

Feedback on the Diversity Strategic Plan
A Framework to Foster Diversity at Penn State: 2004-2009
Eberly College of Science

The Eberly College of Science's diversity strategic plan identifies some ambitious goals over the planning period. For example, the College reports that it will work to achieve the same retention and graduation rate for undergraduate students of color as for majority students. At the graduate and faculty levels, one goal is to achieve "minority and gender representation at least equal to the national levels of these populations." The College has developed a "tool box" that outlines various activities that will contribute to achieving these and other diversity goals. Additionally, the plan calls for naming a diversity advocate in each department.

Overall, the diversity strategic plan for 2004-2009 continues many programs from 1998-2003 into 2004-2009, though the final progress report for the 1998-2003 *Framework* does not offer much data to demonstrate success for many of these programs. Some portions of the text in the 2004-2009 plan appear to be copied over from the 1998-2003 final report (cf., pp. 14-15, 1998-2003 report and pp. 10-11, 2004-2009 plan). If nothing else, this fact gives the appearance that the 2004-2009 plan is not carefully crafted. As a result of these repetitions, much of the plan reports on past activities that are not always well connected to future goals. For example, several statements about the diversity committees (pp. 4-5) focus on endeavors that have occurred or are ongoing, but the description of future activities is essentially limited to "we will continue active support" for these committees, but with no concrete goals, objectives, or metrics for the evaluation of success. Throughout the plan, metrics are provided for some goals but not for others, and some materials are identified as "metrics" without explicit measures on what constitutes success (pp. 10, 21).

RESPONSE: A summary document outlining the intended metrics for use during this review period as well as year zero data for these metrics is now included in our Framework Report for 2004-2009. Note that for most areas year over year progress is our goal rather than a specific number.

Campus Climate and Intergroup Relations

Challenge 1: Developing a Shared and Inclusive Understanding of Diversity

- ❖ The College's definition of diversity is clear, but the communication plan does not provide much detail.
- ❖ The College is commended for changes made to the multicultural coordinator's position. The change in reporting lines directly to the dean should facilitate the College's diversity progress.

RESPONSE: We plan to communicate our definition of diversity, the college's commitment to valuing and fostering diversity, and the activities and membership of our climate committees through a brochure to be distributed annually to all faculty, staff, and students in the college.

Challenge 2: Creating a Welcoming Campus Climate

- ❖ The College plans to ask its climate and diversity committees to focus more on "diversity and inter-group relations" issues as a top priority for the next three semesters or longer if necessary. A "diversity dialogue," which will examine the current status of underrepresented groups, will be instrumental in defining the committees' agendas. Similar dialogues will define the agenda for faculty and staff issues. This initiative appears to be a key item for this Challenge, thus, more details would be useful.
- ❖ The "tool box" and departmental diversity advocate are innovative and are potential best practices, though more development for both is needed. For example, much work needs to occur to make the tool box fully functional, including the identification of measurable objectives under various goals along with metrics for evaluating success. Precise evaluations of these efforts will demonstrate whether or not a given "tool" is a best practice. Also, at present, the tool box focuses primarily on diversity goals related to race/ethnicity and women. Do any plans exist that would augment the tool box approach to include other diverse populations, such as the LGBT community, persons with disabilities, or international individuals?

RESPONSE: We plan to invite a number of campus organizations which represent a wide range of underrepresented groups in the college to speak to our Climate and Diversity Committee. The committee will then develop appropriate action plans aimed at improving the climate for all under represented groups in our college. Metrics appropriate to measure progress and effectiveness of the Toolbox items are now included in the metrics section of our Framework Report for 04-09. For the period covered by this report, we intend to focus our tool box efforts on enhancing recruitment and

retention of women and underrepresented ethnic groups. Our climate initiatives, however, will strive to make the college a welcoming place for all groups of individuals including the LGBT community, persons with disabilities, and international individuals.

