

**Conducting a “DEI Audit” of the Academy of Homiletics:
Overview of Teaching and Research Practices, 2017-2022**

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Abstract: *In 2019, the Academy of Homiletics (AoH) launched a multi-year effort to understand and deconstruct the ways that whiteness has systematically impacted the research, practices, and teaching of preaching. In 2022, the AoH received a grant from the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion to study its efforts to “unmask homiletical whiteness” and embrace diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in homiletical pedagogy, research, and scholarship. The first part of this article shares general findings from the survey distributed to 81 members, gauging their attitudes, intentions, and practices regarding DEI. The second part reports on the team’s analysis of 179 syllabi submitted by members from before and after 2019 to track changes in pedagogy regarding DEI. In this “DEI audit,” we note correlations between increased sensitivity to and engagement with DEI while also pointing to differences according to the demographic intersections of members and the topics of interest.*

Background and Introduction

The Academy of Homiletics (AoH) is an academic guild based in the U.S. made up of professors of preaching, Ph.D. students in homiletics programs, independent scholars, and retirees who study the art and craft of writing and delivering sermons. Founded in 1965 by a small group of white mainline Protestant homileticians, the guild now has more than two hundred members comprised of scholars, teachers, researchers of preaching from the U.S. and Canada, as well as several other countries. In 2019, the president of AoH, Dr. Sally Brown of Princeton Theological Seminary, challenged members to “unmask homiletical whiteness” in preaching and pedagogy. The following year, Dr. David Schnasa Jacobson of Boston University School of Theology, in his role as president, hosted a series of online town halls on “Teaching Praxis for Solidarity” for members to explore their pedagogical commitments, values, and practices regarding DEI. In response, the guild undertook a multi-pronged effort to study ways in which structural racism has shaped the scholarship and teaching of homiletics. This effort challenged scholars of preaching, and indirectly, preachers to counter and dismantle whiteness through a concerted effort of centering diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Expressing Whiteness and DEI Within Theological Education and Homiletics

Along with Schneider and Bjork-James, “We take as a starting point that U.S. society has been structured by white supremacy since its founding in ways that continue to shape public life.”¹ “Whiteness” is a term that refers to conceptualizations of power, status, and identity within

¹ Rachel C. Schneider and Sophie Bjork-James. “Whither Whiteness and Religion?: Implications for Theology and the Study of Religion.” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 88, no. 1 (2020): 175-199, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lfaa002>.

racial hierarchies, privileging those perceived by self and others as white. The salience of this identity varies over time as well as between and among individuals within the social hierarchy. Helms describes whiteness as “the overt and subliminal socialization processes and practices, power structures, laws, privileges, and life experiences that favor the white racial group over all others.”²

The normativity of whiteness conveys a taken-for-granted quality, leaving it unquestioned due to unreflective attitudes and self-concepts. Joseph Barndt has asserted that whites push awareness of whiteness and privilege to the margins of consciousness because they benefit from racism.³ Bringing those benefits into awareness compels responsibility and action; thus, denial remains a viable tactic for evading accountability. A deeper unpacking comes from Eduardo Bonilla-Silva’s *Racism Without Racists*, where he details rhetorical and apologetic strategies whites employ, including historical amnesia and personal distancing.⁴ The result is that the central reaction to systemic privilege is to pretend it does not exist or minimize the impacts of systemic oppression, allowing whites to claim that racism is not real and has nothing to do with them personally.

To counter whiteness and white supremacy, there have been movements of tolerance, welcome, belonging, reclamation, reconciliation, and justice to blunt or ameliorate the effects of whiteness while centering and embracing historically marginalized and oppressed peoples. The contemporary term for this movement is “DEI,” short for diversity, equity, and inclusion, which finds its roots in the Civil Rights era when the country responded to legislation such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Equal Pay Act of 1963. At that time, employers and schools took initial steps to diversify their workplaces and integrate women and people of color. Throughout the 1970s and 80s, initiatives for creating more inclusion and diversity ranged from hiring dedicated staff to creating coalitions and interest groups to establishing formal networks of support for historically marginalized groups. The 1990s and early 2000s saw the elevation of DEI leadership in the form of chief diversity officers and data-driven efforts to verify not just compliance with DEI requirements but also the adoption of DEI as a core institutional value. At the same time, there has been a backlash against DEI, parallel to its growth and development in mainstream America. Deeply ensconced racial inequality fueled the white Christian nationalist movement, which has grown in numbers and influence since the 1950s, organizing in ways that contributed to the election of Donald Trump in 2016 and again in 2024. At the time of this writing, the current administration has stripped DEI initiatives from all government programs,⁵ challenged numerous universities to rescind their DEI efforts,⁶ and either reintroduced or reinforced racial hierarchy and white supremacy vigorously.

² J. E. Helms, “The Challenge of Making Whiteness Visible: Reactions to Four Whiteness Articles.” *The Counseling Psychologist*, 45, no 5 (2017): 718.

³ Joseph Barndt, *Understanding and Dismantling Racism: The Twenty-First Century Challenge to White America* (Fortress, 2007).

⁴ Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2021).

⁵ The White House, “Ending Radical and Wasteful Government DEI Programs and Preferencing,” <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/ending-radical-and-wasteful-government-dei-programs-and-preferencing/>, Jan. 20, 2025.

⁶ PBS News, “More than 50 universities face federal investigations under Trump’s anti-DEI campaign,” <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/education/more-than-50-universities-face-federal-investigations-under-trumps-anti-dei-campaign>, March 14, 2025, accessed July 29, 2025.

Schneider and Bjork-James note that both whiteness and DEI have shaped theological education. “White racial imaginaries have shaped the normative academic ways in which religion as an object of study came to be defined and pursued, even as this racial frame has been taken for granted and concealed.”⁷ Willie James Jennings puts it more pointedly: “Theological education vacillates between a pedagogical imagination calibrated to forming white self-sufficient men and a related pedagogical imagination calibrated to forming a Christian racial and cultural homogeneity that yet performs the nationalist vision of that same white self-sufficient man.”⁸ Thus, attention to whiteness in theological education is necessary not just for understanding how white supremacy has functioned but also for identifying opportunities for resistance and dismantling.

As Richard Voelz points out, this has certainly been the case with the practices and pedagogies of preaching. “When we begin to analyze the ways that this particular [white] identity is formed and performed via pedagogy, we can begin to comprehend and unravel the ways that a multitude of oppressive forces manifest and persist in preaching. In short, to more fully ‘unmask White preaching,’ the homiletics classroom must also necessarily come under scrutiny.”⁹

Overview of Study

One of the actions undertaken by the Academy of Homiletics to deconstruct whiteness and embrace diversity, equity, and inclusion in teaching preaching, research, and scholarship was to conduct a self-study in 2022. Funded by a grant from the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion, a team of nine individuals¹⁰ conducted both quantitative and qualitative research, including a member survey and analysis of syllabi provided by members. Two questions guided the research: 1) In what ways have members of the AoH reshaped their pedagogy to reflect the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion since undertaking the task of unmasking homiletical whiteness in 2019? 2) What can we celebrate, and what gaps, barriers, and opportunities lie before us as we continue to interrogate our intentions, practices, and outcomes of centering DEI?

