

**The Eastern Virginia Medical School  
Community Advisory Board's  
Report to the President on the  
EVMS Climate of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion**

April 24, 2020

## Background

The president of the Eastern Virginia Medical School (EVMS), Dr. Richard Homan, engaged community leaders to serve as volunteer members of the Community Advisory Board (CAB) and to prepare this report about the school's diversity, equity and inclusion (DE&I) climate. In 2019, EVMS received widespread attention after it became known publicly that Virginia Governor Ralph Northam's yearbook page contained a photograph of people dressed in blackface and KKK attire. Governor Northam, an alumnus of the school, eventually denied involvement in the picture, and inquiries arose regarding EVMS's treatment of students, specifically African American and other non-white medical students.

Dr. Homan identified the need for an independent body to assess the school's current diversity and inclusion climate. He contacted Gil Bland, president and CEO of the Urban League of Hampton Roads, and asked him to form the EVMS Community Advisory Board (CAB) and serve as committee chair. The CAB's charge was to understand where EVMS stands regarding diversity and inclusion and to provide recommendations on any improvements necessary. Mr. Bland selected community and statewide leaders to serve as volunteer members of the CAB. The eight-member board met regularly to help develop the overall assessment strategy, review research interview guides and surveys, study research results, prepare for and facilitate town hall meetings, and analyze all related research to develop recommendations to the school.

## Study Purpose and Approach

The CAB, comprised of representatives from higher education, business, healthcare, faith-based, and nonprofit community organizations, as well as those with extensive knowledge regarding diversity and inclusion, conducted an independent assessment of the school's learning and workplace climate around diversity and inclusivity. The CAB developed a comprehensive research plan with the objective and professional support of SIR, Inc., a market research and management consultancy that specializes in organizational diversity and inclusion issues. Senior consultants from SIR reviewed existing EVMS written diversity-related documents, policies, and procedures. They also conducted qualitative research through focus group meetings with students and one-on-one interviews with current students, administrative staff and faculty. In addition, two community town hall meetings were facilitated by CAB members, and two quantitative surveys were conducted by SIR: an internal culture survey of current students, faculty and staff, and a community survey.

Throughout the following report, some of the quantitative survey results are described as "significant differences" in responses between whites and non-whites, and between men and women. Significant differences are defined by a mathematical test (in this case, with the confidence level of 95%) that determines whether differences between groups are attributable to something other than chance relative to the size of the audiences being compared in the study. Due to varying definitions of what constitutes historically underrepresented minorities, non-white is defined as anyone who did not say they identify as "white" in the survey.

While the CAB was convened in response to the blackface photos in the yearbook and other intolerable racial incidents in EVMS's past, a past that EVMS acknowledges was unacceptable, this report was prepared with a focus on the present and what changes in the future are needed to make EVMS a more supportive, welcoming and inclusive place for people of all backgrounds.

## Executive Summary

The study found that there is genuine and deep pride in EVMS by students, faculty and staff, with an overall EVMS culture that most study participants characterized as positive, friendly and supportive. Students gave outstanding ratings to the school for the quality of their education, and faculty and staff widely expressed a commitment to providing high quality training and education. Members of the CAB were impressed by the genuine and widespread loyalty to the school. This shared pride and commitment by students and employees are valuable assets that the school should focus on to further strengthen its internal culture and external reputation.

The study also revealed, however, that there are significant differences in the experiences and perceptions between non-whites and whites, and women and men on the faculty/staff. Those differences were somewhat apparent in the results of the qualitative research of one-on-one interviews and focus group sessions and were clearly identified in the quantitative research as issues that need to be addressed by leadership. The CAB recommends that EVMS focus on a holistic view of DE&I, understanding that as society changes, the definition of DE&I changes. Although race was a catalyst for this assessment, the CAB is well aware of the importance of including other areas such as gender, gender identity and sexual orientation as part of leadership's initiatives to continue to improve the culture.

