

THE CULTURALLY ENGAGING CAMPUS ENVIRONMENTS MODEL AND SURVEY

A Report on New Tools for Assessing Campus Environments and Diverse College Student Outcomes

Samuel D. Museus and **Edward J. Smith**

In recent decades, much national discourse in higher education has focused on the need to more effectively retain and graduate racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically diverse college students. Yet, despite the significant investment that has been made to increase rates of success in higher education, many students who enroll in college never complete a postsecondary credential (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2014). In addition, significant disparities in persistence and graduation rates along racial and ethnic lines linger.

Scholars have produced substantial literature on campus climates, student engagement, and student success. Historically, however, research has not adequately illuminated the types of institutional environments that help racially and ethnically diverse student populations thrive¹ in college (Museus, 2014). For example, higher education literature has helped identify the potentially harmful elements of hostile campus climates, but has not generated a clear and cohesive picture regarding how to cultivate

optimally inclusive campus environments. The Culturally Engaging Campus Environments (CECE) Project is designed to fill these gaps in research and national discourse on college students' experience and outcomes (see Figure 1). Specifically, the CECE Project is aimed at creating tools that provide a common evidence-based vision regarding the types of environments that allow diverse student populations to thrive in college. The CECE Project also utilizes research to transform campuses to cultivate such environments and achieve greater equity (see Figure 2).

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THE CECE MODEL AND SURVEY

In 2014, Museus proposed the CECE Model (see Figure 3). The CECE Model is derived from qualitative interviews with 150 diverse undergraduate students (e.g., Asian American, Black, Indigenous, Latino, Pacific Islander, and multiracial populations) across the United States, qualitative interviews with more than 30 educators at institutions that have

1 For purposes of this report, the term *thrive* is used to denote a holistic perspective of success. Although success is often gauged by limited measures of persistence and degree completion, we understand thriving to encompass achieving a sense of empowerment, satisfaction, well-being, learning, and goal attainment.

demonstrated relatively equitable outcomes across racially diverse student groups, three decades of existing research on diverse students in college, and practical observations and experiences working with undergraduate

populations. The CECE Model acknowledges that external influences (e.g., financial factors, employment, family influences) and precollege inputs (e.g., academic preparation, academic dispositions at the time of entry)

