

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

Penn State Outreach effectively outlines a diversity strategic plan for *A Framework to Foster Diversity at Penn State: 2004-2009*, with a focus on Challenges 1 through 4. The plan centers around 17 concise and concrete action items that address critical needs, including some items that Outreach acknowledges as weaker areas during the 1998-2003 *Framework* period. Outreach is to be commended for developing targeted actions with lines of accountability and performance measures to gauge progress.

It is sometimes necessary to emphasize one item over another within a strategic plan, and the Outreach plan gives evidence of such “strategic thinking.” Despite Outreach’s effective planning for Challenges 1 through 4, Challenges 5 through 7 still need further development. Also, not all 17 action items have performance measures, and some of these measures can be refined. For example, action item #6 includes “future climate survey results” as one of its performance measures. A better approach would be to set specific targets for key climate questions (i.e., “at least 90% of respondents will rate the overall climate in Outreach as ‘good’ or ‘very good’”). Other questions on the climate survey could be used as performance measures for some action items that don’t have them yet. ***RESPONSE: In response to the feedback on the Outreach Diversity Strategic Plan, several action items have been added to the updated plan.***

Campus Climate and Intergroup Relations

Challenges 1 and 2: Developing a Shared and Inclusive Understanding of Diversity and Creating a Welcoming Campus Climate

- ❖ While some overlap occurs in the first two Challenges of the *Framework*, incorporating the two under one section in the plan may obscure some discrete components of each individual Challenge. ***RESPONSE: Action item 2 in the plan specifically addresses Challenge 1; action item 6 specifically addresses Challenge 2. All other action items relate to both – we see developing a shared understanding of diversity as a cornerstone of creating a welcoming climate, and the identified initiatives are mutually reinforcing of both ends.***
- ❖ The new Outreach Diversity Council is promising and, if assessed effectively, could become a best practice.
- ❖ Outreach is to be commended for its goal to enhance its definition of diversity. It is particularly impressive that this goal was developed as a follow-up to staff input on the 2002 climate survey.
- ❖ Action item #3, “prepare directors, managers, and supervisors through dedicated training to provide leadership for diversity . . .,” is positive, but it may go better under Challenge 4. ***RESPONSE: Although this initiative in part concerns recruiting and retaining a diverse workforce, we see this initiative as more broadly related to proactively creating a positive climate for diversity.***
- ❖ Outreach is committed to conducting climate surveys at regular intervals. It would be useful to develop formal follow-up procedures, such as focus groups and reports on survey results that go to all Outreach employees. Survey results need to be provided in upcoming *Framework* progress reports. ***RESPONSE: We share survey results with all Outreach employees, and have followed up with unit management teams and with sessions at the annual professional development conference for staff. Focus groups may be another useful avenue for follow up in the future.***

Representation (Access and Success)

Challenge 3: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Student Body

- ❖ Outreach spotlights adult learners in its recruiting and retention plans. Outreach is encouraged to articulate diversity in all its facets, including adults, but not as a priority over other groups, including members of the LGBT community and individuals with disabilities. Some initiatives, such as the agreement with the Organization of American States, demonstrate Outreach's commitment to other groups; focusing on any single group is a step backwards. **RESPONSE: Our special focus on the adult part-time learner in no way precludes a commitment to access for all underrepresented groups within the adult learner focus or any other audiences served by Outreach (e.g., youth, elder). Our efforts to bring more non-traditional adult learners to Penn State should be viewed as an important contribution to the overall diversity of the University's student body, and as such, this focus is a critical part of the Outreach diversity strategic plan.**
- ❖ Outreach Marketing is encouraged to take a leadership role in breaking into diverse new market sectors.
- ❖ Plans to develop a diversity framework for World Campus are laudable and could serve as a template for other diversity efforts within Outreach.