The school community recognizes and is supportive of recent improvements in EVMS's diversity and inclusion initiatives, especially the enrollment of a more diverse student body. Students are proud of the makeup of the entering fall 2019 class as the most diverse in the school's history. Non-white students and non-white faculty and staff are especially enthusiastic about this trend, and they are waiting to see if the EVMS president and leadership team will follow through on recent DE&I initiatives. While non-white students, faculty and staff rated the EVMS culture similar to other institutions where they attended or worked, they expect to see even more diverse representation and inclusivity in the future.

The study identified nearly 20 DE&I-related programs, yet we found little to no effort by the school to tie them together and demonstrate a widespread DE&I commitment, not to mention the investment the school is making in those areas. Students have a slightly greater awareness of DE&I programs than faculty and staff, awareness that is driven in part by a community-service requirement for first-year students. The EVMS community needs to hear Dr. Homan's voice consistently supporting DE&I work and highlighting its importance, and there needs to be an ongoing management assessment of the outcomes and effectiveness of DE&I-focused programs. A management communications initiative that aligns DE&I programs around an overarching cultural strategy would be an expedient and effective approach to improving awareness and understanding of DE&I at EVMS.

EVMS's community-oriented focus stands out as a distinctive quality from other medical schools, and it is an important and compelling purpose that is attractive to all members of the EVMS community – especially students. Students and faculty/staff gave exemplary ratings of the overall culture as a place where they feel they belong. There also is optimism about EVMS's future, with nearly all students and most employees expecting EVMS to be an even better place in the future. By intentionally leveraging those strengths, the CAB strongly recommends that leadership continues to make DE&I a strategic priority for the school.

All of the multiple research and analytical methods deployed by the CAB contributed to the findings and recommendations in this report, including the town hall meetings and a community survey. Participants in the town hall meetings expressed disappointment and outrage at the blackface incident, and how it was an example of what some believe is deep-rooted bias that contributes to disparities in the treatment of African Americans and other minorities by caregivers. Some town hall participants described discriminatory experiences by doctors and attendants at EVMS clinics. Also, the community survey revealed that the public is not fully aware of EVMS's community orientation or involvement, which is a point of pride for the school. The CAB recommends that the school's leadership addresses community perceptions and knowledge of EVMS's community-oriented programs. However, the preponderance of data and the focus of this report is devoted to the perceptions and experiences of students, faculty and staff.

## Detailed Findings

The CAB's assessment of the EVMS culture of diversity and inclusion focused on information and data collected from the following sources: 1.) A review of EVMS materials and communications; 2.) Results of qualitative research from one-on-one interviews with students, faculty and staff, and focus groups with students; and 3.) Results from quantitative research surveys of students, faculty and staff, and the community. Ten key findings were identified from an analysis of that information and are described in detail below.

### **1. Community Orientation: The community-orientation of EVMS is broadly held up by students, faculty and staff as the school's greatest distinction, and it is one of the primary reasons why most faculty and students are attracted to EVMS.**

Most of the interviewees and survey respondents were proud of and gave high ratings to the institution's focus on the community – from community service requirements in the curriculum to EVMS-staffed clinics. They believe it is a defining factor for the school and the reason that they wanted to attend or work at the institution. Many study participants want EVMS to do even more to demonstrate and communicate this focus by expanding the school's visible participation in community and health equity issues. Such an initiative also would help improve community awareness about EVMS's community orientation, which is not well known by those who participated in town hall meetings convened by the CAB.

#### Sample Comments by Study Participants:

*"We came here because we understand the values and needs of the community, and serving the community feels true. It's incredibly enriching with the potential to grow and opportunity to make a difference." – Student*

*"One of the reasons that I came to EVMS is that they asked me if I ever worked with underrepresented people. No other school ever did that. To me, that stood out and made me know I was choosing the right institution." – Student*

*"We need to organize our policies and procedures around disparity issues. We need to go out to the community rather than them come to us. It must be a fluid interchange. Not being a part of a hospital impacts us, but we need to do more to engage with the community in the research we do." – Faculty*

*"We all believe in community-oriented medicine, and we need to do a better job communicating what is unique about being a community-oriented doctor. We have 135 clinical community outreach services. We are just getting that database together right now. Nobody knows what they are." – Administrative Staff*

### **2. Supportive Culture for Learning: Most students think highly of the school and its culture for learning, rating it as a great place to attend medical school and describing it as a supportive, friendly community.**

More than four out of five student respondents (84%) rate EVMS as a great place to attend medical school, which was a sentiment shared without a significant difference by gender or race. Many study participants discussed EVMS as a "close-knit community," and students gave high ratings to a culture characterized by a sense of belonging.