Figure 1 | The CECE Project Pillars

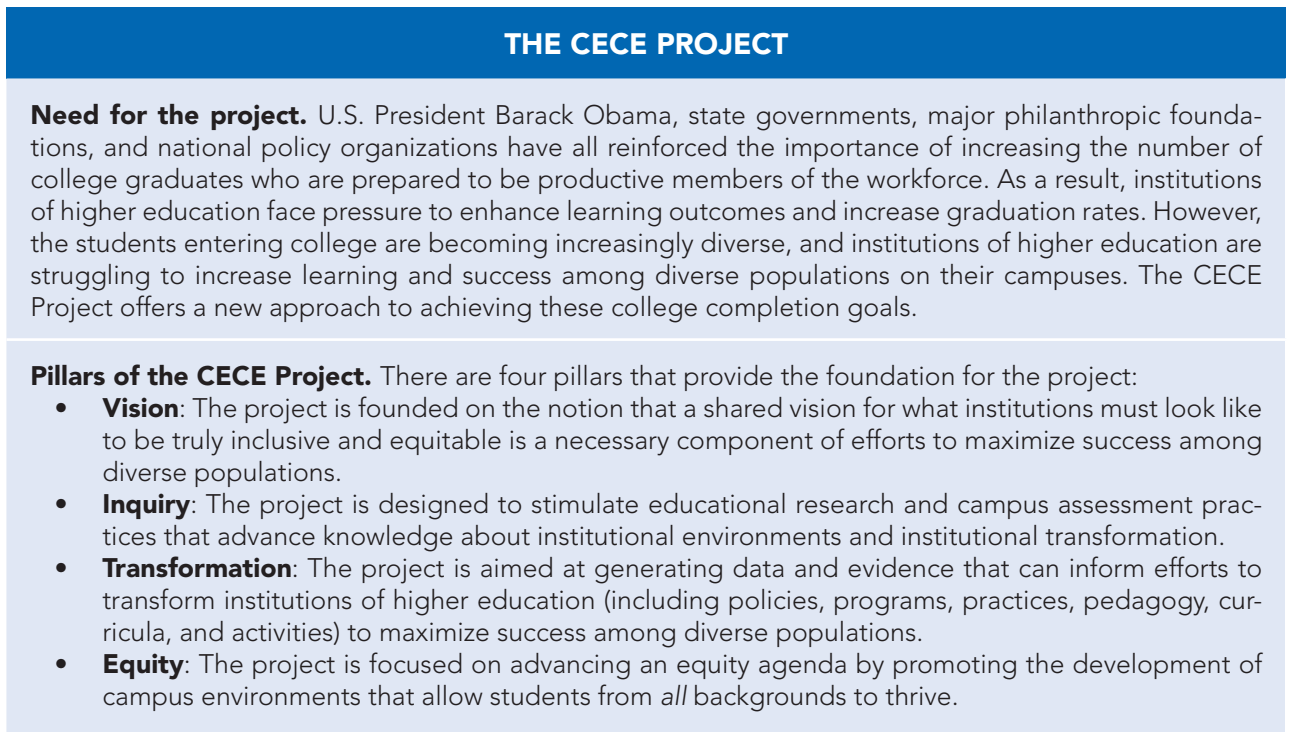
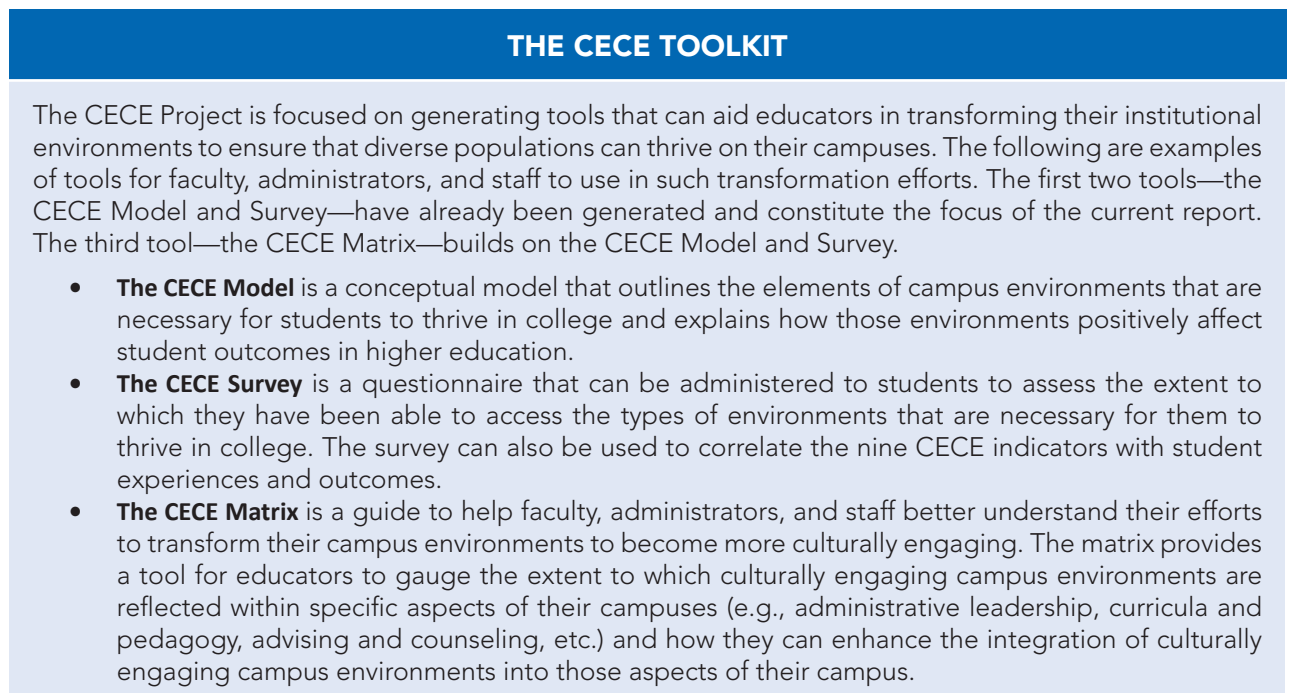


Figure 2 | The CECE Toolkit



shape college success outcomes (e.g., learning, satisfaction, persistence, degree completion). However, the core of the model emphasizes that culturally engaging campus environments lead to a greater sense of belonging, academic self-efficacy, academic motivation, intent to persist, academic performance, and ultimately an increased probability of success in college.