Sifiso Khuzwayo cautions that “to preserve the integrity of theological developments, one must resist the temptation to embrace trendy catch phrases or concepts that dilute its essence into a superficial trend lacking impact.”¹¹ With this in mind, our purpose in studying DEI in the AoH was not an effort to be trendy. Rather, the goal was to discover the ways in which whiteness has limited the diversity, equity, and inclusion of the guild's research, practices, and pedagogy,

⁷ Schneider and Bjork-James, “Whither Whiteness and Religion?” 179.

⁸ Willie James Jennings, *After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging* (William B. Eerdmans, 2020), 7.

⁹ Richard W. Voelz, “Wrestling with Whiteness in Homiletic Pedagogy: A Reflection on Teaching ‘Proclaiming Justice in the Church and Public Square,’ in *Unmasking White Preaching: Racial Hegemony, Resistance, and Possibilities in Homiletics*, edited by Lisa Valle-Ruiz and Andrew Wymer (Lexington Books, 2022), 142.

¹⁰ Grant co-directors were Leah D. Schade and Richard Voelz. Accountability consultants were Kenyatta Gilbert and HyeRan Kim-Cragg. The members of the syllabi analysis team were Kizzy Bush-Boyd, Samantha Gilmore, Larry Morris, and Wing Yi Wong. The two outside research consultants were Amanda Wilson Harper and Wayne Thompson. While the project co-directors were white, which may entail some levels of bias or limited perspective, both the accountability consultants and three members of the syllabi analysis team were scholars from racially or ethnically minoritized communities.

¹¹ Sifiso Khuzwayo, “Western theology’s whiteness and some liberation theologies, two sides of the same coin,” *HTS Theologese Studies/ Theological Studies* 80, no. 2 (2024): 9.

especially since the AoH's leadership and membership have traditionally privileged white voices since its founding.

The first part of this article will share general findings from the survey completed by 81 of its members, gauging DEI attitudes, intentions, and practices. The second part will report on our team's analysis of 179 syllabi submitted by members from before and after 2019 to track changes in pedagogy regarding DEI. In this study, we note correlations between increased sensitivity to and engagement of DEI while also pointing to differences according to the demographic intersections of members and the topics of interest. The article concludes with recommendations for guild and member implementation.

Part One: Survey of AoH Members to Assess Pedagogical Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Methods

The Academy of Homiletics Survey of Members Assessing Pedagogical Diversity, Equity and Inclusion sought to reveal the ways that its members reshaped their pedagogy to reflect the values of DEI since undertaking the task of unmasking homiletical whiteness in 2019. We designed a 52-item instrument with a mix of question types, including multiple-choice, multiple-answer, Likert scale, and open-ended questions to gather both quantitative and qualitative information about member experiences with teaching homiletics classes, navigating institutional barriers, and conducting research. Respondents were anonymous to encourage forthright and honest answers. The questions aimed to elicit opinions, attitudes, and reflections about incorporating DEI into professional practice, providing baselines for the guild to assess future shifts and trends.

From the survey pool of 234 members, 81 completed questionnaires, a 34% response. Thus, the confidence level for the data is 85%, with a margin of error of 6.5%.

We provided respondents with the following definitions of DEI at the outset of the survey:

- **DIVERSITY:** Diversity refers to all aspects of human difference, social identities, and social group differences, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, creed, color, sex, gender, gender identity, sexual identity, socio-economic status, language, culture, national origin, religion/spirituality, age, (dis)ability, mental and physical health, military/veteran status, political perspective, and associational preferences.
- **EQUITY:** Equity refers to fair and just practices and policies that ensure all community members can thrive. Equity differs from equality in that it implies treating everyone as if their experiences are the same. Being equitable means acknowledging and addressing structural inequalities — historic and current — that advantage some and disadvantage others. Equal treatment results in equity only if everyone starts with equal access to opportunities.
- **INCLUSION:** Inclusion refers to a community where all members are and feel respected, have a sense of belonging, and can participate and achieve their potential. While diversity is essential, it is not sufficient. A community can be both diverse and non-inclusive at the same time; thus, a sustained practice of creating inclusive environments is necessary for success.

Demographics

Eighty-four percent of respondents were from the U.S. Other countries of origin included Canada, Korea, Colombia, Malaysia, Nigeria, and the Caribbean. Among those who provided racial or ethnic identity responses, 64% were white/Caucasian, 23% Black/African American,

6% African National/African-Caribbean, 5% Asian/Pacific Islander, 3% Native American/Indigenous, 1% Hispanic or Latinx, and 1% Middle Eastern.¹² The primary language of most respondents was English (95%). Secondary languages included German, Spanish, French, Korean, Cantonese, Arabic, Danish, Igbo, Italian, Mandarin, Portuguese, and Russian. Among those who provided gender and sexual identity, 50% identified as men, 49% as women, 90% as heterosexual, and 7% as LGBTQIA+.

All but one respondent identified as Christian and twenty-one Christian denominations were represented.¹³ Respondent ages ranged from 29 to 74, with forty percent below age 50 and sixty percent age 50 or older. Eighty-one percent of respondents had earned their degree for teaching homiletics, and 19% were students in a terminal degree program. Sixty-three percent were either full, associate, or assistant professors; 26% were either lecturers, adjunct, or visiting professors; 6% were retired. The remaining 5% positions included dean, president, independent scholar, seminary administrator, and church bureaucrat.

On social and political issues, 70% identified as progressive or liberal, 19% as moderate, 7% conservative, and 4% something else

Characteristics of Seminaries Where AoH Members Teach

Of the 44 respondents who indicated that they were “settled” in a single institution,¹⁴ 57% were in free-standing or otherwise independent institutions, and 43% taught in institutions embedded within larger universities. Twelve were represented among those who indicated that their institution had a denominational affiliation.¹⁵

Regarding diversity at their institution, 89% of all respondents said that gender diversity is a high or medium priority for their institution. However, only 27% of female respondents said that gender diversity and representation were high priorities for their institution, compared with 50% of their male colleagues. One-third reported high or medium, and two-thirds reported low priority for LGBTQIA+ inclusion.

Eight in ten respondents said they served in historically white institutions while 17% served historically Black institutions. When asked about the racial and ethnic diversity of their schools, 64% of all respondents chose very or somewhat diverse, while 33% indicated not very or not at all.

More than half of respondents reported having at least a few students for whom English is their second language. One third indicated that many or most of their students have a primary language other than English.

Importance of DEI in Teaching and Factors of DEI Formation

¹² Respondents could choose more than one race; thus, totals exceed 100%. Three percent reported their race or ethnicity as “something else.”

¹³ Denominations included (listed in descending order according to the number of respondents): Baptists, Progressive/National Baptist, American Baptist, Southern Baptist, Presbyterians, Christian Church - Disciples of Christ, United Methodist Church, Roman Catholic, Church of Christ, Lutheran – ELCA, United Church of Christ, Reformed, Episcopal, AME Zion, and CCFM Pentecostal, Church of God, Church of the Brethren, Evangelical Covenant, Mennonite, and Non-denominational.

