# Examining Belongingness, Uniqueness, and Inclusivity Within a Land-Grant University Agricultural and Life Sciences Institute

**Whitney Stone[1], Olivia Caillouet[2], Annie Muscato[3], Colby Silvert[4], and John Diaz[5]**

[1]Department of Agricultural Education and Agricultural Sciences, Oregon State University
[2]Department of Agricultural Education and Communication, University of Florida
[3]Department of Agricultural Education and Communication, University of Florida
[4]Department of Agricultural Education and Communication University of Florida
[5]Department of Agricultural Education and Communication University of Florida

Correspondence regarding this article should be addressed to Whitney Stone. Email: whitney.stone@oregonstate.edu

## Abstract

This mixed methods study aimed to explore the perceptions of employees' belongingness, uniqueness, and inclusivity within the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) system. A survey with quantitative and qualitative questions was used for data collection from February to April 2021. Respondents were UF/IFAS employees, faculty, students, and Extension professionals (n = 430). White (non-Hispanic) Extension professional respondents reported significantly greater levels of organizational belongingness than Extension respondents classified as Other ethnicities. No other significant differences were found for the three constructs among Extension, main campus, or student respondents. The qualitative survey data converged with the quantitative survey data and provided a more complete understanding of respondents' perceptions of organizational diversity, equity, and inclusivity (DEI). Respondents indicated improvements are needed for diversity and inclusivity initiatives, resources, and training. Key recommendations were that UF/IFAS continue DEI initiatives while better tailoring efforts toward meeting the needs of Extension professionals and Hispanic students. Building on the foundational understanding garnered from the present study, future research should explore inclusivity beyond ethnicity and also consider gender, sexual orientation, and income levels.

The social movements of 2020 and 2021 encouraged an awakening by organizational leaders to prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) activities for employees and approaches to management (Fickess, 2021; Monroe, 2020). However, at that time, many organizations and leaders were not prepared to handle difficult conversations with employees about racial and social issues (Harris, 2022). Research demonstrates that within organizations, DEI initiatives are the right thing to do and imperative in

achieving success and employee satisfaction (Creary et al., 2021). As a result, many companies have spent millions of dollars on diversity training programs; however, they have yielded little change for underrepresented groups, women, and minorities (Perez, 2019). Similarly, in higher education, many recognize the importance of diversifying science, technology, engineering, and mathematical (STEM) disciplines, but diversity has failed to be consistently or clearly defined (Gonzales et al., 2021).

As organizations become more reflective of the diverse United States (U.S.) population, employers and employees need to be equipped to understand and effectively respond to varying populations' interests and needs expressed by racial minorities, women, varying ages, people with disabilities, veterans, and groups with expanding gender and sexual orientation spectrums (Bell-Rose & Ollen, 2021). To do this, organizations must determine their baseline when targeting diversity and inclusivity goals to assess opportunities for improvement (Perez, 2019). Based on this need in the context of a land-grant university (LGU) and Cooperative Extension system, this study provides a baseline evaluation of employees' perceptions of belongingness, uniqueness, and inclusivity. The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of faculty, students, and staffs' belongingness, uniqueness, and inclusivity within the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) system.

## Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

The theoretical framework was based on Brewer's (1991) Optimal Distinctiveness Theory (ODT), which posits that "social identity derives from a fundamental tension between human needs for validation and similarity to others and a countervailing need for individuation and uniqueness" (Brewer, 1991, p. 477). According to ODT, individuals attempt to maximize their needs for belongingness and uniqueness, which are vital to the individual's self-esteem (Brewer, 1991). Applied to this context of this study, belongingness was the way UF/IFAS members felt connected to the university system and workplace. Uniqueness in this study related to how members of UF/IFAS felt they could share their individual viewpoints and perspectives in various environments of the system. Depending on the context, individuals may find the qualities of belongingness or uniqueness more important to them (Shore et al., 2011). Shore et al. (2011) extended the theory to include and define inclusivity as "the degree to which an employee perceives that he or she [they] are an esteemed member of the workgroup through experiencing treatment that satisfies his or her needs for belongingness and uniqueness" (p. 1265). In this study, inclusivity related to how members of UF/IFAS felt different environments tried to include different types of people and treat them all fairly and equally. Although challenges exist for individuals assimilating into a work environment, Brewer (1991) supported the notion that individuals have been capable of belonging to a group while also maintaining their unique identity.

## Land-Grant Universities and Extension

In their original inception, LGUs served society's agrarian interests, and scholarship concentrated on agriculture (McDowell, 2003). This principle remains as LGUs continue producing agricultural scholarship and provide relevant and useful knowledge to communities (Burkhart-Kriesl et al., 2019; McDowell, 2003). Extension has worked with multiple sectors in communities, including government, businesses, farmers, nonprofits, and residents, to bridge the knowledge from LGUs and the knowledge needs of communities (Kaufman et al., 2017; Stoecker, 2014). Correspondingly, Extension professionals provide an array of expertise in nutrition, food systems, agriculture, physical activity, public health, and leadership to support clientele. Nonetheless, shifting clientele demographics and differing needs have challenged Extension to adjust educational methodologies, programming foci, and program delivery to be relevant and appealing to diverse communities (Narine et al., 2021). In the 21st century, Florida's communities continue to evolve with diverse needs and populations (Caillouet & Harder, 2021). As such, previous research conducted by UF/IFAS identified the need to better serve underrepresented populations (Harder et al., 2013), but challenges persist, and research is lacking around best practices and policies.

## Belongingness, Uniqueness, and Inclusivity

Metzger et al. (2020) defined inclusivity as "the intentional incorporation of practices that foster a sense of belonging by promoting meaningful interactions among persons and groups representing different traits, perceptions, and experiences" (p. 5). However, if organizations only focus on recruiting diverse individuals without fostering a culture of inclusivity, their voices can go unheard in organizational decision-making (Randel et al., 2018). In the workplace context, previous research consistently reports that minority groups experience unfair treatment in their workplaces, including disparity in earnings, discriminatory behaviors, and lack of career opportunities (Human Resource Management International Digest [HRMID], 2018), perpetuating a non-inclusive environment.

