

**Feedback on the Diversity Strategic Plan**  
***A Framework to Foster Diversity at Penn State: 2004-2009***  
**Commonwealth College**

The College is commended for a comprehensive and well-organized plan that takes into consideration the demographic and socio-economic profiles of the campus recruiting/service areas, and the impact this data may have on recruiting and retaining a diverse campus community. The College plan presents a unified and collaborative college-wide approach while retaining the individuality of each campus location. These plans demonstrate that the College has a clear understanding of diversity goals and objectives, as well as strategies for implementation through the action plans. Action Plans include actions, responsible parties, accountability, cost, outcome assessment and time frames for each of the 12 campus locations.

**Campus Climate and Intergroup Relations**

***Challenge 1: Developing a Shared and Inclusive Understanding of Diversity***

- ❖ The College is commended for building upon the progress of the 1998-2003 plan. The College has designed a multi-faceted, multiple venue approach to “embedding a more consistent message about diversity” throughout all areas of College life, including faculty, staff, students, administration and their communities. Including the recently developed College-wide definition of diversity would be helpful in establishing the context for the actions presented in the plan.

***RESPONSE: As a result of preparing the assessment of the first plan, we have now developed a comprehensive definition of diversity:***

***Commonwealth College envisions diversity as both a motivating concept and an action-oriented goal:***

- ***Understanding, accepting, and respecting the array of human differences including gender, age, race, ethnic background, sexual orientation, mental and physical ability, socio-economic background, geographic experience, nationality, religion, veteran’s status, and other observable and non-observable differences among people.***
- ***Creating and maintaining a welcoming climate for all members of our campus communities through a reasonable representation of differences; continuous pursuit of strategies to develop the multicultural competencies of all individuals; and the effectiveness of all constituents in communicating, problem solving, and decision making.***

***We will include this in the 2004-2009 plan.***

- ❖ Creation of a component of the College web site focused on diversity commitments and resources is positive and will help the College communicate its diversity agenda broadly.
- ❖ Assessment plans and implementation strategies for each action item are a potential best practice.

***Challenge 2: Creating a Welcoming Campus Climate***

- ❖ The College has recently completed administration of diversity climate surveys at all locations and plans follow-up activities such as focus groups, interviews, increased programming, and other strategies. The College also plans to repeat the survey process in five years.
- ❖ Each campus has a broadly representative diversity committee and the College plans to develop guidelines for the composition, role and functions of the committees.
- ❖ Minimum expectations will be established at each campus for type and frequency of diversity programming and for diversity components in orientation programs for new faculty and staff members. Programming will encompass the breadth of diversity subjects.
- ❖ The College will ensure that a diversity component is represented on each campus Website.

### **Representation (Access and Success)**

#### ***Challenge 3: Recruiting and retaining a Diverse Student Body***

- ❖ The College has noted demographic realities confronting some of the individual campus locations that may result in College progress varying by location. The College has responded by implementing a systematic recruitment and retention plan and regional recruitment positions that have resulted in an increase in minority student enrollment.
- ❖ The College might consider encouraging each location to take into account the breadth of the College's definition of diversity in implementation of this challenge (for example, populations such as adult learners, veterans, and members of the LGBT community are specifically noted in some campus plans but not in others).

***RESPONSE: This suggestion is a helpful way to frame the foundation for implementing Challenge 3. At the same time, it is important to note that campus demographics and a lack of specific information about some groups will necessitate that campuses focus on those groups of most importance to their locations. This differential focus will vary by campus and over time as campus populations shift.***

- ❖ The College is encouraged to anticipate resource implications that may not be immediately apparent for the many actions listed (for example, costs for supporting conference attendance, personnel implications, etc.).

***RESPONSE: Identifying new resources will pose special challenges for the College, in light of current enrollment declines. We expect to accomplish most of our goals by using current resources more effectively.***

- ❖ The "newly funded regional recruitment positions" are positive and may help the College make the gains it wishes to achieve in recruitment of underrepresented students at all locations.
- ❖ Directing programmatic offerings and resources to address diverse campus and community populations is positive. (Offerings include ESL classes, programming to support the rapidly increasing Hispanic populations, and academic support and learning center focus on first-generation students.) Additional funding for scholarship support is also notable.