¹⁴ We defined “settled” as neither a student nor a visiting or adjunct instructor.

¹⁵ Denominations of institutions included: Presbyterian (U.S. and Canada), Baptist (American, Southern), Interdenominational, Christian Church – Disciples of Christ, United Methodist, Roman Catholic, Church of Christ, United Church of Christ (US and Canada), Episcopal, Church of the Brethren, Lutheran - ELCA, and Reformed.

Seventy percent of respondents indicated that diversity, equity, and inclusion was a high priority for them in their teaching, 26% moderate priority, and 4% little or no priority. Eight in ten females said that DEI was a high priority, compared with six in ten males. The demographic group indicating DEI as the highest priority was females of color (92%).

What helped to prepare AoH members to center DEI in teaching and scholarship? Given four choices and asked the degree to which they were factors on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 4 (very much), primary texts by scholars of color or international scholars was rated highest (3.04). Second was guest lecturers or preachers from diverse presenters (2.88). Third was instruction from diverse faculty (2.81), followed by DEI training (anti-racism, LGBTQIA+ inclusion, etc.) at 2.06.¹⁶

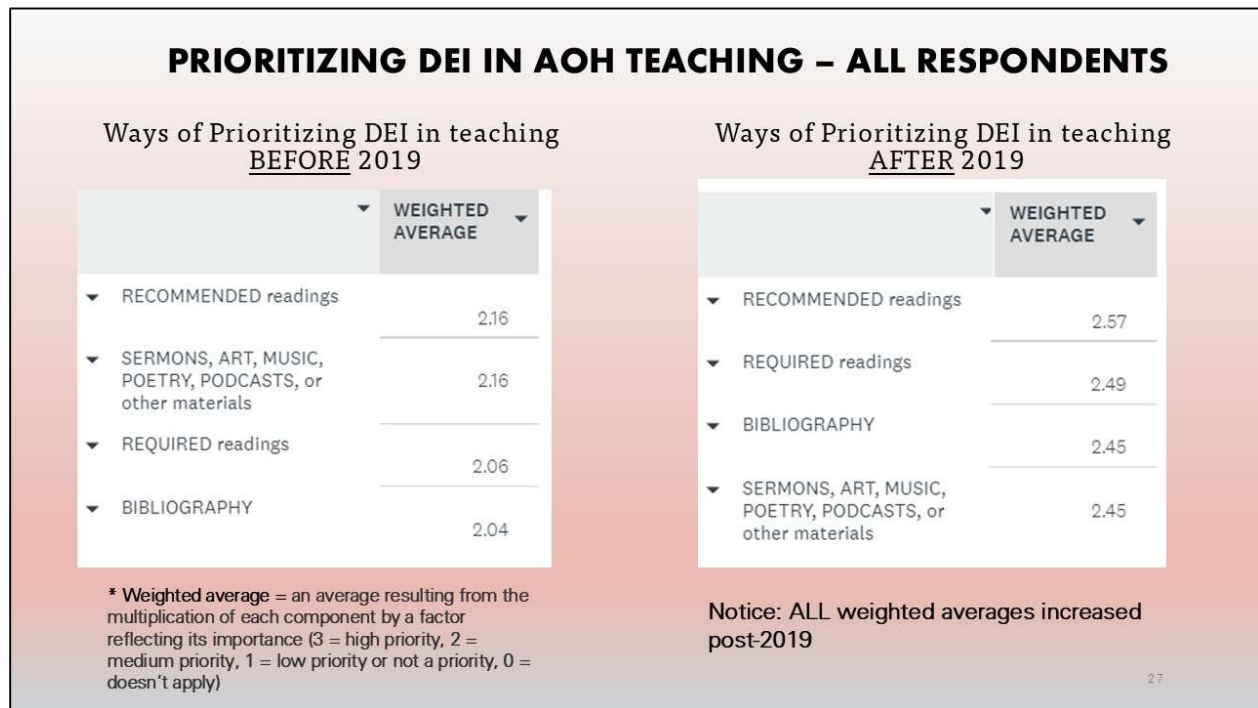
Tracking Changes in Attitudes About DEI Before and After 2019

To measure how the effort to unmask homiletical whiteness may have influenced its members, we compared the responses of the 43 members who attended the 2019 meeting and/or town halls in 2020 with the 38 who did not. Eighty-six percent of those who attended the 2019 meeting and/or town halls in 2020 said that DEI in teaching is a high priority compared with 55% of those who did not attend. Were attendees already predisposed to centering DEI, or was there a correlation between attendance and increased attention to DEI? To explore this, we asked one set of questions regarding pedagogy and another about scholarship.

Sixty-seven respondents indicated they had taught at least one homiletics course in the previous four years. The questions for this group were designed to assess the ways that prioritizing DEI in teaching changed for them after 2019. Then we contrasted the responses of those who attended the 2019-2020 meeting and town halls with those who did not. Table 1 compares the ways that members prioritized DEI in their teaching before and after 2019 in four ways: recommended readings; required readings; sermons, art, music, poetry, podcasts, or other materials; and bibliography. The tables show the weighted average of high priority (3), medium priority (2), and low priority or not a priority (1), with 0 for does not apply.

Table 1. Prioritizing DEI in AOH Teaching, 2022 Survey – All Respondents

¹⁶ In open comments, other ways that were listed included institutional ethos, curriculum (including specific courses), other students, cultural and societal influences (civil rights movement, feminist movement, etc.), specific professors, personal study and research, and reading lists for comprehensive exams.