The concepts of belongingness and uniqueness in the literature are often studied together within inclusivity (e.g., Chaudhry et al., 2020; Chung et al., 2019) because the concepts of belongingness and uniqueness are directly related (Huang et al., 2020). The concept of uniqueness includes celebrating individuals' knowledge, skills, and experience instead of focusing solely on demographic differences (HRMID, 2018). Individuals with unique lived experiences can benefit the organization by offering knowledge previously unexplored (Monroe, 2020). Unfortunately, when unique identities are not embraced within an organization, it causes individuals to assimilate to the workplace culture, discouraging them from sharing aspects of themselves (Ortlieb, 2021). Contrarily, Randel et al. (2018) encouraged organizational leaders to embrace valuing uniqueness while promoting a sense of belonging. Ideally, employees should not feel like they have to conform if they have unique perspectives, and organizations should

consider creating social support for uniqueness to be encouraged (Randel et al., 2018).

Inclusivity is critical to organizational success because it is directly related to employee commitment and job satisfaction (Chung et al., 2019). Furthermore, the degree of uniqueness and belongingness employees perceive in their workplace can significantly increase the attractiveness of a business for diverse applicants applying for jobs (Huang et al., 2020). It is important to note that individuals should understand a sense of belongingness differently in their workplace setting compared to their social and familial environments (Cockshaw et al., 2014; Jena & Pradhan, 2018). Previous literature reported that organizations benefit when employees have a sense of belongingness at work and are accepted and respected, resulting in stronger connections to the organization needed to promote its cause (Enwereuzor, 2020; Kyei-Poku & Ying, 2020).

## Inclusivity Within Extension and Higher Education

Diaz et al. (2021) found, via DEI expert consensus, that Extension professionals should practice open-mindedness, respect, humility, empathy, trustworthiness, and honesty in the first few years of their career to develop intercultural competence in the field. In addition to these traits, Extension educators should develop the attitude to be lifelong learners around issues of DEI (Diaz et al., 2021). Caillouet and Harder (2021) also reported that the diversity of Extension clientele across Florida has increased in the 21st century, which has created issues providing equitable programming. Specifically, Extension may consider diversifying hiring practices to target more multilingual individuals (Spanish and English speakers) and make programs accessible to individuals with low incomes (Caillouet & Harder, 2021).

For an existing example from the sector, Extension's 4-H programming embraces inclusivity by its youth members by pledging to think about others and promote programming in safe environments (Hamilton-Honey, 2017). Hamilton-Honey (2017) found that in creating communication materials for LGBTQ+ youth in 4-H, there was a need to educate 4-H youth, adults, and community members on inclusive terminology and language. Stakeholders in 4-H can support organizational changes, including promoting inclusivity initiatives that serve LGBTQ+ youth (Elliot-Engel et al., 2021). In addition to Extension, inclusivity within higher education is a critical component of all LGUs.

Teachers in higher education perform better when they work in environments that promote uniqueness and belongingness (Parveen et al., 2021). Diverse faculty can be hired in higher education, yet that does not necessarily equate to the working environment being inclusive. For instance, Pittman (2012) found that Black faculty experienced a multitude of racial microaggressions and microinvalidations while working at predominately white institutions (PWIs). Moreover, Black and other minority ethnic faculty can be overburdened and disproportionately asked to contribute to inclusive programming at their institution (e.g., serving on multiple DEI committees/initiatives; Doharty et al., 2020). Similarly, Winkler et al. (2018) found that STEM students

of color felt differently depending on the type of institution they attended. For example, students felt isolated at PWIs in comparison to a historically Black college and university where they felt supported and included (Winkler et al., 2018). Inclusivity in higher education promotes meaningful social and academic interactions with students who have differing perspectives, lived experiences, and social identities (Tienda, 2013). While inclusivity is frequently studied at the classroom level, examining what practices and pedagogies can meet diverse student needs (Brock et al., 2019), the authors identified a gap regarding a broader approach to understanding DEI within LGUs.

## Methods

The concurrent mixed method approach (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018) included one survey instrument with a quantitative component that examined belongingness, uniqueness, and inclusivity, followed by a qualitative component. The qualitative component further explored the reasonings for the quantitative ratings respondents provided in the survey. The survey instrument was administered via an online survey platform, Qualtrics, and consisted of Likert-scale and open-ended questions. This study was approved by University of Florida's Institutional Review Board (IRB 202002827), and participation in the survey was voluntary.

### Participants

The survey was sent to 935 individuals associated with UF/IFAS Extension districts and Research and Education Centers (RECs) that agreed to participate. Three email reminders were sent before the completion of the study. UF/IFAS has been classified as a PWI (Lomotey, 2010), with the Fall 2021 race/ethnicity composition reporting the majority of individuals identified as White (59.7%), Hispanic/ Latino (15.0%), Asian (5%), and Black (5%) (UF Institutional Planning and Research, 2021). Respondents were UF/ IFAS students, faculty, and Extension professionals (n = 412), which resulted in a response rate of 44%. More specifically, the individuals included county Extension employees (e.g., specialized agents; regional agents; staff, etc.), students (e.g., undergraduate and graduate), and main-campus employees (non-tenure track lecturers; tenure-track professors, department staff, etc.). UF/IFAS encompasses Extension, the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences (CALS), and the Florida Agricultural Experiment Station (UF/IFAS Extension, 2021). In total, Florida has 67 counties with Extension offices in each county (UF/IFAS, 2021). Additionally, this includes 12 RECs, Research and Demonstration Sites, and other offices located throughout the state (UF/IFAS Extension, 2021).