Challenge 4: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Workforce

- ❖ Although Outreach notes it has had success in recruiting women into its workforce, the unit acknowledges that efforts to recruit employees from diverse racial/ethnic groups have not been as successful.
- ❖ The goal to strengthen vacancy position descriptions to communicate a commitment to diversity is a good beginning. Further steps could include developing a diversity proviso for job descriptions and asking questions that pertain to diversity issues in job interviews. **RESPONSE: We will incorporate these suggestions.**
- ❖ The recruitment fund to support the hiring of diverse employees is a potential best practice. Outreach is encouraged to monitor outcomes and appraise the program's effectiveness. **RESPONSE: Implementation and results will be closely monitored.**
- ❖ The retention program shows promise, but more details are needed to flesh out the specifics of the endeavor. Again, careful evaluation will be important to ascertain program success and determine whether or not the program should be continued. **RESPONSE: As stated in the plan, the Outreach HR director has been charged to develop the program; implementation and results will be closely monitored.**
- ❖ Outreach should consider a "grow your own" internship program to provide diverse Penn State students with opportunities to develop skills that pertain to Outreach's mission for potential future employment. **RESPONSE: We will be exploring this idea.**

Education and Scholarship

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

- ❖ Outreach's goal to review its multicultural programming portfolio could be an important step in evaluating its current efforts, but the plan appears to fall short of formal assessment. It is recommended that Outreach develop a data-driven evaluation to guide future directions. **RESPONSE: We view the portfolio review as a necessary first step to establish a baseline for diversity-related programming in Outreach both to understand better the full scope of such offerings across Outreach units and the trends and challenges in working with our academic partners on such programming. We have not brought this "big picture" together in the past. It is our expectation that this review will lead to specific initiatives that will be guided by data-driven evaluation.**
- ❖ Other than the review of current programs, no new initiatives are proposed for this Challenge. Given the numerous curricular endeavors that Outreach mentions in its final report for the 1998-2003 *Framework* period, this omission is surprising. Outreach may be underestimating its overall impact on the curriculum and may wish to reevaluate whether the Division can be more proactive in augmenting diversity in the curriculum. "Outside-the-box" initiatives, such as the ESL program and *Race Matters*, are encouraged.

RESPONSE: On the credit side, Outreach programs are driven by the colleges. On the non-credit side, our programs do not contribute to the curriculum at Penn State. Nonetheless, we believe it is important to extrapolate this challenge in terms of the overall Outreach portfolio. We view the planned portfolio review as a jumping off point for possible new initiatives and are exploring the dedication of some funding within the Outreach Program Innovation Fund for diversity-related programs. Penn State Public Broadcasting has recently broadened the focus of the program noted above, now called “What Matters,” to address the many facets of diversity.

Institutional Viability and Vitality

Challenge 6: Diversifying University Leadership and Management

- ❖ Outreach states that some items for Challenge 6 are addressed in Outreach’s response to other Challenges, such as the recruitment and retention programs under Challenge 4. Challenges 4 and 6 are interrelated, but diversifying leadership is more nuanced than diversifying the workforce and requires specific initiatives that are targeted and proactive. Outreach’s current goal of “encouragement and support” for this Challenge needs further development and a more aggressive posture; otherwise, the Division runs the risk of underestimating the dimensions of this Challenge and the needs of the Division during the 2004-2009 *Framework* planning period. ***RESPONSE: The recruitment and retention initiatives identified under Challenge 4 include a special focus on positions for which regional and national searches are conducted (many of these are leadership positions). In addition, we have added action items in the Outreach diversity strategic plan that focus specifically on leadership positions.***

Challenge 7: Coordinating Organizational Change to Support Our Diversity Goals

- ❖ Outreach begins the 2004-2009 *Framework* planning period with good structures already in place to meet this Challenge, including the new Outreach Diversity Council and budget reallocations for diversity program enhancement. Plans to develop an annual update for all Outreach staff on progress towards its diversity strategic planning goals and to network with others throughout Penn State on best practices are commendable, though the networking plans have few details as of yet. ***RESPONSE: The Outreach Diversity Council has made networking a priority for the current year.***
- ❖ Outreach is uniquely positioned to influence change across Penn State. In addition to its plan to network with others on best practices, Outreach is encouraged to consider other means and venues for leveraging its influence to help the University attain its diversity goals.