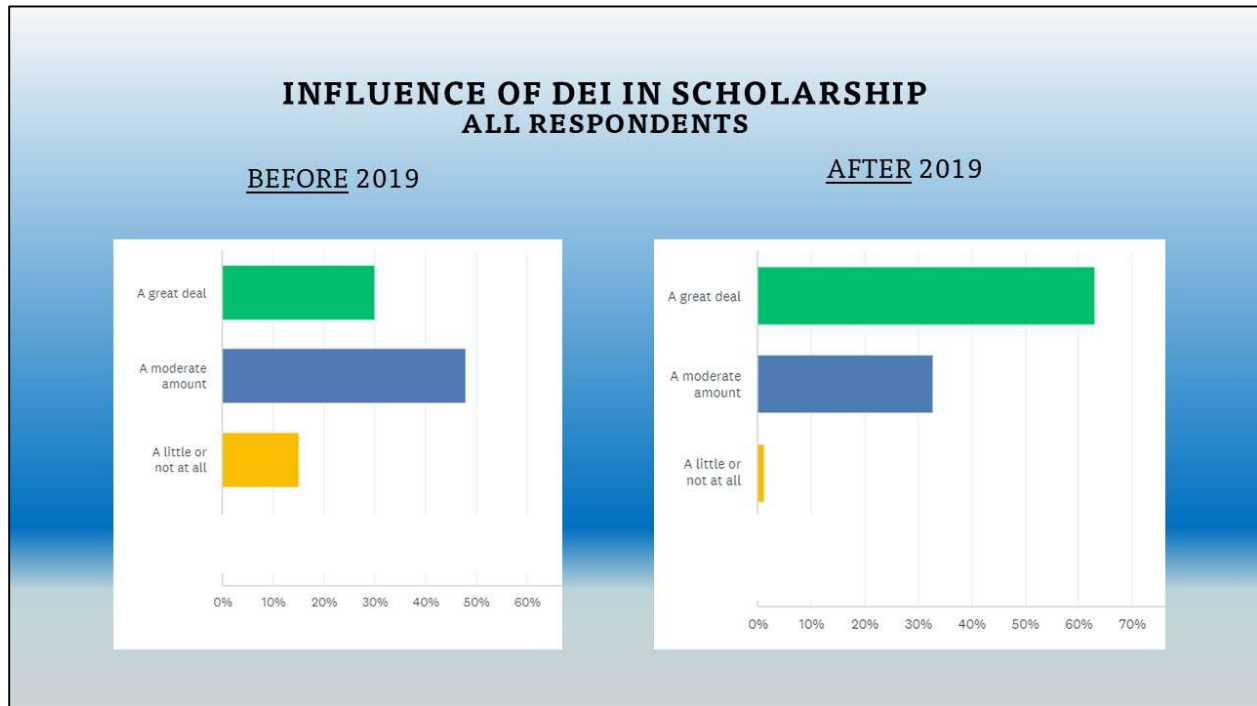


Note that all weighted averages increased post-2019. However, when controlling for those who attended the 2019-2020 meetings, some nuances were revealed. The average of weights for DEI in teaching for *non-attendees* before 2019 was 2.02 and increased to 2.23 after 2019. In contrast, the average for *attendees* before 2019 was 2.39, .37 higher than non-attendees. Thus, attendees were already prioritizing DEI to a higher degree than non-attendees prior to 2019. For attendees prioritizing DEI after 2019, the average was 2.80, .57 higher than non-attendees.

Thus, while attention to DEI in teaching increased for *all members* regardless of whether they attended the 2019-2020 meetings, for those who did attend, the increase in average weights was .41 compared with those who did not attend, which was .21. Thus, it appears that the efforts to promote DEI in the Academy of Homiletics have made the most difference for *those for whom these values were already important*. We found this pattern regarding scholarship as well. For example, we asked a series of questions about respondents' engagement with DEI in their research.¹⁷ Table 2 shows that for all respondents, the influence of DEI on their scholarly work grew noticeably after 2019.

Table 2. Influence of DEI in AOH Scholarship, all respondents, 2022.

¹⁷ 68 respondents said they engaged in scholarship before and after 2019.



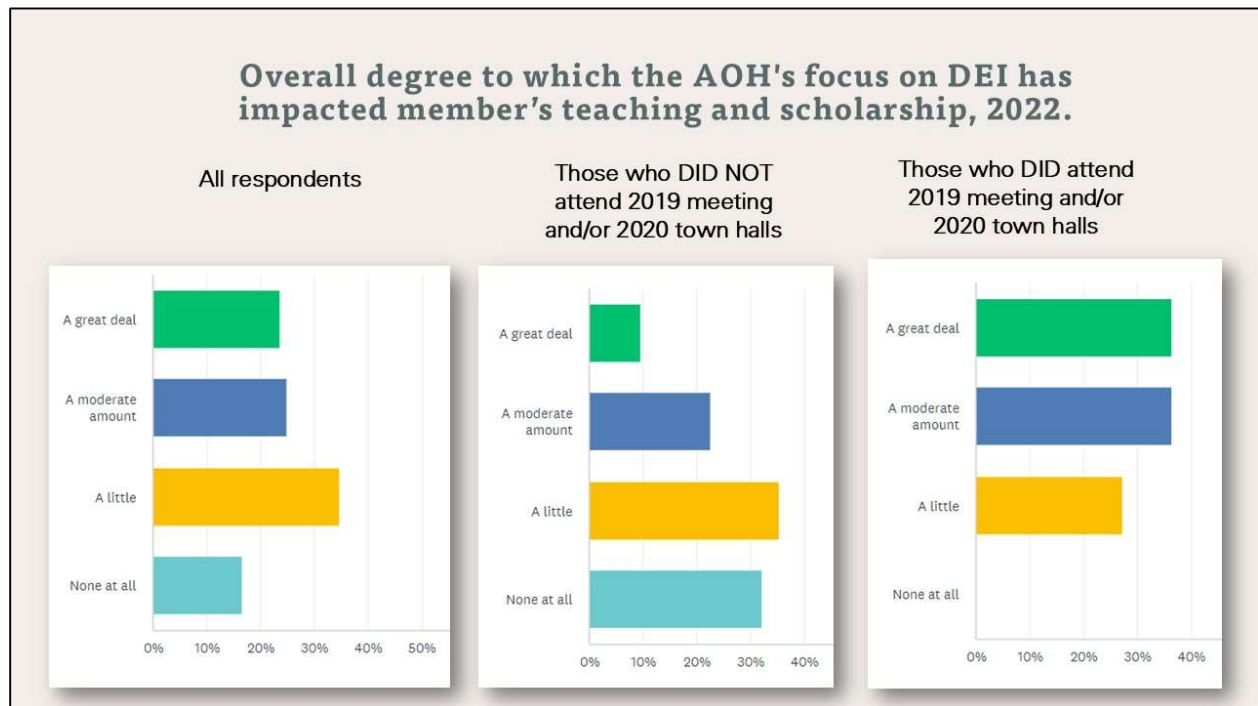
However, there was a 16% increase for those who did not attend either the 2019 or 2020 meetings compared with a 19% increase for attendees. Further, 100% of attendees said that DEI influenced their scholarship either a great deal or a moderate amount after 2019. Thus, as with teaching and DEI, attendees showed greater attention to DEI in their scholarship than those who did not.

There was also a difference between attendees and non-attendees in the *frequency* with which they centered DEI in their scholarship since 2019. Respondents were given a list of possible ways to include DEI in their scholarship and asked to indicate how often they used them. For all respondents, citing works by scholars from historically underrepresented communities or international scholars was rated highest, followed by the instructor clearly identifying their social and demographic identities and intersectional identities. Third was collaborating on projects with scholars from historically underrepresented communities or international scholars. Last was inviting scholars from historically underrepresented communities or international scholars to present at conferences, webinars, keynotes, or workshops. However, when controlling for attendance at the 2019-20 meetings, the weighted average for non-attendees was 2.05, while the average for attendees was 2.63. Again, this indicates that those who attended the 2019-20 meetings appeared to place more importance on DEI than those who did not attend.

Implications of DEI for AoH Members' Teaching and Scholarship

Table 3 shows a comparison between all respondents, 2019-20 meeting attendees, and non-attendees regarding the degree to which the AoH's focus on DEI has impacted their teaching and scholarship. For all respondents, 24% indicated a great deal, 26% a moderate amount, 34% a little, and 17% none at all.

Table 3. Degree To Which AoH's Focus on DEI Impacted Members' Teaching and Scholarship, 2022.