Representation (Access and Success)

Challenge 3: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Student Body

- ❖ This section of the plan provides ample description of the undergraduate recruitment and retention programs outlined in the 1998-2003 progress report and planned for continuation during 2004-2009. However, neither the progress report nor the diversity plan provides concrete evidence of success for most of these programs beyond anecdotal description (data indicating success are provided for the Alcoa Pennypacker program). How will success be measured in 2004-2009 for these programs?
- ❖ Many excellent goals are proposed in the tool box for this Challenge although, as indicated above, more details are needed. There does not appear to be a tool box for undergraduate recruitment for students of color either under this Challenge or in Appendix 1 (where the full tool box is outlined). Is a different approach under consideration for this area?
- ❖ Requiring annual reports from all departments regarding retention and graduation data for students of color and majority students is a noteworthy initiative. Also, good ideas are presented to assess the results of working with HBCUs.

RESPONSE: Our metric section now includes data to track results from these long-standing undergraduate recruitment activities. We have chosen to focus our efforts during the 04-09 timeframe on undergraduate retention rather than recruitment. Success of the students who are here is the best recruitment tool of all.

Challenge 4: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Workforce

- ❖ The goal of increasing the percentage of tenured and tenure-track women faculty from the present 15% to 25% over the next ten years is ambitious and commendable. It would be useful to establish metrics that delineate thresholds for these goals for the 2004-2009 diversity planning period so that the College can effectively evaluate its efforts at the mid-point and end of the planning period.
- ❖ The College plans to initiate or continue various strategies for recruiting and retaining a diverse faculty, including a post-doctoral program, purchases of departmental rosters from the Minorities and Women Doctoral Directory, and review of the P & T process to identify flaws and biases. These plans are laudable, but they need further development, including the identification of specific objectives and metrics to measure success.
- ❖ The College will implement three new search strategies for staff positions: simultaneous vacancy postings, focused participation in OHR intern and work experience programs, and re-consideration of candidates from diverse/racial groups not selected for previous positions. These plans seem reasonable but, given the demographics of the State College community, they may need to be augmented, including outreach efforts to churches and other local organizations in the community along with a targeted advertising plan.

RESPONSE: Again, a metrics section has now been added to our report.

Education and Scholarship

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

- ❖ The College offers some workable strategies to *begin* curricular integration in undergraduate courses. For example, collaborations with the College of the Liberal Arts and the Africana Research Center are in the offing, though, apparently, plans are still tentative.
- ❖ The College appears to still be in the process of identifying appropriate approaches to this Challenge within its core curriculum. For example, the plan calls for analysis of traditional “weed out” courses to determine whether or not the College needs to develop smaller sections for some at-risk students and whether or not better ways exist to schedule students. These initiatives are still undeveloped but, more importantly, they seem to fit better under Challenge 3. The integration of diversity into science curricula

poses some unique challenges; however, sufficient planning and forethought by the College can result in the development of creative and effective approaches.

RESPONSE: We will remove the discussion of “weed out” courses. This initiative is already at part of our strategy under Challenge 3. Initially we plan to focus on creation of First Year Seminar modules to teach and discuss the value of diversity and the importance of a welcoming climate for all.

Institutional Viability and Vitality

Challenge 6: Diversifying University Leadership and Management

- ❖ In addition to ongoing initiatives, the College outlines three new strategies: establishing a strategic leadership group consisting of the dean, associate deans, and the multicultural coordinator; conducting regular discussions and planning with the College executive committee; and encouraging periodic involvement of other faculty and staff in climate and diversity planning. These efforts are commendable, but their connection to developing new leaders within the College is unclear.

RESPONSE: We have also developed a list of individuals, female and minority, whom we believe have the potential and some inclination, at least, to move into leadership positions. We will ensure that these individuals have opportunities to show and hone their leadership skills by appointing them to head up key activities in the college, such as the college P&T committee and key search committees.

Challenge 7: Coordinating Organizational Change to Support Our Diversity Goals

- ❖ The plans to change the title and reporting lines for the multicultural coordinator, to diversify the executive committee, and to develop a network of departmental diversity advocates indicate that the College has progressed well beyond where this unit stood during the 1998-2003 planning period. This plan could be strengthened by carefully defining the coordinator’s relationship to department heads, other Dean’s Office personnel, diversity committees, and the new departmental diversity advocates.

RESPONSE: Yes, the diversity advocate role is potentially a powerful and effective one, but one that will require leadership support and will most likely evolve as we find our way.