

**Feedback on Final Update on Progress Implementing
A Framework to Foster Diversity at Penn State: 2004-09
Information Technology Services
Spring 2010**

Information Technology Services (ITS) has made strides towards its diversity goals during the 2004-09 planning period. Some of these advances are developing a clear definition of diversity since the mid-term update; broadening recruiting activities for staff; conceptualizing student employment and GA support as a contribution to student retention; conducting a climate survey; implementing the ITS Community Principles; and collaborating with other units, especially the Office for Disability Services and the University Libraries, to support persons with disabilities. These activities have undoubtedly had an effect on improving Unit climate and on other measures of progress.

On the other hand, some efforts, such as the plan to examine the partnership with Lincoln Tech and Project MELD, appear not to have moved forward since the mid-term. Better accessibility for ANGEL and the JAWS screen reader, which can still present problems in some environments, and better articulation of ITS services throughout all campuses, as the update also acknowledges, are also ongoing needs. The review team noted that the update neither systematically answered the *Framework* assessment questions nor addressed the ITS diversity strategic plan. Accordingly, some items were lacking in the update, such as the composition of the Climate and Diversity Team (C&D) and the most and least successful strategies for change (for all Challenges). If the update had articulated a rationale in the introduction for these omissions, the review team would have had at least some context for understanding why these components were absent. Finally, the update does not consistently measure progress against a clear set of outcomes performance indicators with specific thresholds that define success.

Campus Climate and Intergroup Relations

Challenge 1: Developing a Shared and Inclusive Understanding of Diversity

- ❖ Some of the roles and the level of responsibilities of C&D are unclear. Was C&D involved in developing the *Framework* update and plan? This role appears to be a natural place for them to exert leadership. Also, the new reporting structure of C&D to a steering committee, while potentially useful, could result in ITS leadership setting all major goals for C&D, limit buy-in from C&D and others responsible for initiatives, and impede honest feedback on endeavors.
- ❖ The focus on disabilities under this Challenge is exemplary, but programming for other diversity constituents appears thin.

Challenge 2: Creating a Welcoming Campus Climate

- ❖ The development and dissemination of ITS Community Principles is commendable. Strategies for assessing the extent to which behavior of Unit personnel aligns with the principles will be key to realizing the vision of community.
- ❖ Efforts to improve communication within the Unit are noteworthy.
- ❖ Conducting a Unit climate survey (as reported at the beginning of the update) is commendable, particularly the articulation between the Unit survey and the 2008 Faculty/Staff Survey. Including some of the specific results on the gaps reported would have been useful. Also, the strategies for addressing problems appear sound, though more detail on the “comprehensive and systematic plan” would illumine how well the plan aligns with the stated problems. How will outcomes pertaining to the plan be assessed?
- ❖ Access to the vice provost, especially “Coffee with Kevin,” appears to be an effective way to secure informal feedback on Unit climate. Has any evaluation been conducted (e.g., participant perceptions on outcomes, useful information gained, or action items that have emerged)? Methods for gathering feedback anonymously should also be implemented.

Representation (Access and Success)

Challenge 3: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Student Body

- ❖ While internship programs for students from other schools are potentially valuable, as acknowledged in ITS’s response to the mid-term feedback report, metrics are needed to assess the impact of the program.

- ❖ It is commendable that one-fourth of all wage/interns and GAs are students from diverse racial/ethnic groups. However, ITS should consider how to better diversify its GA positions since no Black/African American or Latino students are represented. The Unit should also consider how these positions can be used most strategically to support the retention of high-need students. The team believes this initiative has enormous promise because it provides excellent wage support to these students. With data supporting positive retention outcomes, the initiative could become a best practice.

Challenge 4: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Workforce

- ❖ Expanded efforts to recruit diverse staff is positive, but results have been uneven, with a decline overall for staff from diverse racial/ethnic groups. ITS clearly needs outside-the-box thinking for this Challenge.
- ❖ Extensive professional development efforts in diversity areas are commendable. However, no assessment of their impact appears to have taken place, nor have any plans been developed for such an assessment.
- ❖ Participation in the PDP program is commendable, but no information is provided on whether or not interns have been successfully retained as employees after completion of the program.
- ❖ The increase of women at higher competency levels is noteworthy. Is the increase primarily due to hiring from without or promoting from within? Teasing out these differences might help ITS direct its efforts more effectively.
- ❖ Expanded job postings are well and good but are not always effective. Again, tracking outcomes and modifying strategies based on results are key.
- ❖ ITS' recruiting and hiring of diverse undergraduate students for internships with the goal of retaining them as full-time employees later is exemplary. As has been emphasized throughout this Challenge and, indeed, for the entire feedback report, data on these initiatives will determine their success.

Education and Scholarship

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

- ❖ Project MELD, mentioned in earlier updates and feedback reports as an important ITS program, does not appear in this update. A check of the ITS Web site revealed broken links and outdated information. What are plans for its future? Has its use by faculty been assessed? In its response to the feedback report at the mid-term, ITS noted the need for better support from academic units. Has ITS taken steps to cultivate such support?

Institutional Viability and Vitality

Challenge 6: Diversifying University Leadership and Management

- ❖ Have any promotions resulted from the professional development activities reported in this segment?
- ❖ No information is provided on the diversity profile of ITS administrators or on strategies for creating diverse applicant pools and diversifying administrative and executive ranks in ITS. A demographic breakdown of management was not provided in this update or at the mid-term. Providing such a breakdown with some reflection on why improvement hasn't occurred would, at the very least, imply that ITS is making this Challenge a priority.

Challenge 7: Coordinating Organizational Change to Support Our Diversity Goals

- ❖ The Four Themes for strategic planning, including the Fourth Theme, which appears to be most related to diversity, can still be conceptualized as a casual approach to diversity. A more-directly stated diversity goal would send a stronger message.
- ❖ The new structure for the C&D team is a tangible organizational change regarding diversity. Assessment of how well the new structure works will be welcome in future updates.
- ❖ What is the status of the University-wide Diversity Network, which was discussed in the mid-term report?
- ❖ The IT Leaders Program and the 360-degree evaluation of the Senior Leadership Team are laudable, but the update appears to take the perspective that these measures inherently foster diversity. These programs, while valuable, need to be directly leveraged in a proactive manner towards diversity to impact ITS's diversity goals.