When controlling for attendance at the 2019 meeting and/or 2020 town halls, there are marked differences. Of those who did not attend, only one in three said there was a great deal or moderate impact, while 32% indicated none. In contrast, seven in ten attendees indicated that the DEI focus had a great deal or moderate impact, while none checked “none at all.” Again, it appears that the efforts toward DEI in the Academy of Homiletics have made the most difference to those for whom this work is important.

Yet, as one respondent commented, “Programming is not enough. Though there have been significant strides in representation and the job placement of candidates with respect to DEI, the nature of the guild still feels as if we are talking about DEI without digging into the substance of what DEI entails for transforming our guild.”

This aspect of “digging in” to the substance of DEI for transforming the AoH was explored in a question asking for respondents to indicate how helpful specific workshops and resources would be for further equipping their work in DEI. Creating an annotated bibliography was ranked highest, followed by a workshop on tools and best practices for pedagogy. Other options included a repository of model syllabi; workshops on navigating institutional racism, prejudice, bias, and resistance; a workshop on best practices with international and/or ESL students; and accountability groups for peer-to-peer support. The research team found it interesting that a workshop on best practices with ESL students ranked second to last, considering that more than half of respondents said they teach at least a few or some students who have a primary language other than English. This may indicate that AoH members remain unaware of the impacts of Anglocentric pedagogy on international and ESL students.

Part Two: Analysis of AOH Members' Syllabi to Assess DEI in Pedagogy

While respondents' self-reported attitudes and practices provide an important glimpse into the effects of centering DEI with members of the Academy of Homiletics, the team analyzed pedagogical artifacts in the form of syllabi to compare with the survey. Would the analysis of the syllabi show less engagement with DEI than what was self-reported in the syllabi? We collected

and analyzed members' syllabi to assess the implementation of DEI-focused research and pedagogical practices and compared these artifacts with self-reported attitudes.

Methods

In the fall of 2022, the research team requested members of the Academy of Homiletics to submit their syllabi from 2016-2018 (pre-intervention) and 2020-2022 (during intervention) to be analyzed for diversity, equity, and inclusion within the courses. The request for syllabi was announced to AoH members via email from the Executive Committee on behalf of the grant co-directors in 2022. Three types of syllabi were solicited: introductory preaching courses, elective or advanced-level or D.Min. preaching courses, and Ph.D. courses. Syllabi were anonymized by a third party to ensure confidentiality and coded for gender, race, ethnicity, and professional status of the instructor.

The sample pool was 204 members of the AOH; 52 members submitted syllabi. Syllabi from 2016-18 numbered 79; 2019-22 numbered 97. Three were discarded due to incomplete data. A total of 179 syllabi were collected and analyzed for the following components:

1. Required and recommended texts, bibliographies, and other sources that include scholars from historically marginalized communities and perspectives or speak to issues of DEI.
2. Keywords and other language in the syllabi regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion, as well as stated commitments to a culture of DEI in the classroom and institution.
3. Assignments and non-textual resources that intentionally incorporate DEI.

Demographics

Half of the instructors were full professors, 24% assistant professors, 16% associate professors, 7% adjunct or contingent, and 2% visiting professors. Eighty-seven percent of instructors were full-time, and 12% were part-time. Of those who indicated their gender and sexual orientation, 28 were female, 23 male, and 1 trans male; 74% heterosexual, 7% homosexual, 5% bisexual or flexible. Thirty-four were white, 11 Black, 4 Asian, 1 Hispanic or Latine, 1 multi-racial or multi-ethnic, and 1 Native American. Among those who indicated their country of origin, 87% of the instructors were from the U.S.; 10% were from outside of the U.S.

Analyzing Course Components Centering DEI in AoH Syllabi

Syllabi were grouped according to instructor to track course components pre- and post-intervention and then divided between four coders who each received 30-50 syllabi. Using a simple word search, each coder noted the number of DEI keywords.¹⁸ Then they analyzed the syllabi guided by the following questions:

¹⁸ Keywords included: ableism, disability, accessibility, affinity, African American, ageism, anti-racism, Asian American, bias, BIPOC, Black, Black women, Womanist, bodies, embodiment, brave space, classism, colonialism, de-colonial, post-colonialism, colorism, context-specific, context-determined, culture, cultural competency, intercultural, culturally distinct, discrimination, diversity, English as a second language, equality, equity, ethnic, ethnicity, Eurocentric, female, feminist, gender, global, Global South, heterosexism, heteronormative, Hispanic, Latine/a/o/x, inclusion, inclusive language, expansive language, Indigenous, Native American (and more specific references to country, nation, tribe, etc.), intersections, intersectionality, justice, injustice, LGBTQIA+ (or variations), gay, lesbian, minority, minoritized, historically minoritized, multicultural, multi-ethnic, neurodiversity, Pacific Islander, patriarchy, privilege, pronouns, race, racialized, racism, sexual orientation, sexuality, stereotypes, white, whiteness, white nationalism (or white Christian nationalism), white supremacy, white savagery, and xenophobia.

1. Do the required and recommended course readings include authors from historically marginalized communities or from beyond the U.S. and address topics of diversity, equity, and inclusion?
2. Do the non-textual and/or artistic resources (videos, audio clips, podcasts, visual arts, music/hymnody, poetry, etc.) originate from historically marginalized communities or perspectives, address DEI perspectives/topics, or originate from beyond the U.S.?
3. Do additional bibliographies/resource lists include materials, including non-textual and/or artistic resources, originating from historically marginalized communities or perspectives, that address DEI perspectives/topics, or originate from beyond the U.S.?
4. Does the language of the syllabus indicate the professor's personal commitments to DEI and express a commitment to a classroom culture of honoring DEI?

DEI Keywords

The keyword found most frequently in all syllabi (avg. 84%) was “context-specific or context-determined,” followed by “culture” (avg. 74.5%). Other frequently found keywords were “inclusive language/expansive language” (avg. 67%), “ableism, disability” (avg. 63.5%), “diversity” (avg. 55.5%), and “justice/injustice” (avg. 47.5%). Several terms saw a marked increase in percentage points from the pre-intervention to the post-intervention periods, including “Black” (+19), “inclusive/expansive language” (+17), “justice/injustice” (+19), race (+15), “African American” (+15), and “sexual orientation/sexuality” (+14). Of the fourteen terms that were mentioned the most, all but two (“bodies/embodiment” [-4] and “female/feminist” [-3]) increased in frequency in the 2019-22 group.¹⁹

We noted that while a keyword may not show up in a syllabus, an instructor may use DEI words in their course content verbally or in online forums. Nevertheless, the syllabus is the student's first encounter with the course and is an artifact that reflects the instructor's intentions for the course. Therefore, it is worth examining the use of keywords. When controlled for race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, 75% of scholars of color used the top five keywords, compared with 68% of white instructors. 90% of LGBTQIA instructors used the top keywords, compared with 68% of heterosexual and cisgender respondents.

DEI in Assigned or Recommended Texts, Readings, Media, Course Assignments, and Syllabus Language

Required texts, assigned readings (PDFs, book excerpts), recommended texts, and bibliographies were examined for the gender, race, culture, and country or origin of the author as well as for content that addressed some aspects of DEI. Course assignments and general language in the syllabi were also assessed.