### Instrument and Data Collection

An online survey was pilot-tested via Qualtrics from December 2020 through January 2021 to individuals employed through the UF/IFAS system. This survey served to support the piloting of the instrument as a formative needs assessment-type activity for the DEI committees for the UF/IFAS organization. Researchers distributed the

final version of the survey from February 2021 to April 2021. The final survey consisted of four main parts: (a) belongingness statements, (b) uniqueness statements, (c) inclusivity statements, and (d) demographic questions. The survey instrument was based on the Work-Group Inclusion instrument (Chung et al., 2019), which studied different components of belongingness within organizational contexts. The survey instrument was modified to incorporate specific demographic questions related to UF/IFAS, such as specific Extension programmatic areas or years worked at UF/IFAS.

Then, a panel of experts reviewed the survey that included survey methodologists, Extension directors, DEI Extension experts, and education specialists. The survey was soft launched to obtain clarity and any necessary final question re-organization through feedback provided by Extension agents. As a result, researchers added inclusivity with varying levels of scales. The three survey constructs were tested for reliability using Cronbach's alpha with belongingness and uniqueness constructs that demonstrated high levels of internal consistency (.90). The inclusivity construct had acceptable internal consistency (.87), per social science and education research standards (Ary et al., 2019; University of California Los Angeles, n.d.). Then, the final survey instrument's sampling frame was limited to the Extension districts and RECs that agreed to participate.

## Data Analysis

The quantitative data analysis occurred using SPSS statistical software. Descriptive statistics were used for the survey respondent demographics, and inferential statistics were applied to determine if any significant differences occurred between respondent sub-samples categorized by ethnicity, job position, and years worked for UF/IFAS. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests were used to determine if there were statistically significant differences between students, main campus faculty, and county-based Extension regarding the three survey constructs (belongingness, uniqueness, and inclusivity) and ethnicities (Laerd Statistics n.d.). Also, overall means were used to describe respondents' feelings of belongingness, uniqueness, and inclusivity within UF/IFAS.

Simultaneously, a qualitative approach was used to analyze the survey participants' responses to the open-ended questions. Per the recommendation of Krippendorff's (2004) hermeneutic loop, the researchers involved in the study adopted an iterative process of reviewing and re-reviewing the data while simultaneously contextualizing, interpreting, and defining themes within the content. Following Creswell and Poth's (2018) thematic analysis suggestions, document memoing was used by the researchers, which summarized and identified theme code categories. An abductive research approach was used to construct sub-themes and develop a codebook describing themes and patterns consistent across the data set (Delputte & Orbie, 2017). The codebook served as the guiding foundation for the researchers' qualitative analysis. Finally, the researchers developed narrative descriptions of the themes and sub-themes to describe the survey participants' perceptions of belonging and inclusivity within UF/IFAS.

The researchers applied recommended techniques for quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods research to boost validity, reliability, and trustworthiness. For instance, two internal analysts performed qualitative coding and an external reviewer provided feedback and confirmation that the coding reflected a non-biased process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Furthermore, member checking with participants was utilized to enhance trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Although a member check was not conducted with students, county Extension and REC leaders were sent reports to share the survey results and seek feedback. Throughout the entire data analysis process, detailed records were kept for an audit trail including (a) raw survey data, (b) incomplete survey responses, (c) statistical outputs, and (d) the qualitative code book (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

## Data Convergence and Reflexivity Statement

The research team worked together to analyze the convergence and divergence of the data. To integrate the data, two authors conducted the quantitative analysis, and two other authors qualitatively analyzed the data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Afterward, the researchers looked for similar concepts across both data sets centering around the constructs. The findings were written separately. Then, the researchers compared results while expanding on the data interpretation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Because qualitative researchers cannot separate themselves fully from the data analysis process and may draw on personal experience within the study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018), the researchers deemed it important to include positionality statements. The first four authors were graduate students at the University of Florida (UF) specializing in different fields of communication, Extension, and leadership. The fifth author is an Assistant Professor and Extension specialist at UF who distributed the survey. The authors did not participate in the study.

## Limitations

This research is limited by its sampling process, which could have contributed to bias. Furthermore, the constraints of a PWI resulted in some inability to conduct quantitative analyses. Namely, individuals might not have felt comfortable answering questions fully since they could have been identified by ethnicity or their county location. Also, a limitation of this study was a lack of defining the three key terms used throughout the survey instrument: belongingness, uniqueness, and inclusivity.

## Results

### Respondents

Of the 412 respondents who completed at least 75% of the survey, there were 396 respondents who were categorized as either UF/IFAS Extension (n = 247, 62.4%), main campus (n = 92, 23.2%), or students (n = 57, 14.4%).

However, individuals held a variety of positions within those categories such as county Extension faculty (n = 136, 32.6%); department of center staff (n = 54, 12.9%); tenure track faculty (n = 42, 10.1%); and graduate students (n = 44, 10.6%). Furthermore, there were individuals from all five of the UF/IFAS Extension districts. The most common Extension programmatic areas reported by respondents were: (a) 4-H youth development (n = 47, 24%), agriculture (n = 39, 19.9%), (c) horticulture (n = 36, 18.4%), and (d) family and consumer sciences (n = 36, 18.4%). The number of years respondents worked at UF/IFAS varied from a year or less (n = 36, 9.8%) to upwards of 25 or more years (n = 23; 6.3%). Critical to this study, respondents self-identified their ethnicity as one of six categories: (a) White (non-Hispanic) (n = 254, 68.1%); White (Hispanic) (n = 52, 13.9%); Asian (n = 27, 7.2%); Black or African American (n = 15; 4.0%); American Indian or Alaska Native (n = 3; 0.8%); or Other (n = 22, 5.9%).