## Sample Comments by Study Participants:

*“When I reach out for help from anyone — students, professors, faculty, staff, core facilities — they reach back and are always there to help you. We are taught that the success of one individual can help the community, especially when you have the strength of the institution behind you.” – Student*

*“The faculty (from the first two years) want you to succeed and will almost bend over backwards trying to ensure that you do. They are open in communication and flexible in goal-setting.” – Student*

- 3. Current DE&I Initiatives and Activities: Overall, students are proud to attend EVMS and are genuinely satisfied with the learning environment. They demonstrate high awareness of DE&I issues through their high ratings for the school’s service-learning curriculum, social determinants of health curriculum, and other DE&I initiatives and activities. Despite their high ratings, they want the school to do even more in the community. There are slight, though not statistically significant, differences between whites and non-whites regarding their overall feelings of the school in quantitative survey ratings.**

Student respondents gave EVMS positive ratings for a range of attributes, including academic rigor (93% high ratings), peer support (88%), and reputation as a medical school (76%). They also embrace the community and social determinants of health (SDOH) orientation of the school. Despite their high ratings for SDOH, they want administrative and academic leadership to place an even higher priority in the curriculum on health and social disparities in the community.

## Sample Comments by Study Participants:

*“I am glad that we talk about social determinants of health, as they are clearly very important to our future work as physicians.” – Student*

*“I would like to see the school focus on the patient holistically such as the historical implications and factors to health disparities. Let’s not just focus on the race of the person who has diabetes, but also what historically happened that caused the issues with diabetes. Discussing social determinants of health is important.” – Student*

*“EVMS does a great job getting involved in the community. However, as someone who is not from the area, I find that I still know relatively little about the composition of Norfolk and the challenges faced by our community. However, I wish that the curriculum in this regard worked more towards helping us identify and challenge our own biases and pushed us to grow into more culturally competent clinicians.” – Student*

- 4. Workplace Culture: Most employees described EVMS as a community that is supportive, innovative and diverse, and they provided relatively high survey ratings on those topics. However, there were significant statistical differences identified in experiences and opinions between races and genders on many EVMS workplace topics.**

While the majority of employees across races and genders gave high ratings to many work-related attributes (e.g., work is challenging, know what is expected of me, work is rewarding, I feel proud to work for EVMS), non-white respondents gave significantly lower ratings than white respondents on most topics studied. The largest gaps were in peer/co-worker support (86% high ratings by whites, 57% non-whites), feeling a part of the EVMS team (69% whites, 44% non-whites), and recognition for work (59% whites, 36% non-whites). Although the opinions of women and men regarding work attributes were similar for most work attributes, there were significant differences in high ratings on three attributes: work being rewarding (89% high ratings by men,

77% women), EVMS having a positive reputation as a medical school (78% men, 59% women) and feeling a part of the EVMS team (77% men, 60% women).

**5. Diverse Representation Among Students and Faculty: Students largely provided a highly favorable assessment of EVMS's diversity and other cultural norms, although many expressed concerns about the need for greater student body and faculty diversity.**

Students identified a wide range of DE&I statements as being descriptive of EVMS, especially in terms of people being treated fairly regardless of their backgrounds or who they are. Students did, however, describe the need for EVMS to increase representation of non-white students, faculty, and staff to better reflect the community they serve. More than three in five (63%) student respondents, however, rated EVMS high on DE&I issues compared to previous institutions they have attended, a rating that was consistent among all demographic segments.

