommendation 1***

Commuters are not being given as many opportunities to participate or find a sense of belonging at FBU. The recommendation is to display accessible information on offerings at FBU for support, events, and groups to further reach those that do not live on campus. This could be done by having more information on Fontbonne's website for students to stay up to date on different things that are happening.

### ***Recommendation 2***

There is a lack of support employee wise, creating a dynamic where institutional change is impossible. The recommendation is to increase staffing and resources. Allocating funding to the DEIB department will open space for more employees and will help create mezzo level changes.

### ***Recommendation 3***

The qualitative data from the interview showed that while overt racism isn't tolerated at FBU, a lack of DEIB training could lead to microaggressions and personal biases that affect students from marginalized backgrounds. The recommendation is to incorporate DEIB into the curriculum for students and staff.

***Limitations***

Due to the limited amount of time for the needs assessment, most researchers filled out the survey to increase the amount of data that would be analyzed. This creates a possible bias and future studies should be done by researchers that are not current students at the university. Another limitation is that 77% of participants identified as White which is unrepresentative of the Fontbonne population. Future studies should target marginalized groups of students to gather more conclusive data.

**CONCLUSION**

The results from the survey were inconclusive due to limitations. The analyzed data offer a starting point that answer if community needs are being met, and the resources that are required to meet those needs. Further research should be done utilizing surveys that include more questions that are specific to DEIB practices at Fontbonne and that target marginalized groups.

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **ORGANIZATION DESCRIPTION**

Fontbonne University (FBU) is a private Catholic university that was founded in 1923 by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet. FBU is a non-profit liberal arts university located in Clayton, MO which is a suburb of St. Louis. The mission of FBU is to care for the dear neighbor, which involves creating a more just world through acts of service, critical thinking, ethical actions, respect, integrity, community, excellence, justice, and faith. The vision of the university is to build leaders that can serve those in need. FBU's commitment to their students and community involves act of service, educational excellence, knowing the history and having moral resolve, giving space for diverse communities and showing care and respect, and helping students develop an ethical and responsible presence.

### **FONTBONNE UNIVERSITY DEMOGRAPHICS**

Fontbonne had approximately 944 students enrolled by Fall 2022. Around 72% of the 944 enrolled students are undergraduate students, and 90% of undergraduate students are full-time which means they are taking at least 12 credit hours per semester. 59% of Undergraduate students live off-campus. The FBU census divides gender into male and female categories. According to the census, 59% of students identify as female and 41% identify as male. While there are more people that identify as female, Fontbonne has seen an increase with people that identify as male regarding new students in fall 2022. The percentage of students that identify as White has dropped almost 10% since 2018, while the percentage of students that identify as Black or African American has risen 5%. As far as transfer students in fall 2022, most identify as White. Most first-year full-time students (75%) live on campus and over 80% of these students are student-athletes. Only 10% of first-year full-time students are from out of state, while 69% are from the St. Louis Metro. In fall 2022 many first-year full-time students came to the university to participate in Fontbonne's first ever Sprint Football team. While most first-year students live on campus, most transfer students are commuters.

### **DEIB PRACTICES**

Diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) started during the Civil Rights Movement. Diversity is more than a word/ideal; it is recognizing inequity while also acknowledging power and privilege (University of Washington, 2020). Inclusion and equity in turn, take things a step further by holding a desire to create equal opportunities and seeing how a diverse community is stronger than one that excludes others (University of Washington, 2020). Belonging was recently added to acknowledge that there is a difference between someone being included and that person feeling a sense of belonging. Belonging gives a person a sense of identity and community and is necessary within DEIB practices. DEIB practices are an ongoing action, not a box to check off. One can have a DEIB department and office, but not be utilizing DEIB practices.