## Belongingness, Uniqueness, and Inclusivity Constructs

Belongingness refers to feelings of acceptance, uniqueness refers to individual differences yet still being accepted, and inclusivity was described as an employee's satisfaction with both belongingness and uniqueness (Chung et al., 2019). To evaluate the constructs, ANOVAs were used to determine if there were differences in scores between various ethnicities and positions within UF/IFAS. The constructs' belongingness and uniqueness each had five individual scores and seven Likert-scale response options with index scores ranging from a minimum of 1 (strongly disagree) to a maximum of 7 (strongly agree). The inclusivity scores were calculated by totaling the five individual scores that could range from a minimum of 1 (not at all inclusive) to a maximum of 5 (extremely inclusive). Statistically significant differences were found among varying Extension, main campus, and students' ethnicities.

### Belongingness

Statistically significant differences were identified among Extension, main campus, and student ethnicities regarding the belongingness construct. The greater the mean, the more respondents strongly agreed with statements, such as "I am treated as a valued member of UF/IFAS" and "I belong in UF/IFAS." There was a statistically significant difference in Extension respondents' belongingness scores as determined by a one-way ANOVA (F (5, 219) = 2.2776, p ≤.05). A Tukey post hoc test revealed White (non-Hispanic) respondents (M = 5.97, SD = 1.07) and other ethnicities (M = 4.98, SD = 0.80) differed significantly at p ≤.05. No statistically significant differences were found among main campus or student respondents.

The researchers further explored the qualitative data and found three sub-themes organized around the theme of belongingness, including: (a) opinion not valued, (b) favoritism, and (c) (lack of) acceptance. Respondents discussed the varying levels of value they felt by expressing their own opinions or the observations of others. For example, in Extension, a county staff member commented, "I am just staff. People at the state level know that my position exists but are unconcerned over who fills the space." Feeling valued was also discussed regarding the importance placed on Extension efforts at the university-level. Extension respondents did not feel like the main campus valued their roles. Respondents discussed how certain people were favored especially regarding who was offered opportunities by leadership. For instance, one Extension respondent explained, "My county director does not always listen and shows favoritism to her program's staff and herself."

Extension respondents also wrote about a lack of acceptance based on "deep south attitudes" regarding race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. Extension respondents reported not feeling safe in their workplace and explained they did not feel comfortable to be themselves. For instance, an Extension respondent noted, "When you are the only

**Table 1.**

*Feelings of belongingness of extension, main campus, and student respondents at University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences.*

| Ethnicity | Extension | | | Main campus | | | Students | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | *n* | *M* | *SD* | *n* | *M* | *SD* | *n* | *M* | *SD* |
| White (non-Hispanic) | 164 | 5.97 | 1.07 | 58 | 5.87 | 0.83 | 23 | 5.85 | 0.82 |
| Black or African American | 10 | 5.32 | 1.04 | 2 | 5.70 | 1.55 | 3 | 6.40 | 0.87 |
| American Indian or Alaska Native | 2 | 6.60 | 0.56 | 0 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 1 | 6.60 | 0.0 |
| Asian | 7 | 5.83 | 1.14 | 13 | 5.97 | 1.03 | 7 | 6.08 | 1.44 |
| Other | 12 | 4.98* | 0.80 | 3 | 6.20 | 1.05 | 7 | 5.68 | 0.82 |
| White (Hispanic) | 30 | 5.87* | 0.96 | 9 | 6.07 | .75 | 12 | 5.50 | 1.42 |
| Total | 225 | 5.87 | 1.06 | 85 | 5.92 | 0.86 | 53 | 5.83 | 1.06 |

*Note. n* = number of people in the sample for each category of employment; *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation. Likert-type scale responses ranged from 1 to 7. 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = somewhat disagree; 4 = neither agree nor disagree; 5 = somewhat agree; 6 = agree; 7 = strongly agree. * Significant at p ≤ .05.

minority in your office, it is difficult to be yourself due to judgement," and another Extension respondent wrote, "I am afraid of my clientele learning that I am a lesbian and discrediting the work that I do." Similarly, a graduate student respondent stated, "diverging opinions are not valued or listened to" while describing experiencing a lack of belonging at the REC where they worked.

### Uniqueness

Along the same lines as the belongingness construct, the greater the mean, the more respondents strongly agreed with uniqueness statements such as "I can bring aspects of myself to work that others in UF [UF/IFAS] don't have in common with me," and "People in UF [UF/IFAS] listen to me even when me views are dissimilar." There were no statistically significant differences found among Extension respondents regarding feelings of organizational uniqueness. No statistically significant differences were found among main campus or student respondents. This could be because of the low and imbalanced sample sizes and is a potential limitation of the study.

Based on the codebook definition of uniqueness, researchers did not find themes that strongly support this definition (see discussion section). As a result, sub-themes related to diversity emerged that included: (a) lacking diversity, (b) DEI efforts not genuine, and (c) aversion to DEI efforts. Extension respondents discussed a lack of diversity within leadership, among their peers, and clientele. Some respondents did not clarify what they considered diverse, but one Extension respondent wrote, "We don't have a lot of variety in our district." However, another Extension respondent expressed, "Our county office is not at all diverse. All one race, mostly all one gender." Respondents explained that UF/IFAS DEI efforts did not seem genuine but more of an activity to fill a quota or to "fill a checkbox." An Extension respondent noted that they have had clientele who thought the inclusivity efforts were to fulfill quotas. For instance, they wrote, "When I hear youth saying, 'I am at

UF because they needed more Hispanics'. They don't think they would have been given the opportunities at UF if they would have been non-Hispanic. I was shocked hearing this." Additionally, there was an aversion to the DEI efforts the UF/IFAS Extension had made. An Extension agent who participated in the study suggested the university has taken intentional DEI efforts too far in respect to the hiring process, stating, "Hiring, promotion, and support should be based upon qualifications and capabilities alone." The same sentiment was shared in the context of working with Extension clientele. One respondent stated, "Serving clients should be based upon needs…," suggesting it unnecessary to additionally focus on DEI efforts as Extension agents.