In required texts of the 2019-22 syllabi, there was an increase in percentage points in female authors (+4), Black or African American (+11), and those outside the U.S. (+2), compared with 2016-18 syllabi. There was also a +4 increase in the number of required readings that addressed some aspect of DEI. Eighty-three percent of syllabi included such required texts, and the most frequently addressed topics in 2019-22 were justice (41%), Black or African

¹⁹ The research team noted that keywords might indicate trends in teaching and in culture as much as individual commitment to certain topics. For example, the term “BIPOC” (an acronym for Black, Indigenous, People of Color) was among the least frequently used terms and may reflect the fact that the acronym has generally fallen out of favor. At the same time, the term “neurodiversity” was also among the least frequently used terms, but may reflect the fact that while awareness of neurological diversity is on the rise, it is still in the emergent phase.

American (29%), race/racism (28%), womanist/Black women (28%), context (22%), and culture (19%). We noted that compared with the 2016-18 syllabi, the post-intervention syllabi showed more evidence of attention to intersectionality and distinctions within previously monolithic topics. For example, womanist/Black women increased by 23 percentage points, while Black/African American decreased by 18.

By race, 69% of instructors of color chose texts written by scholars of color compared with 44% of whites. Controlling for gender and sexual orientation showed that 41% of females chose texts written by female authors compared with 34% of males. Six in ten LGBTQIA instructors chose texts written by diverse scholars compared with five in ten of hetero/cisgender instructors. Also, 94% of LGBTQIA instructors chose DEI topics compared with 79% of hetero/cisgender instructors.²⁰

Combining across years, 24% of instructors used primary texts by authors of color and 64% used non-textual or artistic resources from people of color. Does this gap indicate exploitation or extraction of online sermons and other free resources by preachers or color instead of royalty-producing primary texts? Alternatively, are homileticians featuring preachers of color as exemplars? As a coder noted, “Seeing a person who looks like me in a preaching video is so important. Representation matters. Images are so powerful. It is one thing to read a text by an author of color; it is another to see a preacher of color in action.”

Sixty-six assignments were analyzed.²¹ For 2016-18, 30% incorporated DEI or referenced authors or preachers with minority identities, compared with 43% in 2019-22. Language in syllabi was examined for indications of a commitment to a culture of DEI in the classroom and/or the institution. This included the use of pronouns for the professor and the instruction for students to share their pronouns; inclusive and expansive language for the Divine and humans; non-discrimination statements; and personal statements of intersections, perspectives, and social locations. Syllabi DEI language increased from 33% in 2016-18 to 47% in 2019-22.

“Grading” Syllabi and Comparing to Member Survey

Coders assigned a “grade” of A, B, C, or D for each syllabus by completing a tally sheet assigning points for the number of instances of DEI.²² These grades were then compared for differences between pre- and post-intervention.

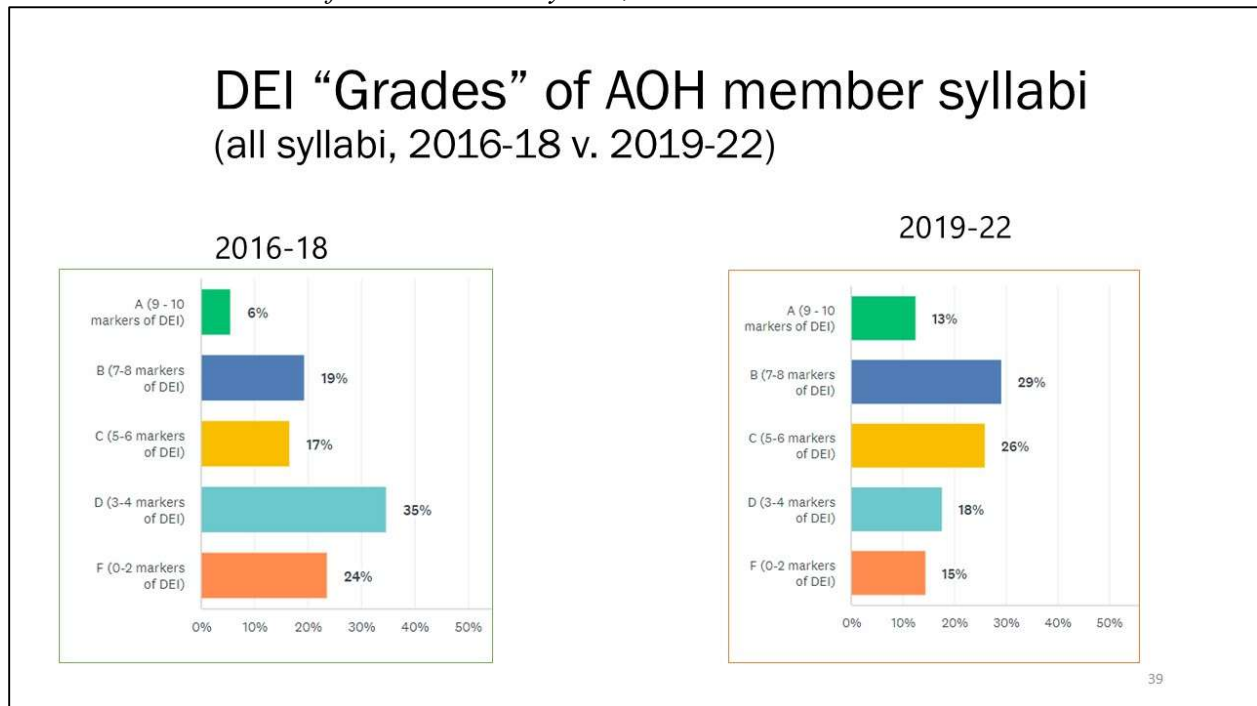
Table 4 shows that the number of syllabi with grades of A or B increased from 25% in 2016-18 to 34% in 2019-22.

²⁰ The same pattern held for DEI in assigned PDFs and excerpts, recommended texts, non-textual resources (sermons, videos, etc.), and bibliographies. For these course components, there were increases in Black/African American and female authors/creators as well as an increase in addressing some aspect of DEI. Focusing on bibliographies showed that 50 percent of female instructors had sources centering DEI compared with 26 percent of males. LGBTQIA instructors had a higher rate (50%) compared to hetero/cisgender (40%). In terms of race, white instructors had slightly more diversity in their bibliographies compared to instructors of color (41% v. 38%).

²¹ Assignments included: reflection papers, class discussion, write/record sermon, exegesis paper, online discussion board, academic paper, design liturgy/worship service, analyze a sermon, book review, create annotated bibliography, oral reflection, qualitative interviews, class presentation, written reflection on readings, videos, recordings, and attend and analyze worship service.

²² Coders assigned points for the number of DEI keywords (1-10 = 0; 11-20 = 1; 21 or more = 2), course resources with authors of color and/or outside of the U.S. and/or address a DEI topic (one or more required and assigned texts = 1; two or recommended texts = 1; two or more non-text sources = 1; bibliography with 11-25% = 1, 26% or more = 2); instances in syllabi with specific commitment to a culture of DEI in the classroom or institution (1-2 = 1, 3-5 = 2); and assignments that engage DEI (1 = 1; 2 or 3 = 2).