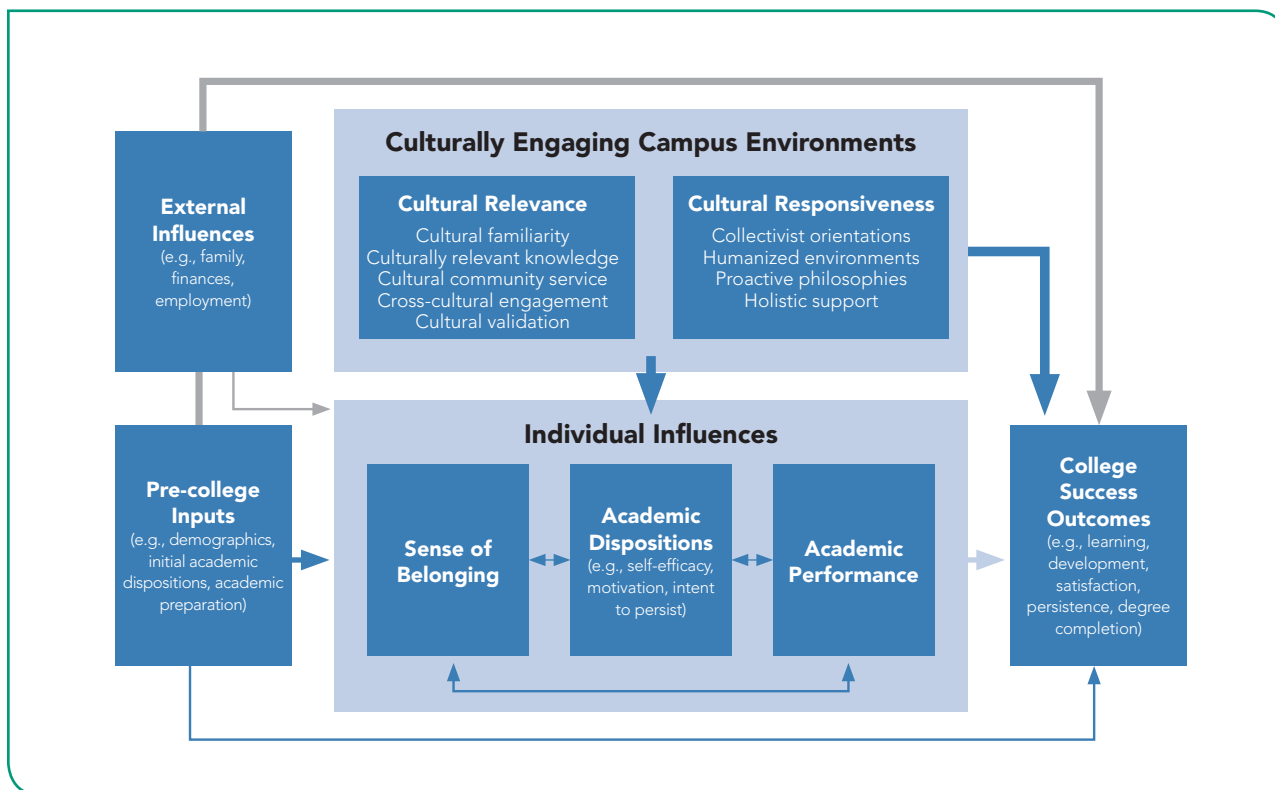
The CECE Model includes two clusters of indicators that represent the elements of culturally engaging campus environments (see Figure 4). The first cluster—focused on cultural relevance—consists of five indicators that characterize campus environments that meaningfully engage and reflect the cultural backgrounds, communities, and identities of diverse students. The second cluster—concerning cultural responsiveness—consists of four indicators that reflect environments in which an understanding of diverse students’ cultural norms and values undergirds campus learning and support systems that respond to these students’ needs. It is important to note that these two clusters are not mutually exclusive. Although the indicators of cultural relevance might be more salient

in learning environments (e.g., classrooms) and indicators of cultural responsiveness might manifest more noticeably in campus support systems (e.g., academic advising, counseling), both clusters can simultaneously be integrated into and reflected in any given space, policy, curriculum, program, or practice.