### Inclusivity

Inclusivity was determined by asking respondents to identify their perception for various levels and program areas within UF/IFAS: (a) UF/IFAS state level, (b) Extension districts, (c) county Extension offices, (d) Extension clientele, and (e) Extension program area. The Likert-type scale responses ranged from not at all inclusive (1) to extremely inclusive (5) with higher scores representing greater feelings of inclusivity. No statistically significant differences were found among respondents. However, this could be attributed to the low and imbalanced sample sizes and is a limitation of the study's results.

Three sub-themes emerged in the theme of inclusivity, including: (a) promoting inclusivity, (b) lacking inclusivity, and (c) struggling in communication. As evident in the quantitative results, main campus respondents felt that overall, inclusivity was promoted at the university, district, and local level. An example statement promoting this sub-theme was "Our programs include people from all walks of life, all races and from poverty level to wealthy participants." However, many statements from students noted a lack of inclusivity. One student expressed a lack of inclusivity regarding their teachers and wrote, "I can count on one hand how many African American or Hispanic agriculture

**Table 2.**

*Feelings of uniqueness of extension, main campus, and student respondents at University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences.*

| Ethnicity | Extension | | | Main campus | | | Students | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *n* | *M* | *SD* | *n* | *M* | *SD* | *n* | *M* | *SD* |
| White (non-Hispanic) | 167 | 5.55 | 1.18 | 57 | 5.56 | 1.13 | 23 | 5.75 | 0.76 |
| Black or African American | 10 | 4.90 | 1.02 | 2 | 5.60 | 1.98 | 3 | 5.27 | 1.63 |
| American Indian or Alaska Native | 2 | 6.40 | 0.85 | 0 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 1 | 6.00 | 0.00 |
| Asian | 7 | 5.37 | 1.26 | 12 | 6.07 | 0.75 | 7 | 6.00 | 0.91 |
| Other | 12 | 4.60 | 1.31 | 3 | 6.53 | 0.50 | 7 | 5.68 | 1.21 |
| White (Hispanic) | 31 | 5.53 | 1.00 | 9 | 5.31 | 1.40 | 12 | 4.62 | 1.57 |
| Total | 229 | 5.47 | 1.17 | 83 | 5.64 | 1.13 | 53 | 5.49 | 1.18 |

*Note. n* = number of people in the sample for each category of employment; *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation. Likert-type scale responses ranged from 1 to 7. 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = somewhat disagree; 4 = neither agree nor disagree; 5 = somewhat agree; 6 = agree; 7 = strongly agree. * Significant at p ≤ .05.

**Table 3.**

*Feelings of inclusivity of extension, main campus, and student respondents at University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences.*

| Ethnicity | Extension | | | Main campus | | | Students | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *n* | *M* | *SD* | *n* | *M* | *SD* | *n* | *M* | *SD* |
| White (non-Hispanic) | 137 | 3.69 | 0.84 | 41 | 3.76 | 0.72 | 12 | 3.83 | 0.78 |
| Black or African American | 8 | 3.02 | 0.79 | 2 | 3.50 | 0.71 | 2 | 3.30 | 0.14 |
| American Indian or Alaska Native | 1 | 3.40 | 0.00 | 0 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 1 | 4.00 | 0.00 |
| Asian | 5 | 3.36 | 0.86 | 10 | 4.26 | 0.78 | 6 | 3.97 | 1.06 |
| Other | 8 | 2.52 | 0.73 | 2 | 3.80 | 1.41 | 5 | 3.80 | 0.71 |
| White (Hispanic) | 23 | 3.21 | 0.92 | 8 | 3.72 | 1.02 | 4 | 2.70 | 1.55 |
| Total | 182 | 3.53 | 0.88 | 63 | 3.83 | 0.78 | 30 | 3.67 | 0.96 |

**Note.** *n* = number of people in the sample for each category of employment; *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation. Likert-type scale responses ranged from 1 to 7. 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = somewhat disagree; 4 = neither agree nor disagree; 5 = somewhat agree; 6 = agree; 7 = strongly agree. * Significant at $p \leq .05$.

teachers I have seen in my time, and I have never seen a Native American or Asian agriculture teacher either. AG education is not a good representation of the melting pot that is America."

Many Extension respondents felt lacking in inclusivity, noting an overall feeling of exclusion, exclusory clientele, needing more inclusivity training and improvements, and recognizing some departments/centers had stronger cultures of inclusivity than others. Extension respondents expressed a lack of inclusivity at the different UF/IFAS institutional levels. While some Extension respondents noted they thought their county or office did a decent job promoting inclusivity, they recognized other aspects of UF/IFAS were lacking in inclusivity. For instance, an Extension respondent wrote, "Some departments are more inclusive than others and some seem to complain about being made to be more inclusive."

Many Extension respondents discussed the challenge of trying to remain professional while promoting inclusivity to clientele who were not accepting of different people's views. For instance, an Extension respondent explained, "Some of the 'traditional' Extension clientele in this community are reticent to accepting a broad variety of individuals. Some of this can be overheard conversations at events." Another Extension respondent felt similarly and wrote, "As you move into the community, specific groups tend to be more exclusive because they are not exposed to diversity." Issues with clientele were repeated in many respondents' ratings of inclusivity, and some pointed to leadership issues. As this Extension respondent discussed, "Extension clientele are not inclusive and can be racist, sexist, and homophobic."

Exclusory clientele also referred to how Extension respondents' own practices excluded community members they served, such as when "programs offered, especially virtually, do not take into account rural or poverty-stricken areas with limited internet." Extension respondents elaborated regarding programming and services that could improve clientele inclusivity.

