

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) Plan

Graduate Counseling Program

Eastern Mennonite University

2026

The EMU Graduate Counseling Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) Plan is reviewed for progress, completion, and improvement regularly as part of the program's evaluation cycle. Changes are noted in the annual evaluation report and a revised and approved DEIB plan is created for the following academic year. The current EMU Graduate Counseling DEIB Plan is published publicly on the EMU Graduate Counseling website.

Graduate Counseling DEIB Plan

In alignment with the values and mission of EMU, as well as the ethical standards of the counseling profession and the 2024 CACREP standards, the EMU Graduate Counseling Program regularly and systematically engages in programming, planning, and evaluation efforts to enhance diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) among students, faculty, and staff. These efforts, in turn, strengthen the application of knowledge and skills that promote educational and clinical environments where DEIB is actively fostered for all students, faculty, staff, and clients. The EMU Graduate Counseling DEIB plan includes evaluation of the program's mission statement and objectives, faculty, staff, and student training and professional development opportunities, and projects that provide direct funding to support programmatic DEIB initiatives.

We build on the foundation laid by EMU's university-wide DEI office which can be found at emu.edu/dei/ and the definitions used below are found on the EMU DEI Office page called "[Our Definitions & Theory of Change](#)".

Graduate Counseling Mission Statement

We strive to achieve the highest standards of training for clinical mental health counselors, emphasizing applied clinical skill and professional readiness, counselor identity formation, service to the underserved, multicultural development and awareness, social justice through advocacy, reflective self-awareness, and celebration and appreciation of difference within a community environment

Program Objective

#4. In alignment with EMU's Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition, the Graduate Counseling program cultivates a diverse learning community that values diversity, equity, inclusiveness, and belonging for students, staff and faculty by reducing barriers to recruitment, retention, and graduation, guided by the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging plan.

Diversity and Underrepresented Populations

"Diversity - We are committed to embracing persons who represent a range of backgrounds, experiences, social identities, and views that intersect in many ways. We value the uniqueness and gifts of each individual. Some examples of diverse factors include race and ethnicity, gender and gender identity, sexual orientation, relationship status, socio-economic status, language, culture, place of origin, religious, spiritual, and non-religious expressions, age, educational background, and (dis)ability status" (EMU DEI Office).

Identifying Underrepresented Populations

The EMU graduate counseling program identifies underrepresented populations using definitions offered by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), the EMU graduate counseling program's demographic data trends, and information provided on student applications. Based on HRSA definitions and historical program data we know that some populations that are historically underrepresented in our program are:

- Black, Hispanic, Indigenous, Asian, first generation college students, students from a rural background, transgender/nonbinary students, and religious minority students.

Other factors are also important elements of diversity, such as students' sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, disability status, and cultural background. While these data are not currently collected from students, the EMU graduate counseling program still strives to cultivate awareness of these factors and works to reduce the associated barriers (e.g. all-gender restrooms). The graduate counseling program actively works to cultivate an inclusive community in which students, faculty, and staff can express their intersectional identities.

Action Items:

- Develop partnerships with local HBCUs, Hispanic-serving institutions, and tribal colleges to increase recruitment of underrepresented students.
- Create a targeted annual marketing campaign (e.g., digital ads, social media features, and alum spotlights) that highlight diverse student experiences and program inclusivity.
- Establish an annual "Pathways to Counseling" informational session for first-generation college students and underrepresented groups.
- Track faculty and staff demographics to assess representational diversity and identify areas for intentional recruitment.
- Review admissions processes annually to identify and mitigate potential barriers (e.g., application fees, recommendation requirements, GRE waivers, or bias in interviews).
- Maintain and review annual demographic data reports with the DEIB Committee and include summary findings in the program's annual evaluation report.

What we do:

- Collect demographic data on program applicants each year, via the graduate program application form.
- Collect demographic data on applicants for open faculty/staff positions, as applicable.
- Analyze demographic data related to recruitment, retention, and graduation annually
- Update recruitment strategies based on findings from demographic data
- Graduate Recruiters and/or faculty/staff in the EMU graduate counseling program strive to visit and provide promotional materials to:
 - Latino Student Alliance at EMU, and Latino groups at local colleges and universities;
 - Black Student Alliance at EMU, and African American student groups at local colleges and universities;
 - Asian American Pacific Islander Student Association (AAPISA) at EMU;
 - International Student Organization at EMU, and at local colleges and universities;

- Blue Ridge Community College psychology classes; and
- EMU undergraduate classes, such as psychology and social work classes.

Equity and Reducing Barriers

“Equity - We are committed to working in a relationship to identify and name what each member of our community needs to have equal access and opportunities to thrive. We will take the necessary steps to correct past, present, and future inequities. This includes removing systemic barriers that have historically prevented full participation for marginalized groups, within both EMU and society at large” (EMU DEI Office).

Action Items:

- Create an annual faculty/staff equity audit process to review policies, syllabi, and departmental practices for unintentional bias or barriers.
- Offer annual workshops or discussion circles focused on equity in pedagogy, supervision, and clinical practice.
- Expand use of inclusive language and accessible course materials (captioning, screen-reader–friendly documents, and plain-language handouts).
- Offer financial literacy sessions to help students manage graduate school costs and access external scholarship opportunities.
- Continue identifying and applying for external grants that fund stipends, travel, and professional development for underrepresented students.
- Evaluate and revise advising practices to ensure equitable access to mentoring and faculty support for all students.
- Encourage faculty to include diverse readings, case studies, and client perspectives in every core course.