The CECE Survey was derived from the CECE Model and was designed to measure these nine characteristics of culturally engaging campus environments and help institutions assess the extent to which these environments exist on their campuses. The CECE Survey can also be used to evaluate the extent to which the nine CECE indicators lead to more positive student outcomes in college. The survey is a questionnaire that includes items about college students’ demographic characteristics, their access to culturally engaging campus environments, and a variety of individual outcomes.

The CECE Model and Survey build on the strengths and address the limitations of existing frameworks and instruments to offer a new culturally relevant and responsive set of research and assessment tools. The CECE Model and Survey aim to accomplish the following goals:

Figure 3 | *The Culturally Engaging Campus Environments (CECE) Model*



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- Build on the last 30 years of research and evidence on the types of environments that allow diverse student populations to thrive in higher education.
- Provide a common vision regarding the types of campus environments that research suggests can and should be cultivated in order to maximize success among diverse students in college.
- Specify a model that can inform work at a variety of levels (e.g., from executive leadership to academic advising offices) and across a wide range of programs and activities (e.g., from designing classroom curricula to structuring academic advising or counseling services) on college and university campuses.
- Intentionally acknowledge the role of both diverse home and campus communities in mutually shaping students' experiences and outcomes in college.
- Provide tools to assess the extent to which campuses are creating the types of environments that allow diverse students to thrive.
- Shift the focus from short-lived and isolated diversity initiatives to comprehensive efforts that focus on deep and pervasive cultural and structural transformation.

In sum, the CECE Model and Survey are valuable tools to transform campuses to meaningfully respond to their diverse student bodies and maximize success among these populations.

Figure 4 | *Nine Indicators of Culturally Engaging Campus Environments*

CULTURAL RELEVANCE: Five indicators focus on the extent to which campus environments engage and reflect the cultural backgrounds, communities, and identities of diverse college students.

1. **Cultural familiarity:** Campus spaces for undergraduates to connect with faculty, staff, and peers who understand their cultural backgrounds and experiences.
2. **Culturally relevant knowledge:** Opportunities for students to learn and exchange knowledge about their own cultural communities via culturally relevant curricular and cocurricular activities.
3. **Cultural community service:** Opportunities for students to give back and positively transform their cultural communities.
4. **Meaningful cross-cultural engagement:** Programs and practices that facilitate educationally meaningful cross-cultural interactions among their students that focus on solving real-life social and political problems.
5. **Cultural validation:** Campus cultures that validate the cultural backgrounds, knowledge, and identities of diverse students.

CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS: The remaining four indicators focus on the extent to which campus learning and support systems respond to the cultural norms and needs of diverse students.

6. **Collectivist cultural orientations:** Campus cultures that emphasize a collectivist cultural orientation characterized by teamwork and pursuit of mutual success rather than individual success and competition.
7. **Humanized educational environments:** Environments in which students are able to develop meaningful relationships with faculty and staff who care about and are committed to their success.
8. **Proactive philosophies:** Philosophies that lead faculty, administrators, and staff to proactively make students aware of important information, opportunities, and support services, rather than waiting for students to seek them out.
9. **Holistic support:** Whether college students have access to at least one faculty or staff member whom they trust and are confident will provide the information they need, offer the help they seek, or connect them with the information or support they require, regardless of the issue they face.