Respondents wrote comments regarding struggling in communication within UF/IFAS and evidence of a top-down approach within Extension. An Extension respondent wrote, "Communication is often one-sided." Extension respondents wrote about not being heard in their positions and feeling excluded by leadership. Also, respondents described how the UF/IFAS Extension top-down leadership approach weakened inclusivity practices and how leadership were unaware of the differences among the counties. One county faculty responded as "Many times there is a top-down look instead of from the bottom up. County faculty [are] not as aware of the [community] problems." An Extension respondent wrote, "Leadership is very cliquish, and I'm not in that clique." Extension respondents' opinions not being heard due to the top-down leadership style resulted in miscommunications and perceptions of non-inclusivity.

## Discussion

Establishing a baseline of data is a vital DEI organizational effort (Perez, 2019). Therefore, this study examined how individuals at the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) perceived belongingness, uniqueness, and inclusivity through a survey using quantitative and qualitative questions. The majority of respondents were White (non-Hispanic), which aligns with UF/IFAS being a PWI (Lomotey, 2010). Data indicated that White (non-Hispanic) respondents felt more belongingness, while Other ethnicities reported significantly less belongingness. The quantitative and qualitative data converged that indicated to respondents not feeling valued, leadership showing favoritism, and a lack of acceptance within the UF/IFAS system. Reports of discrimination were evident in non-White populations. At the time of this study, events of racial injustices continued to occur with Asian hate crimes, and more than 9,000 anti-Asian hate crimes have been reported since the COVID-19 pandemic began March 2020-June 2021 (Aspergren, 2021). Interestingly, Asian

respondents did not have significant differences regarding feelings of belongingness, uniqueness, or inclusivity compared to other ethnicities at UF/IFAS.

Extension respondents believed that UF/IFAS has evidence of promoting inclusivity; however, many respondents also described experiences within their workplaces and during clientele interactions where inclusivity was lacking. Respondents also discussed experiences where they felt UF/IFAS communication was strained that was perpetuated by a top-down approach from leadership, which excluded employees and students from decision-making and having their voices being heard. Members of UF/IFAS requested more training on inclusivity and recognized that improvements could be made to existing DEI initiatives. These findings align with Drape et al.'s (2019) recommendation that students and faculty should be trained on increasing interpersonal interactions among various ethnicities (dominant and non-dominant) aimed at promoting a more inclusive environment within agricultural colleges. Because many individuals pointed to leadership issues around inclusivity, leaders should build specific communication best practices to help to reduce hierarchical decision-making. Extension respondents also expressed challenges working with clientele who were less open to inclusivity practices. This finding indicated that factors influencing UF/IFAS DEI extend beyond the internal organizational factors but are also strongly influenced by external factors, such as clientele's values and beliefs.

## Recommendations and Implications

Respondents were asked to explain their inclusivity rating, yet many described elements of diversity, demonstrating a lack of understanding that diversity does not equate to inclusivity. This lack of understanding has implications for DEI trainings because respondents might feel they promote inclusivity, but they do not fully demonstrate the concept. This knowledge gap is problematic because if an organizational focus is diversity, individuals' voices may still go unheard due to a lack of inclusivity (Randel et al., 2018). The concern provided in previous research regarding a lack of inclusivity was supported by this study because respondents reiterated not being heard and not being valued by UF/IFAS leadership. These findings aligned with the complexities of ODT because respondents experienced tension between their need for validation from peers as well as a contrasting need for individualization (Brewer, 1991). Organizations and leaders should consider providing training sessions that help clarify the meaning of diversity and inclusivity and evaluate how their workplace promotes these practices.

Many individuals, including those with jobs in the "Other" category, did not elaborate on their quantitative answers. It was unclear whether individuals reporting jobs as "Other" did not have any additional comments or if they did not feel comfortable or trust sharing their perceptions within the survey. For future research, establishing trust will likely be essential so that employees feel they work in an environment where they can reach their full potential and the organization's desired goals (HRMID, 2018). One way

to achieve trust within an organization is for employees to feel they are treated fairly (HRMID, 2018). Trust and fair treatment among employees could be increased through the use of town halls aimed at allowing individual voices to be heard or through a voting process to enact organizational policy changes.

LGUs may consider creating or strengthening mentoring programs within Extension tailored for students in colleges of agriculture to help with institutional belongingness. New hires at UF/IFAS Extension have been required to have one mentor during their tenure probationary period, an estimated 6 years (Harder et al., 2021). Still, this amount of time could be extended. DEI trainings should continue to evolve within the main campus environment as well. When higher education environments promote DEI trainings, it creates spaces for all students to learn about each other from various backgrounds and learn from one another (Bell-Rose & Ollen, 2021). DEI best practices should be incorporated throughout LGUs courses as a way of training the next generation of leaders in the workforce (Bell-Rose & Ollen, 2021). Future studies should consider using the United Nations (UN) Women Toolkit for Intersectionality (UN Women, 2021) when developing training programs for LGU populations. For instance, the toolkit utilizes questions such as "Has the issue or problem been identified for a specific section of the population? Has any importance been given to the differences in the groups?" (p. 11).

UF/IFAS is a constant place for growing and learning. Some of the findings identified specific areas for DEI improvements within LGUs, which may be used to build a better workplace and healthier community presence. Similar to Groggins and Ryan's (2013) recommendation, openness to cultural misunderstandings may help provide a space for continuous learning and support an organization's efforts toward a more diverse workplace. Additionally, this study highlighted the importance of LGUs to launch their own climate survey to gauge employees' perceptions of organizational DEI (Baum, 2021). LGUs should consider deploying the instrument used in this study to target students and main campus respondents, which were lacking in this study along with minority ethnicities. Researchers and practitioners are also encouraged to examine inclusivity beyond characteristics of ethnicity and consider gender, sexual orientation, and income. Finally, future research might try collecting data regularly to gauge the organizational climate and if there are improvements post-DEI training.

## References

Ary, D., Jacobs, L. C., Irvine, C. K. S., & Walker, D. (2019). *Introduction to research in education* (10th ed.). Cengage Learning.