What we do:

- MAC Grant Fund : In celebration of their graduation, the 2022 MA in Counseling (MAC) Cohort established the MAC Grant Fund. This fund provides direct financial support to EMU graduate counseling students, with preference given to BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color).
- Grant funding from the HRSA: Building on two previous grant awards, a recent \$2.3 million grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HRSA BHWET Pro) has allowed us to expand our practicums and internships to address underserved, rural communities, children and adolescents, and integrated mental health practice in interprofessional environments. In addition to many other benefits, these grants provide \$25k in stipend support to our internship students who qualify, travel stipends, and conference registration reimbursements.
- Expanded focus for faculty and staff development: All faculty and staff in the EMU graduate counseling program stay current on contemporary trends and resources to promote equity and reduce barriers (e.g. entire graduate counseling faculty/staff read *Inclusive Teaching: Strategies for Promoting Equity in College Classroom* (2022) by Kelley Hogan and Viji Sathy during SU23).

- Reduce barriers: Reduce academic jargon that presents a barrier to students who may be less comfortable/familiar with the academic space (Hogan & Sathy, 2022). For example, we changed “Office Hours” to “Student Hours” and explicitly discuss “greet”, “meet” and “work” categories of student hours to help students connect with graduate counseling faculty.

Inclusiveness and Cultivating a Diverse Learning Community

“Inclusion - We are committed to ensuring that everyone is an active participant in our community of learners and is seen for who they are. This means intentionally engaging with diversity to foster spaces where everyone can belong, both within affinity groups and across differences, recognizing cultural norms and biases, discussing issues of equity or privilege, and respecting the expression of diverse ideas” (EMU DEI Office).

Action Pieces:

- Provide an annual orientation workshop for faculty on fostering inclusive classroom dialogue and responding to microaggressions.
- Ensure every course includes at least one structured learning activity centered on cultural humility or intersectional identity.
- Regularly assess student perceptions of inclusion and belonging through climate surveys and focus groups.
- Include DEIB competencies as part of annual faculty and staff evaluation and professional development goals.
- Offer joint faculty-student service projects or advocacy initiatives with local community agencies that serve underrepresented populations.
- Support affinity-based student organizations and create opportunities for collaboration across groups to build shared understanding.

What we do:

- Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI): As reflected in Mastery Competency Assignments in COUN 507: Professional Identity, Function, and Ethics and COUN 610: Multicultural Counseling, all students take the Intercultural Development Inventory, administered by a trained evaluator (Dr. Greg Czyszczon), for personal and professional development.
- Expanded Training:
 - COUN 610: Advanced Multicultural class: The required coursework determined by the Virginia Board of Counseling includes a course in multicultural counseling. In our program, students fulfill this requirement by taking the COUN 607 Multicultural Counseling course. In spring 2021, we instituted a new course: COUN 610 Advanced Multicultural Counseling. Students are required to take the Advanced Multicultural course after taking the introductory Multicultural Counseling course.
 - In the first semester of Multicultural Counseling, students are asked to demonstrate growing competency primarily in the developmental domains of self-awareness and client worldview; in the second semester, students

demonstrate increasing competency in these areas and growing competency in application of skills within the domains of the counseling relationship and counseling advocacy through the implementation of their advocacy projects.

- Opportunities for faculty and staff to participate in DEIB training and intercultural development initiatives. For example, Dr. Jennifer Cline completed a 2 -day intensive training with Dr. Sonja Sutherland on Racial and Intergenerational Trauma.
- Mentorship Program:
 - All incoming students are paired with a 2nd or 3rd year volunteer student mentor. A graduate counseling mentor may share with a mentee information about their own path to and through graduate school (so far), as well as provide guidance, motivation, support, and role modeling.
 - In addition, faculty and staff are encouraged to participate in peer mentorship and professional development mentorship to foster an inclusive and supportive campus environment.
- Focused advising: Students who are conditionally admitted or otherwise identified as needing extra support will be assigned to or may elect to join a focused advising group led by Dr. Cheree Hammond.
- Size inclusivity: Purposefully choosing furniture that is accommodating of all sizes

Belonging

“Belonging - We are committed to fostering a sense of connection with each other and within the school/campus/institution/community. We work to build reciprocal relationships where everyone’s humanity and right to exist are not threatened; we strive for everyone to feel accepted, respected, loved, and value” (EMU DEI Office).

Action Pieces

- Host quarterly community-building events (e.g., potlucks, open mic nights, storytelling evenings) designed to strengthen connection and cross-cohort engagement.
- Develop a “Welcome to MAC” video and digital guide introducing faculty, student leaders, and key resources to new students.
- Establish a peer recognition program (“Caught Caring” or “Community Builder of the Month”) celebrating acts that enhance belonging.
- Encourage faculty and staff to hold “open office” lunches or coffee hours where students can connect informally.
- Partner with EMU’s DEI Office to provide “Belonging Check-Ins” or restorative dialogue sessions after significant national or campus events.
- Expand physical representations of belonging in department spaces (e.g., multilingual signage, student artwork, rotating cultural displays).
- Integrate belonging-oriented reflection prompts into student evaluations and faculty development plans.

What we do:

- Regular feedback from students during student lunch with the director (fall and spring for each cohort - 1st year and 2nd and 3rd year students) and annual surveys (alumni, supervisor, employer).
- Institution of cultural oasis - a space for students and affinity groups to find solace, inspiration, and connection.
- Symbolism displayed in department and across campus (e.g. pride flag, rainbow stickers, gender neutral bathroom signs, BLM mural, hall of nations, and land acknowledgment).
- Intentional in-class exercises to build safety, trust, relationships, and belonging within cohorts.
- Encourage faculty, staff, students, and alumni to participate in shared cultural and social activities that promote belonging and understanding across diverse identities and backgrounds (e.g. open mic night).