Three decades of existing qualitative and quantitative research provide some support for the assertion that culturally engaging campus environments lead to more positive experiences and outcomes in college, such as higher levels of engagement, increased motivation, greater sense of belonging, and greater likelihood of persisting and graduating from college (Museus, 2014). In addition, The CECE Project has analyzed survey data from 499 undergraduates across three institutions, and the emerging findings suggest that (a) the CECE Survey exhibits high levels of content and construct validity, (b) the nine CECE indicators are correlated with more positive college experiences and outcomes (Table 1), and (c) the CECE Survey is a tool that can be used to measure critical aspects of campus environments and their impact on college outcomes.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EXECUTIVE ADMINISTRATORS

To achieve deep, pervasive, and long-lasting change, institutional leaders must engage the entire campus community in building, implementing, and assessing comprehensive efforts to create culturally relevant and responsive campus environments. To begin transforming institutions cultures, campus leaders should commit to holistic transformation efforts (Museus & Yi, 2015) that include, but are not limited to, the following imperatives:

- Focus on deep and pervasive cultural and structural transformation rather than isolated diversity and success efforts.
 - Demystify misconceptions about inclusion and excellence being opposing values, and make culturally relevant and responsive education a priority in quality conversations and efforts.
 - Develop coalitions and networks across functional areas, departments, divisions, and relevant stakeholders to advance transformation efforts.
 - Cultivate a culture of inquiry and continuous assessment.
 - Make the space and time for collective strategic planning, assessment, and analysis.
- Reward activities that foster more culturally engaging campus environments.
 - Consider the value of scaling successful models of cultural engagement.
 - Critical Considerations for Academic and Student Affairs Educators

The CECE Model was designed to ensure its applicability across different types of campuses and across varying environments within post-secondary institutions. Therefore, we encourage educators who work with students daily to adapt and apply the model in ways that will help them most effectively create and nurture relevant and responsive campus environments within the context of their own spheres of influence. College educators will need to select and focus on the indicators that are most essential to cultivating such environments within their respective sphere of influence. For example, an academic advisor might be able to apply all nine indicators but be best positioned to infuse humanized, proactive, and holistic support (indicators 7–9) during one-on-one interactions with advisees. In contrast, a psychology professor might most effectively foster culturally engaging campus environments by providing opportunities for his or her students to find spaces of cultural familiarity, exchange culturally relevant knowledge, and engage in cultural community service through cocurricular programs (Indicators 1–3). This task requires collaboration between academic and student affairs to achieve curricular and cocurricular learning opportunities that affirm a holistic framework for cultural engagement. In doing so, educators should be mindful of the following considerations, which are based heavily on the recommendations of Museus and Yi (2015):

- Provide space to connect over common backgrounds and experiences.
- Center knowledge from and about students' cultural communities in learning spaces.
- Engage students in cultural community service projects to give back to their communities.
- Designate spaces for political and social dialogue across cultures.
- Cultivate collective agendas based on teamwork and mutual success.

Table 1 | Significant Correlations between and among CECE Indicators and College Student Outcomes

	SENSE OF BELONGING	ACADEMIC SELF-EFFICACY	ACADEMIC MOTIVATION
Cultural familiarity	***	*	***
Culturally relevant knowledge	***		***
Cultural community service	***		*
Cross-cultural engagement	***	***	***
Cultural validation	***	***	***
Collectivist cultural orientations	***	***	***
Humanized environments	***	**	***
Proactive philosophies	***	***	***
Holistic support	***		***

*= $p < .05$. **= $p < .01$. ***= $p < .001$.

- Ensure that students know you care about and are committed to their success.
- Provide holistic support and serve as conduits to campus support networks.
- Proactively pressure students to take advantage of opportunities and support.

The ultimate aim of this report is to make clear the importance of building and sustaining campus environments that deeply engage the cultural backgrounds and identities of diverse student populations to improve holistic development, sense of belonging, campus engagement, and success outcomes. We advance the CECE Model as a way to help campus leaders and practitioners reflect on their current

environments, recommend that they examine it with colleagues and students, and provide recommendations to (re)envision, refine, and restructure their campus environments. Campus leaders who do so have committed to the first step in an arduous yet rewarding process of large-scale campus transformation. Thirty years of education scholarship suggest that campuses are considerably more likely to see measureable progress in reaching institutional goals and outcomes if they facilitate the types of environments detailed in this report. Isolated and fleeting efforts no longer suffice. Only the commitment and investment in deep and broad cultural and structural transformation will lead us to the positive impact we desperately seek.



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THE AUTHORS

SAMUEL D. MUSEUS is associate professor of higher education and student affairs and founding director of the Culturally Engaging Campus Environments (CECE) Project at Indiana University, Bloomington.

EDWARD J. SMITH is a doctoral student at the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education.

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