Aspegren, E. (2021, August 12). 'Not going away:' More than 9K anti-Asian hate incidents since COVID pandemic began, report says. USA TODAY. https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2021/08/12/asian-american-hate-crimes-not-slowing-down/8116540002/

Baum, B. (2021). Diversity, equity, and inclusion policies: Are organizations truly committed to a workplace culture shift? *Journal of Business and Behavioral Sciences*, *33*(2), 11–23. https://asbbs.org/files/2021-22/JBBS_33.2_Fall_2021.pdf#page=12

Bell-Rose, S., & Ollen, A. (2021). *The great skills gap: Optimizing talent for the future workforce*. In J. Wingard & C. Farrugia Harnessing the power and potential of diversity and inclusion (pp. 159–170). Stanford Business Books.

Berkeley. (2019). *Social constructivism*. https://gsi.berkeley.edu/gsi-guide-contents/learning-theory-research/social-constructivism/

Brewer, M. B. (1991). The social self: On being the same and different at the same time. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *17*, 475-482 https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167291175001

Brock, C., Sanchez, N., & Sharpe, D. L. (2019). Pen as a bridge: Instructor perspectives on incorporating diversity and inclusion writing intensive course. *Teaching in Higher Education*, *25*(8), 992–1009. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2019.1628733

Burkhart-Kriesel, C., Weigle, J. L., & Hawkins, J. (2019). Engagement to enhance community: An example of extension's land-grant mission in action. *Social Sciences*, *8*(27). https://doi.org/10.3390/socsc8010027

Caillouet, O. C., & Harder, A. (2021). Diverse perspectives on trends impacting the future of Extension in Florida. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, *62*(3). https://doi.org/10.5032/jae.2021.03202

Chaudhry, I. S., Paquibut, R. Y., & Tunio, M. N. (2020). Do workforce diversity, inclusion practices, and organizational characteristics contribute to organizational innovation? Evidence from the U.A.E. *Cogent Business & Management*, *8*(1), 1–24. https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2021.1947549

Chung, B. G., Ehrhart, K. H., Shore, L. M., Randel, A. E., Dean, M. A., & Kedharnath, U. (2019). Work group inclusion: Test of a scale and model. *Group & Organization Management*, *45*(1), 75–102. https://doi.org/10.1177/1059601119839858

Cockshaw, W. D., Shochet, I. M., & Obst, P. L. (2014). Depression and belongingness in general and workplace contexts: A cross-lagged longitudinal investigation. *Journal of Social & Clinical Psychology*, *33*(5), 447–461. https://doi.org/10.1521/jscp.2014.33.5.448

Creary, S. J., Rothbard, N., & Scruggs, J. (2021). Improving workplace culture through evidence-based diversity, equity and inclusion practices. *The Whorton School of Business*. https://www.wharton.upenn.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Applied-Insights-Lab-Report.pdf

Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2018). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (3rd ed.). SAGE.

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE.

Delputte, S., & Orbie, J. (2017). EU Development policy: Abduction as a research strategy. In H. Heinelt & S. Münch (Eds.), *Handbook of European policy: Formulation, development and evaluation*. Edward Elgar Publishing.

Diaz, J., Silvert, C., Gusto, C., Jayaratne, K., & Narine, L. (2021). Toward intercultural competence: Using expert consensus to identify essential personality traits and attitudes to develop an inclusive extension education workforce. *Advancements in Agricultural Development*, *2*(3), 83–95. https://doi.org/10.37433/aad.v2i3.135

Doharty, N., Madriaga, M., & Josephy-Salisbury, R. (2020). The university went to 'decolonise' and all they brought back was lousy diversity double-speak! Critical race counter-stories from faculty of color in 'decolonial' time. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, *53*(3), 233–244. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2020.1769601

Drape, T., Westfall-Rudd, D. M., & Morris, A. (2019). Graduate student perception of diversity and inclusion in a college of agriculture. *North American Colleges and Teachers of Agriculture [NACTA] Journal*, *63*, 100–108.

Dunn, O. J. (1964). Multiple comparisons using rank sums. *Technometrics*, *6*(3), 241–252. https://www.stat.cmu.edu/technometrics/59-69/VOL-06-03/v0603241.pdf

Elliott-Engel, J., Westfall-Rudd, D., Kaufman, E., Seibel, M., & Radhakrishna, R. (2021). A case of shifting focus friction: Extension directors and state 4-H program leaders' perspectives on 4-H LGBTQ+ inclusion. *The Journal of Extension*, *59*(4). https://doi.org/10.34068/joe.59.04.14

Enwereuzor, I. K. (2020). Diversity climate and workplace belongingness as organizational facilitators of tacit knowledge sharing. *Journal of Knowledge Management*, *25*(9), 2178–2195. https://doi.org/10.1108/JKM-10-2020-0768

Fickess, J. (2021). Trends in DEI practices and policies. World atWork Newsletter. https://archive.hshsl.umaryland.edu/bitstream/handle/10713/17354/W%40W%20-%20Diversity%20piece%2010-21.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

Gonzales, L. D., Hall, K., Benton, A., Kanhai, D., & Nunez, A. M. (2021). Comfort over change: A case study of diversity and inclusivity efforts in U.S. Higher education. *Innovative Higher Education*, *46*, 445–460. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10755-020-0941-7

Groggins, A., & Ryan A. M. (2013). Embracing uniqueness: The underpinnings of positive climate for diversity. *Journal of Occupational & Organizational Psychology*, *86*, 264–282. https://doi/10.1111/joop.12008

Hamilton-Honey, N. (2017). Diversity & inclusivity in New York state 4-H. *Theory in Action*, *10*(4), 78–88. https://

Harder, A., Moore, A., Mazurkewicz, M., & Benge, M. (2013). Problems impacting Extension program quality at the county level: Results from an analysis of county program reviews conducted in Florida. *Journal of Extension*, *51*(1), Article 31. https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/joe/vol51/iss1/31/