Table 4. DEI “Grades” of AOH Member Syllabi, 2016-18 v. 2019-22.



Coders noticed several improvements in the 2019-22 syllabi compared with those the instructors submitted for 2016-18. For example, one coder said there were “enormous leaps forward from the previous syllabus. The instructor attends to what it is like to live and preach from particular bodies as the course attends to performance.” Another commented about “significant attention given to DEI” in terms of classroom culture and including chapters and articles from a vast diversity of voices.” A third coder noted that a professor “focused on Black women preaching and included a diverse range of non-text materials. The instructor provided detailed rationale and examples of inclusive language practices.” However, across years, the number of As and Bs for white instructors increased by 6% while those of minoritized instructors increased by 37%.

How did findings from the syllabi analysis compare with the member survey? The survey demonstrated an increase of 16.8% in prioritizing DEI when factoring in self-reported actions regarding required readings, recommended readings, non-textual/artistic resources, and bibliographies. Syllabi showed a 26.2% increase when examining those same course components. In other words, analysis of the syllabi confirmed what the members reported about their increased commitment to DEI.

However, as the data showed, while attention to DEI increased in syllabi in 2019-22 compared with 2016-18, there were variations by gender, race and ethnicity, and sexual orientation. Overall, males appear to be doing less regarding DEI than their female colleagues. Whites appear to be doing less compared with their colleagues of minoritized groups. And heterosexual/cisgender individuals appear to be doing less compared with their LGBTQIA colleagues.

In addition, increases in DEI have focused primarily on Black and African American issues, while the interests of other minoritized groups were underrepresented in AOH members’ syllabi. As one coder noted, “The syllabus shows that the instructor made deliberate efforts to address racism by incorporating various materials drawn from different racial identity group in

the U.S. However, the required book section reveals a preference for only discussing Black and white issues which can reinforce a binary perspective on racism.” In addition, international scholars and their concerns were underrepresented across the board.

Caveats to Grades of Syllabi

Coders pointed out that some syllabi received higher grades because of the number of DEI keywords, but did not necessarily incorporate DEI themes into assignments or move beyond token nods to DEI. At the same time, some syllabi received lower grades for DEI because it was difficult to assess the nuances that might have contributed to DEI awareness and engagement in the course. Coders also noted that other cultural and societal factors (i.e., murder of George Floyd, Black Lives Matter movement, Covid anti-Asian bias, border crisis, etc.) may have influenced the increase of DEI in the 2019-22 syllabi.

Discussion

This project’s primary objective was to conduct a “DEI audit” of the Academy of Homiletics to highlight the efforts of its members to unmask and deconstruct white homiletics and embrace diversity, equity, and inclusion. At the same time, we acknowledged the limitations inherent in this work as well as the complexities involved in deconstructing and reconstructing the discipline of homiletics that expands beyond the binaries of race. The aim of this work is to promote dialogue and humility in exploring the pedagogy and scholarship of homileticians. By moving beyond narrow and exclusive understandings of homiletics, we might begin to embrace a broad, open, and inclusive orientation toward the teaching and research around preaching.

This work is essential given that, as Schneider and Bjork-James contend, “religion plays a role in either perpetuating, obscuring, or mobilizing against increasing racism and racial inequality. It is crucial, therefore, to bring conversations about the co-imbrications of race and religion within our current juncture to the fore, particularly given the fact that conservative white Christians maintain considerable influence over national politics in the United States.”²³ The work is also urgent, given the rapidity with which the current presidential administration and its supporters are dismantling DEI initiatives,²⁴ attacking higher education and academic freedom,²⁵ and restricting international students from attending U.S. universities.²⁶

Thus, this study raises questions that we hope will lead to further inquiries. For example, how does Christian preaching – and the theological formation of Christian preachers – continue to reinforce the racial hierarchies that undergird American society? In what ways do white homileticians and preachers deflect attention away from the reality of racial hierarchies?

²³ Schneider and Bjork-James, “Whither Whiteness and Religion?,” 176.

²⁴ Michele S. Manceaux, L. Maverick Flowers, Michael Kuczynski, “DEI Executive Orders and Related Litigation,” *The National Law Review*, Feb. 20, 2025, <https://natlawreview.com/article/dei-executive-orders-and-related-litigation>, accessed Oct. 1, 2025.

²⁵ Liam Knox and Johanna Alonso, “Trump’s 100-Day War on Higher Ed,” *Inside Higher Ed*, April 30, 2025, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/government/politics-elections/2025/04/30/how-trumps-first-100-days-transformed-higher-ed>, accessed Oct. 1, 2025.

²⁶ Lexi Lonas Cochran, “Trump tightens reins on foreign students in multifront immigration crackdown on universities,” *The Hill*, July 29, 2025, <https://thehill.com/homenews/education/5424114-trump-immigration-crackdown-international-students-columbia-harvard-university-college/>, accessed Oct. 1, 2025.

Conversely, how might preaching deconstruct these racial hierarchies and contribute to an expansive and inclusive proclamation?²⁷

Further, do the well-intentioned efforts of DEI inadvertently reinscribe and center whiteness and the voices of white scholars while eliding fundamental and crucial questions of emancipation, repentance, reparations, and restoration? The research team noted that the increased focus on African American homiletics, while demonstrating a necessary improvement, could have a simultaneous effect of minimizing attention paid toward homiletics from other marginalized groups. Kenyatta Gilbert, one of the senior advisors, described the need for attending to non-white and non-Black social identities:

The human community has not done enough work examining racial hierarchy and how racialized groups adopt different strategies when addressing matters that pertain to group preservation. Deconstructing what this means in terms of global visibility and diversity is hard to do. However, based on experience, many minoritized groups aspire to assimilate into what is deemed respectable to whites based on hierarchical norms and success criteria established by white persons. Equally true is that whites are generalized in assessment studies as if there are no real cultural differences in what is perceived to be monolithic.²⁸

In other words, an ongoing challenge with this work is the assumptions of white supremacy that are made invisible to preachers and their sermon listeners, even within minoritized communities. Homileticians must also ask what practices, policies, and pedagogies can dismantle the structures that continue to “coexist with everyday systems of racialized social inequality.”²⁹ In what ways can the research and teaching of preaching resist the temptation to “shield white subjects from recognizing the ways institutionalized racism continues to structure the society around them”?³⁰ Also, how might “white theologians, in particular, [including white homileticians] learn how to confess and redress white power in their intellectual work”?³¹

Limitations

The syllabi analysis was impacted by low inter-rater reliability in that each syllabus was reviewed by only one coder.³² We also note that the rise of Learning Management Systems (LMS) has created two streams of artifacts for courses where something might be present in the LMS but not in the syllabus, and vice versa. In addition, there was insufficient representation of

²⁷ During the discussions following the presentations of this research at the annual meetings, other questions surfaced, such as how to determine what is “enough” when it comes to DEI. In other words, what constitutes a sufficient number of texts, materials, and assignments in addressing DEI beyond tokenism? Further, is it possible to establish a threshold by which to gauge sufficient emphasis on DEI? Also, given that some seminary students are required to take only one course in preaching, how can instructors incorporate DEI into the course as effectively as possible within time constraints?