DEIB practices can be measured through ongoing evaluations, especially individuals from marginalized backgrounds. DEIB is a relatively new practice in universities. A barrier to adhering to DEIB practices is the societal trend of capitalism, which stems directly from white supremacy. DEIB is becoming a trend among organizations to gain consumers, and while DEIB practices affect everyone; students, faculty, and staff that come from marginalized backgrounds are impacted most. When a university does not practice DEIB, these students are more likely to

experience academic distress than those that do not come from marginalized backgrounds (Taff & Clifton, 2022). Many students from marginalized backgrounds (such as Latinx, people of color, LGBTQ, etc.) minimize the unfair treatment they experience because they believe they are being overly sensitive although studies show that unfair treatment does lead to academic struggles as well as struggles with overall well-being (Cheng et al., 2020). There has been an increase in international students attending universities in America. Many universities have a high intercultural awareness, but they lack supportive practices when working with international students (Wang & Sun, 2022). International students are more likely than other students to feel a lack of belonging and are less likely to be thought about within DEIB practices (Wang & Sun, 2022).

Because Fontbonne is a Catholic university, there is dissonance between Catholic beliefs and inclusivity for LGBTQ students. Catholic universities may claim to be inclusive and welcoming, however, the practices of Catholicism invite microaggressions into the classroom (Hughes, 2019). Part of the issue surrounding DEIB struggling in action is lack of professional development offerings to faculty and staff. While it should not all be left on professors to bring DEIB practices to universities, it is important for them to be openminded to shifting their beliefs to foster a more inclusive environment for diverse populations (Meyer, 2021). Failure to engage in DEIB practices leads to feelings of loneliness and unfairness which lead to struggles in all areas of life.

Although many universities claim to practice DEIB, they often use normative statements online to appeal to key stakeholders and students (Rankin et al., 2022). Rankin et al. (2022) demonstrated that inaccurate diversity representation online leads to students from marginalized backgrounds being doubly disadvantaged because not only are they being excluded by the university, but the university is excluding them while appearing inclusive to others online. Issues with engaging in DEIB practices stem from societal beliefs and politics around deservingness (Dickenseon, 2022).

It is important that institutions of higher education challenge old beliefs with new knowledge to foster a safe learning environment that gives equal opportunities to all. College institutions must be willing to be honest and look at implicit biases and privilege to develop anti-racist and more inclusive practices (Bell, 2021). Taff and Clifton (2022), found that, “receptivity, availability of support services, accessible spaces, and inclusive policies and procedures” are facilitators of inclusion for students that come from marginalized backgrounds. Along with this, it is important to recognize that DEIB issues stem from systemic problems within universities and therefore it is necessary to be critical of institution foundations and to be willing to pushback and work towards recognizing and changing the foundation (Tevis & Foste, 2022).

## **INTRODUCTION TO THE COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT**

As DEIB practices become more prevalent and talked about online and within college institutions, Social Work students at Fontbonne recognized the need to evaluate how the DEIB department is meeting the needs of the community it serves, as well as if the department has the resources to meet those needs. Social Work students at Fontbonne conducted a Needs Assessment to evaluate how needs are being met on campus and if the department involved with DEIB has the resources needed. The goals of the assessment:

1. Identify the resources needed for the DEIB department to engage in supportive practices to its community
2. Examine barriers and gaps to providing DEIB practices
3. Evaluate if community needs are being met by Fontbonne

## **METHODOLOGY**

Social Work students utilized an online survey to gather quantitative data surrounding how the DEIB department is meeting the needs of undergraduate students at Fontbonne University. The survey instrument was adapted from many different places. To inquire about quality of life and basic needs insecurity, the WHO-QOL form, the 2-Item Hunger Vital Sign, and the Census SIPP Housing Insecurity Measure were used. To look at disabilities and impairments, academic performance, belonging, and student support and success researchers modified a student survey conducted in 2023 by EDUCAUSE (EDUCASE, 2023).

Participants were recruited using convenience sampling. An email was sent out to Social Work students, and other professors were asked to distribute the link to the survey as well. Instagram was used to market the survey to those that use social media. Researchers also asked other students via word of mouth and text to take the survey. Eligible participants were undergraduate students over the age of 18 who were able to read English and had access to technology with internet connection to fill out the survey.