**Sample Comments by Study Participants:**

*"The Office of Diversity and Inclusion is awesome. I can communicate and connect with other black people there, which has been invaluable to me." – Student*

*"My undergrad was extremely unsupportive, as students were very competitive, and faculty acted like they didn't care if you did well or failed. Also, EVMS works really hard to make sure minority students are succeeding and are integrated into the community." – Student*

*"I think EVMS has a lot of good structures and policies in place, and they are working to further develop and expand those structures, and I hope we don't become complacent, as we've made some progress, especially in such a diverse area as Norfolk where EVMS needs to reflect the community better." – Student*

*"Medicine is historically a white man's area, and some of that is felt here. For instance, the portraits of the deans on the wall are all white men but one woman. Even more disturbing is that those photos are across from the diversity office." – Student*

*"We need more faculty of color. Period." - Faculty*

**6. Gap in Workplace Perceptions and Experiences: While recent progress on diversity and inclusion is recognized and supported across the school, non-white and white employees have significant differences in opinions when examining specific topics around DE&I.**

Half of all employees (51%) feel positive about DE&I at EVMS. However, topics of age, race, gender, promotions and compensation are rated lower overall by non-whites. Non-white employees and women employees feel significantly less positive about the culture of diversity and inclusion and also gave lower ratings than white and male respondents on all attributes associated with DE&I, with significant differences in high ratings by respondents in the following areas: feel included in the EVMS community (76% high ratings by men, 51% women, and 76% whites, 29% non-whites); promotions awarded fairly without bias (63% men, 35% women, and 48% whites, 27% non-whites); people treated fairly regardless of age (84% men, 64% women, and 73% whites, 56% non-whites); people treated fairly regardless of gender (87% men, 53% women); and people treated fairly regardless of race (84% men, 60% women, and 79% whites, 35% non-whites).

### Sample Comments by Study Participants:

*"I think improvements have been made in representation. I would like to see EVMS continue with the progress it has made. I don't think we are yet at a place where students of color don't face racial prejudice as medical students, but I think the school is committed to working towards a more inclusive environment and that progress has already been made." – Administrative Staff*

*"EVMS started as a small school that was behind in processes, but earlier leaders did a lot to change that. Expectations about HR and how they handle things has changed. Diversity and Inclusion was put in place. It still takes some time to bring all the changes we want." – Faculty*

*"The culture of diversity has been discussed and the need to diversify. While the intent is there, they have not increased diversity in the student body enough. And the paltry number of minority faculty is not acceptable." – Administrative Staff*

### 7. **DE&I Communications:** Survey respondents have recently seen improvements in communications about DE&I initiatives, but they had limited awareness of those initiatives and wanted to know more.

Most employees have limited awareness of EVMS's DE&I activities. However, those who knew more about those activities had more positive feelings about EVMS. Employee ratings of EVMS as an employer of choice increased by 28 points when they were highly aware of EVMS's diversity and inclusion efforts. Nearly seven in 10 students (69%) and three in five employees (61%) feel EVMS has recently improved its communications regarding DE&I.

### 8. **Trust:** Most students and employees trust their immediate relationship circles, but non-white respondents exhibit lower levels of trust in leadership.

Students gave high marks for trusting their fellow students (83%), their advisors (83%), and their department chairs (78%), and most students (60%) believe that any unfair treatment situation will be handled appropriately by leadership. However, 78% of white students gave high trust ratings of EVMS leadership compared to 53% of non-white students. While employee trust in their immediate working environment is high (83% high trust ratings for fellow employees, 75% for co-workers, 65% for supervisors), less than half of employee survey participants have high trust for EVMS leadership (46%). Finally, non-white respondents exhibit the lowest levels of trust across the institution (45% high trust rating for co-workers, 53% supervisor, 48% president, 31% leadership).

### 9. **A Place to Belong:** All EVMS cultural characteristics received high ratings from students as a place where people of different backgrounds feel engaged and have opportunities to grow and succeed. While employees gave lower ratings than students on all cultural characteristics, this provides a benchmark score that leadership can work to improve in the future.

The student, faculty and staff survey included a key index of organizational culture, named the BELONG Score, which is a numeric way to assess how respondents feel about the school's equity, inclusivity, and diversity performance. BELONG is an acronym for the following:

- **Background:** EVMS is a place made up of people from many different backgrounds — ages, races, genders, sexual orientations, faiths, ethnicities, abilities, and cultures.