Harder, A., Narine, L. K., Benge, M., Denny, M., & Farner, K. (2021). Exploring early career extension agents' perceptions of their mentors, best liked coworkers, and organizational commitment. *Journal of Human Sciences and Extension*, *9*(2). https://www.jhseonline.com/article/view/1162

Harris, L. (2022). Examining workplace diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) with the COMMIT inclusive behavior framework. *Organizational Dynamics Working Papers*, *29*. https://repository.upenn.edu/od_working_papers/29

Huang, L., Yang, Y., & Sekiguchi, T. (2020). Attractiveness of Japanese firms to international job applicants: The effects of belongingness, uniqueness and employment patterns. *Asian Business & Management*, *19*, 118–144. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41291-019-00068-0

Human Resource Management International Digest [HRMID]. (2018). Moves to increase diversity and inclusion in the workplace: Fairness and camaraderie as building blocks. *Human Resource Management International Digest*, *26*(2), 41–43. https://doi.org/10.1108/HRMID-01-2018-0012

Jena, L. K., & Pradhan, S. (2018). Conceptualizing and validating workplace belongingness scale. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, *31*(2), 451–462. https://doi.org/10.1108/JOCM-05-2017-0195

Kaufman, A., Boren, J., Koukel., S., Ronquillo, F., Davies, C., & Nkouaga, C. (2017). Agriculture and health sectors collaborate in addressing population health. *Annals of Family Medicine*, *15*(5), 475–480. https://doi.org/10.1370/afm.2087

Kim, B. (2001). *Social constructivism*. http://epltt.coe.uga.edu/index.php?title=Social_Constructivism

Krippendorff, K. (2004). *Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology* (2nd ed.). SAGE.

Kyei-Poku, I., & Ying, Y. (2020). Authentic leadership and citizenship behavior: A path through fairness and belongingness. *International Journal of Organizational Theory & Behavior*, *23*(3), 245–258. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJOTB-08-2018-0091

Laerd Statistics. (n.d.). *SPSS statistics*. https://statistics.laerd.com/premium/index.php

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). Naturalistic inquiry. Sage Publications.

Lomotey, K. (Ed.) (2010). *Encyclopedia of African American education*. SAGE.

McDowell, G. R., (2003). Engaged universities: Lessons from the land-grant universities and extension. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, *585*, 31–50. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716202238565

Metzger, M., Dowling, T., Guinn, J., & Wilson, D. T. (2020). Inclusivity in baccalaureate nursing education: A scoping study. *Journal of Professional Nursing*, *36*(1), 5–14. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.profnurs.2019.06.002

Monroe, G. (2020). 3 strategies for promoting diversity and inclusion in the workplace. *BenefitsPRO*. https://www.benefitspro.com/2020/09/11/3-strategies-for-promoting-diversity-and-inclusion-in-the-workplace/?slreturn=20220504160409

Narine, L. K., Ali, A. D., & Hill, P. A. (2021). Assessing rural and urban community assets and needs to inform Extension program planning. *Journal of Human Sciences and Extension*, *9*(1), 109–122. https://scholarsjunction.msstate.edu/jhse/vol9/iss1/8

Ortlieb, R., Glauninger, E., & Weiss, S. (2021). Organizational inclusion and identity regulation: How inclusive organizations form 'good', 'glorious' and 'grateful' refugees. *Organization*, *28*(2), 266–288. https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508420973319

Parveen, I., Uzair-ul-Hassan, M., & Aimen, U. (2021). "I do not feel included": Teachers' experiences of workplace inclusion at higher education. *Journal of Inclusive Education*, *5*(1). 75–92. https://jie.aiou.edu.pk/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/5-JIE-2021.pdf

Perez, P. (2019). *The drama-free workplace: How you can prevent unconscious bias, sexual harassment, ethics lapses, and inspire a healthy culture*. John Wiley & Sons Incorporated.

Pittman, C. T. (2012). Racial microaggressions: The narratives of African American faculty at predominantly white university. *The Journal of Negro Education*, *81*(1), 82–92. https://doi.org/10.7709/jnegroeducation.81.1.0082

Randel, A. E., Galvin, B. M., Shore, L. M., Ehrhart, K. H., Chung, B. G., Dean, M. A., & Kedharnath, U. (2018). Inclusive leadership: Realizing positive outcomes through belongingness and being valued for uniqueness. *Human Resource Management Review*, *28*(2), 190–203. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2017.07.002

Shore, L. M., Randel, A. E., Chung, B. G., Dean, M. A., Ehrhart, K. H., & Singh, G. (2011). Inclusion and diversity in work groups: A review and model for future research. *Journal of Management*, *37*(4), 1262–1289. https://ideas.wharton.upenn.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Shore-Randel-Chung-Dean-Holcombe-Ehrhart-Singh-2011.pdf

Stoecker, R. (2014). Extension and higher education service-learning: Toward a community development service-learning model. *Journal of Higher Education Outreach*

*and Engagement*, *18*(1), 15–42.

Tienda, M. (2013). Diversity ≠ inclusion: Promoting integration in higher education. *Educational Researcher*, *42*(9), 467–475. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X13516164

United Nations Women [UN Women]. (2021). *Intersectionality resource guide and toolkit*. https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/Intersectionality-resource-guide-and-toolkit-easy-to-read-en.pdf

University of California Los Angeles. (n.d.). *What does Cronbach's Alpha mean?* https://stats.oarc.ucla.edu/spss/faq/what-does-cronbachs-alpha-mean/

University of Florida [UF] Institutional Planning and Research. (2021). *Workforce*. https://ir.aa.ufl.edu/facts/workforce/

University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences [UF/IFAS] Extension. (2021). *Who we are*. https://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/who-we-are/about-extension/

Winkle-Wagner, R., & McCoy, D. L. (2018). Feeling like an "alien" or "family"? Comparing students and faculty experiences of diversity in STEM disciplines at a PWI and an HBCU. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, *21*(5), 593–606. https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2016.1248835