#### ***Challenge 4: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Workforce***

- ❖ Gains have been made in hiring women and people of color into all faculty and staff position levels in the College, particularly in regard to staff positions. The College faces issues presented by the demographic realities of the surrounding areas. However, the College has responded with targeted recruitment and retention strategies to recruit and retain a diverse workforce.
- ❖ Noteworthy action items include: Dean's incentive fund to support hiring staff and non-tenure track faculty from underrepresented groups; listing of specific topics to be covered in college charge meetings; reviewing applicants from a "holistic" perspective that values diverse life experience and contributions; implementing *Faculty Mentoring Guidelines*; formalization of a mentoring plan for new staff members and analyzing information from exit interviews. The College is encouraged to acknowledge and appropriately value contributions to diversity in the context of service within the tenure and promotion process and in staff reviews.

***RESPONSE: As noted in response to feedback for the 1998-2003 plan, the College has already adopted this approach. Diversity-related activities are reported in the annual Faculty Activity Reports (FAR) for teaching, research, and service, and significant contributions to diversity and multiculturalism are highlighted in the Dean's letter of support for promotion and tenure decisions. Also, Campus Executive Officers report their diversity accomplishments annually.***

### **Education and Scholarship**

#### ***Challenge 5: Developing a Curriculum That Fosters Intercultural and International Competencies***

- ❖ The planned minor in gerontology is an example of responsiveness to the demographics of surrounding communities served by the locations.
- ❖ An international curriculum that supports the growth of global citizens is commendable. The College is encouraged to balance international focus with attention to US diversity studies. Inter-group and racial identity development as well as the realities of American multicultural society for all citizens is critical to the maximization of the workforce. Diversity issues have a place in the classroom as well as in extra-curricular programming.

***RESPONSE: The College recognizes the important balance needed with U.S. diversity efforts and has worked to expand its attention to U.S. diversity studies. These efforts will expand during the 2004-2009 planning period. Campuses will be asked to monitor and report on both international and domestic diversity awareness in the curriculum.***

- ❖ Other positive actions include: introducing a certificate and minor in international studies; developing a Website to support international multicultural and diversity teaching and research; and engaging the Honors Program in supporting a diverse and international curriculum.

### **Institutional Viability and Vitality**

- ❖ It is positive that in Challenges 6 and 7 specific action plans are stated for both the College level and the campus-level to address leadership and organizational change issues.

#### ***Challenge 6: Diversifying University Leadership and Management***

- ❖ The College has a three-pronged approach to this challenge: identifying employees who may be interested in administrative opportunities; providing professional development, mentoring, and opportunities for promotion; and improving external recruiting. This approach has resulted in notable success in diversifying College administration, which includes five women, three African Americans, two persons with disabilities. Also, four new division heads include two women, two Hispanic, and one Asian.
- ❖ Monetary resources are provided to allow underrepresented faculty and staff to attend professional development opportunities that could potentially lead to increase in leadership capacity.
- ❖ Charging each search committee to conduct a post-search review and make process improvement recommendations is positive.
- ❖ Monitoring the assessment of diversity in annual performance reviews for faculty and staff is positive.

#### ***Challenge 7: Coordinating Organizational Change to Support Our Diversity Goals***

- ❖ It is positive that climate surveys were implemented at all locations, results have been shared, and follow-up evaluations and new initiatives are being developed.
- ❖ A potential best practice is the 360-degree evaluations of 100 College administrators to assess their ability to create a welcoming and rewarding work environment. A personal improvement plan would result from this evaluation.
- ❖ The College is commended for an ambitious and comprehensive plan and for committing significant resources to achieving its diversity goals. Prioritization of goals may be useful because of the of resource implications of these numerous initiatives.

***RESPONSE: We recognize that a number of initiatives have resource implications and will take those into consideration during the priority setting. The issue of balance across the types of diversity and across the variations in campus communities will also be addressed as part of this review.***