The purpose of the needs assessment was detailed in bold on the first page before starting the survey. The goal of the survey was to “learn more about how the programs at Fontbonne University are meeting the needs of students.” The assessment took approximately 15 minutes to complete. 49 surveys were completed and analyzed.

To gain qualitative data looking at if the DEIB department has the resources needed to meet the needs of the students at Fontbonne, the team conducted an interview with Deanna Williams. Deanna Williams is the Special Advisor to the President for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. The interview was held on Tuesday March 28, 2023, in Deanna’s office. There were 11 key questions that looked at different roles the DEIB department plays on campus, and how DEIB practices are taught and used. The interview took approximately 45 minutes to complete. The interview was recorded by Social Work students and informed consent was received.

## **RESULTS**

### ***Demographics***

Out of the 49 surveys that were completed and analyzed, 37 participants (77%) identified as White, 4 identified as African American/Black, 6 identified as Hispanic/Latinx, and 2 individuals identified as Asian. 3 participants identified outside of the gender binary, 40 identified as female, and 6 identified as male. There were 34 individuals that work parttime, and 44 of the 49 participants are full-time students. 18 of the students that completed the survey are commuters, and 9 commuters are 22 or older. 34 out of the 49 students are 18-21. 16 students identified as having a disability, and 8 identified as being part of a marginalized group.

### ***Quantitative Results***

Out of the 49 surveys that were analyzed, 3 individuals do not feel comfortable being themselves at Fontbonne. A total of 6 students do not feel like they are a part of the student community. Out of those 6 students, half of them are commuter students. Within the 18 commuter students that completed the survey, 9 of them identified as having a disability which accounts for a little over half of the total participants (56%) that identified as having a disability. 4 commuter students identified as being part of a marginalized group. A total of 6 students do not believe that the messages about diversity and belonging at the University (marketing/website) are consistent with their personal experiences (3 of those responses being from commuter students). 3 out of 9 students that identified as non-white do not feel Fontbonne's messaging matches their experience on campus. There are 2 commuter students that do not feel valued by the institution. Regarding the open answer question, "What could Fontbonne University do to increase your sense of belonging," three responses stuck out. One response was, "International student support." Another response was, "Create more diverse training for minority groups/have more support for these groups." A final response was, "Providing a more open feel with events and picking different student staff for organizations."

### ***Qualitative Results***

The DEIB department at Fontbonne University was created in June 2022. The department is a branch off Multicultural Affairs (MCA). Deanna Williams is the only employee within the department. There is a committee within faculty that meet to talk about DEIB practices at FBU. The committee brings recommendations to executive leadership to attempt to create institutional change. Deanna Williams said that her role within the department is to create trainings and programs for students and staff. The mission of the DEIB department is to create an equitable and inclusive environment. When talking in the interview, Deanna Williams noted that if there is only one staff in a DEIB department at an organization, "that's not institutional change." Researchers learned that there is no required professional development for faculty and staff specifically around DEIB practices. All DEIB trainings on campus are optional. An issue Deanna Williams spoke to in the interview was needing to do a better job with working with the commuter population. She spoke to most programming and groups being geared toward students that live on campus, and the struggle there is to reaching commuters. Deanna Williams mentioned that because there are many institutional components day to day, and because she is only one person, she gets pulled away from different projects to manage situations on campus that need immediate attention. This makes it challenging to create other programs and groups on campus.