²⁸ Quote from Kenyatta Gilbert as part of the presentation, “Assessing Pedagogical Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the Academy of Homiletics,” Grant Project Report, Academy of Homiletics, December 2023.

²⁹ Schneider and Bjork-James, “Whither Whiteness and Religion?,” 188.

³⁰ Schneider and Bjork-James, “Whither Whiteness and Religion?,” 188.

³¹ James Perkinson, *White Theology: Outing Supremacy in Modernity* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 3.

³² More funding would have allowed for multiple coders to examine each syllabus and compare results for consistency.

Hispanic and Latine homileticians in this project, so we recommend that specific outreach should be undertaken to engage these scholars in future research.

There were also challenges in interpreting the data and accounting for the shifts in engagement with DEI. For example, were more diverse materials made available, which, in turn, gave instructors more options?³³ Did institutions hire more diverse faculty or make efforts to increase the diversity of their student bodies? Further, to what degree were the changes influenced by a maturation effect (individuals making changes over time) as well as a period effect of societal and cultural factors?

Recommendations

Given the fact that whites in the U.S. and abroad continue to uphold racial hierarchy and oppression through Christian preaching and the discipline of homiletics, there is much work to be done. This analysis of attitudes, pedagogical practices, and scholarship around diversity, equity, and inclusion within the Academy of Homiletics is part of an initial effort in identifying, resisting, and dismantling homiletical whiteness. We agree with Jennings that “theological education carries the resources necessary to reframe Western education beyond the distortion” of whiteness.³⁴ Therefore, our hope is that this project makes a useful contribution that will lead to homiletical research, teaching, and practice that envisions and inspires alternate social imaginations. Ultimately, this work should be utilized in the ongoing struggle to manifest preaching that is rooted in justice by offering insights into the limits and possibilities of homiletics that embraces the fullness of human community in all its expressions.

The data from this project indicates that continued focus on DEI through annual meeting themes, town halls, and workshops could be effective in continuing to deconstruct whiteness. To that end, the co-directors of this grant chose themes for the 2024 and 2025 Annual Meetings when they served as presidents in those years that built on the work of previous presidents and this research project. Leah Schade chose the theme “Preaching Builds Bridges” in 2024 to build connections with and among historically underrepresented groups that have received minimal attention within the guild. She moderated three online panel discussions covering the topics of “Building Bridges within the Multilingual Homiletics Classroom,” “Building Homiletical Bridges Alongside Those with Disabilities,” and “Building Homiletical Bridges in a Climate-Changed World.” During the annual meeting, the plenaries continued the focus on understudied themes, including building bridges with the LGBTQIA+ community, Indigenous and tribal communities, and within non-traditional spaces and emerging contexts. The meeting was held online in the spirit of building bridges of access and equity for international members, those who have disabilities, and those who do not have institutional support for the cost of travel and lodging.

For the 2025 annual meeting, Rich Voelz chose the theme “Preaching and Place,” stating: In the biblical witness, place serves a variety of functions: naming God’s presence and activity, defining God’s presence and judgment, marking socio-cultural and religious difference, accounting for the formation and maintenance of identity, charting the

³³ During discussion about the presentation of this data at the 2023 Annual Meeting, a question was asked as to whether publishers should invite more scholars of color to write basic preaching texts rather than books from a particular standpoint. Or is it better to move away from textbooks altogether in favor of shorter articles, videos, podcasts, and other platforms that can present a more diverse array of voices?

³⁴ Jennings, *After Whiteness*, 5.

faithfulness and faithlessness of God's people, mapping God's present and future promises, and much more. Throughout history, place has been a way that identity, conflict, community, and interactions with the Holy have been mediated.³⁵

The meeting was planned to focus on issues of contextuality, globalization, coloniality, migration, ecological crisis, war, the changing nature of sacred spaces and spaces from which preaching happens, digitality, and place-based pedagogy to "continue our collective commitment to seeking justice in our scholarship."

As the AoH charts its path for continued deconstruction of white hegemony, the research team offers recommendations for its members to incorporate DEI into their teaching and scholarship:

- For syllabi, create assignments encouraging student engagement with DEI beyond "checking boxes."
- Include photos of the authors in the syllabus to show the humanity and diversity of scholars the students will encounter.
- Place statements about DEI near the beginning of the syllabus rather than at the end, and include the professor's personal demographics and intersectionalities.
- When recommending commentaries to be consulted for exegesis in preaching, include a diversity of biblical scholars representing perspective-explicit interpretations.
- Offer options for students with different learning styles and for those whose primary language is different than English.
- Use required texts by authors from a wide range of historically marginalized groups.
- Focus more attention on international scholars to avoid Americanism and Eurocentrism.

The team also makes the following recommendations for the guild to undertake as an organization:

- Create a crowd-sourced annotated bibliography of texts, authors, and resources that reflect various aspects of DEI.
- Create a repository of assignments that embed DEI.
- Create a repository of model syllabi engaging DEI.
- Establish a threshold for the standard of DEI in syllabi and pedagogy, differentiating between tokenism and genuine, authentic engagement.

These are just a few ways that members of the Academy of Homiletics and its members can "shift centers of knowledge, show anti-racism [and de-coloniality] at work, exhibit historical consciousness, foster agency and consider intersectionality, and enact a publicly accountable classroom," as Voelz suggests.³⁶ These will help move this project beyond "merely an analytical enterprise" and instead "enact alternative futures for both pedagogy and whatever discipline or practice might be under consideration" in homiletics.³⁷

Phase Two of this project will include another member survey to continue tracking attitudes and practices around pedagogy and DEI within the field of homiletics. Researchers also plan to conduct ethnographic research by interviewing AoH members guided by questions such as: what factors have led them to shape their pedagogy so that it centers DEI in their classrooms? At the same time, what are the barriers or challenges to doing this work?

³⁵ Richard Voelz, email communication to AoH members, February 2025.

³⁶ Voelz, "Wrestling with Whiteness in Homiletical Pedagogy," 149-50.

³⁷ Voelz, "Wrestling with Whiteness in Homiletical Pedagogy," 150.

Overall, we suggest that the Academy of Homiletics might undertake “reconstruction homiletics,” an adaptation of the term “reconstruction theology” coined by J.N. Kanyua Mugambi in his proposal for post-liberation theology in postcolonial Africa.³⁸ This would entail shifting the conversation around homiletics away from a mere “no” to whiteness and toward a “yes” to reconstruction that embodies the fullness of humanity in all its multiplicity. At the very least, “it needs to refuse to be drawn into the abstract forms that have occupied whiteness and thus Western theology.”³⁹

At its best, when homileticians of all races, colors, genders, abilities, nationalities, cultures, and sexual orientations can hear their own and each other’s voices, they can engage in a conversation that creates a better-built homiletical convergence for preaching, teaching, and scholarship.

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³⁸ J.N. Kanyua Mugambi, *From Liberation to Reconstruction: African Christian Theology After the Cold War* (Nairobi, EAEP, 1995).

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