- **Engagement:** EVMS is a place where people, regardless of their background or economic status, feel they can engage – they are recognized, valued, and changes are made based on their input.
- **Lifestyles:** EVMS is a place where people respect different lifestyles – cultures and religions.
- **Opportunities:** EVMS is a place that offers opportunities for people, regardless of their background or economic status – opportunities for employment, advancement in employment, scholarships, recreation, and networking.
- **Necessities:** EVMS is a place where people, regardless of their background or economic status, have access to basic necessities for success.
- **Growth:** EVMS is a place where people, regardless of their background or economic status, can personally grow and thrive.

The student BELONG score was 81%, with high ratings for Background (76%), Engagement (78%), Lifestyles (84%), Opportunities (79%), Necessities (85%) and Growth (86%). There were no significant differences in high ratings by white and non-white students. The composite employee BELONG score was 63%, with the highest ratings for Background (73%), Necessities (69%) and Lifestyles (69%), and lower ratings for Growth (57%), Opportunities (57%), and Engagement (55%). Non-white employee respondents rated all six characteristics lower than white respondents, with five of the six categories rated significantly lower. Women faculty and staff gave significant lower ratings than men for Growth (87% men, 55% women), Opportunities (76% men, 58% women), and Engagement (79% men, 54% women).

#### 10. **Future Outlook: Nearly all student and employee survey respondents are optimistic about EVMS and its future.**

Most students give high ratings about morale in the student body and believe that EVMS will be a better place to attend medical school in the next five years. More than half of all employees believe morale is high at EVMS, and 62% are optimistic about EVMS as a place to work in the future. Many respondents commented on the important role the institution plays in the community and the school's commitment to improvement.

##### Sample Comments by Study Participants:

*"Institutional change around these issues takes a long time. It's not going to change at EVMS unless you have a proactive, genuine approach and not just a reaction to a person's poor choice in a yearbook." – Faculty*

*"This study is something that has been needed, and we are on the right trajectory. The culture is always something we can improve upon, but it has been a very successful organization." – Administrative Staff*

*"Though not perfect in all their steps, I feel many of the leaders of EVMS honestly do seem to value and want to improve EVMS in all the ways they can. They also seem to be taking solid steps and making plans that I feel will accomplish this." – Student*

*"I really do think that EVMS is a great medical school, but I don't think it gets as much recognition as it should nationally. I think that will change within the next few years, and I can't wait to be a part of it." – Administrative Staff*

## Recommendations for Change

The EVMS CAB identified five key recommendations for change to improve the culture of the school around DE&I. These recommendations are based on the above assessment of both qualitative and quantitative research, and the collective experience and judgement of the CAB members and SIR, Inc., the consulting and research firm retained by the CAB to assist in this study. As briefly described in the executive summary, the CAB found many positives about the school's culture that support the education and professional development of future doctors. We also determined from our study that the president and leadership of EVMS need to be more intentional about making DE&I a strategic priority of the school.

- 1. Students strongly believe EVMS is a great place to attend medical school and that its community-oriented focus and increasing diversity in the student body distinguishes it from other medical schools. The positive sentiments by students should be highlighted to reinforce and strengthen the culture and the school's reputation.**

EVMS has an opportunity to bolster its reputation — internally and externally — by leveraging the exceptional comments, ratings and written sentiments about the school provided by both student survey respondents, and those who participated in one-on-one and focus group interviews. Student experiences and attitudes represent compelling ideals that should be used to help define and promote the community orientation of EVMS.

Students are proud of the school — especially its community orientation, its focus on social determinants of health, and its high-quality academics — and they believe EVMS is an inclusive and supportive place of learning. Students feel that EVMS is a great place to attend medical school, and they agree that the school performs well on most DE&I cultural attributes. They also have some awareness about DE&I activities and programs, and they expect leadership to do more to continue to attract and retain a diverse student body and faculty.