## **DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### ***Recommendation 1***

The results from the quantitative survey and from the interview suggest that while commuters make up most undergraduate students at Fontbonne, these students are not being given as much support or being reached in the same way that students that live on campus are. There are 18 students that took the survey that are commuters. Half of those students identified as having a disability. Four commuter students identified as being part of a marginalized group and 3 identified that they do not feel the messaging at FBU matches their experiences on campus. These results show that half of the students that identified as being a part of a marginalized group

and as not feeling the messaging at FBU matches their experiences on campus are commuter students. Along with this, 16 out of 18 commuters are taking a fulltime course load. It is unknown if these classes are in-person, but it can be assumed that there are many commuter students on campus daily. In accordance with the qualitative data showing that the DEIB department is aware of needing to do more to reach the commuter population, the researcher's first recommendation is to increase accessible information on offerings at Fontbonne for support, events, and groups to reach commuters and other students. Some possible ways to do this would be finding ways to send emails, or post things in places that people that don't live on campus are more likely to see. This might also include having more information on Fontbonne's website for students to stay up to date on different things that are happening as not all students have access to Instagram where more events are posted.

### ***Recommendation 2***

The current focus for the DEIB department at FBU is micro level/tier 3 due to having only one staff member working in the department. There is a lack of support employee wise, creating a dynamic where institutional change is impossible. The qualitative data included Deanna Williams saying if one is looking at an organization to assess their DEIB department and there is only one person in the department, "that's not institutional change." The recommendation to enable work at tier 1 and 2 is to increase staffing and resources. Allocating funding to the DEIB department will open space for more employees and will help create mezzo level changes. During her interview, Deanna Williams said, "I could be looking at policy for my queer population, but then something happens that's racially charged and then I gotta switch." This creates a space where only certain needs are being met which means that the University is not utilizing DEIB practices. The qualitative results do not fully match the quantitative results on people feeling their needs are not being met due a lack of conclusive data. Only 8 out of 49 participants identified as part of marginalized groups, and only 12 identified as non-white. Along with this, students from marginalized groups are likely to minimize their experiences because they believe they are being too sensitive even though research has been done to show that they are more likely to endure struggles with institutions of higher educations (Cheng et al., 2020).

### ***Recommendation 3***

The final recommendation is to incorporate DEIB into the curriculum for students and staff. Fontbonne University does currently require one social justice course, however, the qualitative data showed that staff are not required to participate in professional development (PD) courses on DEIB practices. Only having optional PD courses leaves DEIB practices an option rather than a requirement. This could be why a theme within the quantitative results was that the messaging at FBU does not match the personal experiences on campus. There were 6 people that said this in total, and 3/12 non-white participants felt this way. The qualitative data from the interview made it clear that while overt racism is not tolerated there could be microaggressions and personal biases that affect students from marginalized backgrounds. Being a Catholic University creates a higher likelihood of microaggressions due to Catholicism still having exclusive beliefs specifically regarding those that identify as LGBTQIA+ (Hughes, 2019). The qualitative data supports this conundrum because Deanna Williams spoke about the Pope not having made any clear statements on this topic. It is important to fully incorporate DEIB into the curriculum for students and staff because DEIB is a practice, not a marketing tool.

***Limitations***

Due to the limited amount of time for the needs assessment, most researchers filled out the survey to increase the amount of data that would be analyzed. This creates a possible bias and future studies should be done by researchers that are not current students at the university. Another limitation of this study is the demographics of the participants. 77% of participants identified as White which is unrepresentative of the Fontbonne population. The Fontbonne census reports that 59% of students identify as White. Future studies should target marginalized groups of students to gather more conclusive data.

**CONCLUSION**

The results from the survey were inconclusive due to limitation, however, the information still is valuable and offers a starting point for future needs assessments. The quantitative results from this study appear to show that community needs are being met by Fontbonne, but the qualitative results and other research assume the opposite. To get more conclusive data, further research should be done utilizing surveys that include more questions that are specific to DEIB practices at Fontbonne. The research and results from the study identify that the DEIB department does not have the resources needed to engage in supportive practices to students. The recommendation to increase resources is allocating more funding specifically to the DEIB department and increasing staff. A barrier and gap that exists at FBU to providing DEIB practices is optional PD and being a Catholic university. It will be important for Fontbonne to reflect on ways to fully engage in DEIB practices to meet the needs of the students they market to online.

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