African American students in the qualitative research specifically mentioned that “finding their group” at EVMS is partially why they enjoy their medical school experience. They stated that many of the students self-select who they socialize with, which tend to be peers that look like them, but they want more opportunities to interact socially with people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. The school should explore ways to create more structured and unstructured interaction among diverse groups outside of the classroom.

- 2. Faculty and staff have relatively low levels of trust in leadership and confidence in the future of EVMS, and more needs to be done to address trust among non-white and women employees.**

Leadership needs to build greater trust with employees and must continue to close the gap in experiences between men and women, and whites and non-whites. More attention needs to be given by management to gaps between races and genders on several work-related attributes, including compensation, recognition, feeling a part of the team, and having adequate resources to be effective at their jobs. That focus is needed to help bolster inclusivity across the institution. Employees do believe, however, that leadership is committed to continuous improvement and that EVMS will be an even better place to work in the future.

- 3. EVMS's DE&I initiatives are recognized as improvements by students, faculty and staff, and there are expectations that the school will do even more to recruit, enroll and support students from diverse backgrounds, attract and retain African American and other non-white faculty, and close the gap in positive experiences between whites and non-whites; men and women.**

Both employees and students recognize that the school is working to improve DE&I, and leadership needs to continue to make DE&I a priority to bring about positive organizational change. This change includes implementing institution-wide strategies to make the workplace environment more equitable and inclusive for non-whites and women. Fortunately, some of this work is already underway as described in detail in the EVMS 2020-2024 Strategic Plan for Advancing Health Equity and Inclusion for Community and Academic Impact.

Recruitment of students and faculty with diverse backgrounds is problematic due in large part to the school's lack of financial resources, which places a limit on scholarships available for students and compensation for faculty. The school needs to develop new sources of funding that will allow it to be more competitive in the marketplace.

The gap in experiences and perceptions of faculty/staff non-whites and women must be addressed for EVMS to maximize its full potential as a leading, community-centered medical school that is equitable and inclusive. That racial and gender gap, which is significant for nearly all workplace culture factors studied, (as referenced in finding No. 4 above) will impact employee productivity, satisfaction, retention and long-term success.

- 4. Implementing a diversity, equity and inclusion leadership development and education initiative for employees, as proposed in the 2020-2024 strategic diversity plan, will provide needed skills and training throughout the school and help to make DE&I a greater management priority.**

A leadership development and managerial education program is needed to help educate managers and the workforce about workplace and cultural issues identified in this study. Senior leadership needs to make DE&I a more visible and important part of management practices, starting at the top and being integrated throughout the organization. Importantly, this initiative needs to focus on ways to address diversity, equity and inclusion issues to ensure that managers and employees are all accountable for a workplace culture that is open and supportive to help all employees succeed. While DE&I initiatives often focus on race, widespread concern regarding the treatment of women must be addressed by leadership.

- 5. A more comprehensive focus on DE&I that is integrated throughout the EVMS strategic plan and leadership initiatives is needed to build upon current efforts and further demonstrate leadership's commitment to a more diverse and inclusive culture. This priority of attention and intention by leadership will lead to an increased understanding and awareness about the importance of DE&I at EVMS.**

Both employees and students need to have greater awareness about the medical school's existing DE&I activities, events and other commitments to serve the diverse community. This represents an opportunity, as student and employee opinions about EVMS improve measurably when they learn about the school's diversity and community-focused initiatives, which again are detailed in the Strategic Plan for Advancing Health Equity and Inclusion for Community and Academic Impact.

A more intentional management communications effort that connects DE&I initiatives to an overarching strategy, crossing over departments and functional areas of the school, will provide multiple benefits, such as:

- It will be a tangible demonstration to more employees and students of the authentic work being done by EVMS to advance health equity in the community;
- It will educate more faculty and staff about the community-driven purpose of the school, which will contribute to greater employee satisfaction and engagement; and
- It will enhance recruitment of non-white students, faculty and staff.

A permanent Community Advisory Board (which also is recommended in the Strategic Plan for Advancing Health Equity and Inclusion for Community and Academic Impact) that reports to the president will improve communications and accountability for diversity, equity and inclusion in the community. It also will demonstrate the institution's DE&I commitment to all stakeholders.