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

Penn State Altoona has developed an extensive, comprehensive plan for incorporating diversity initiatives and programs into the College community. The development of the Office of Institutional Equity and Diversity demonstrates a strong commitment on the part of administration to diversity. It is very impressive that the College has increased the minority student population and reached goals four years ahead of the target date. The academic community is regularly engaged in diversity related scholarly research and service learning. Finally, the method for documenting Selected Academic Activities Related to Diversity in Appendix C deserves commendation.

Once again, the College is strongly encouraged to develop specific goals in the next strategic planning cycle to increase the number of minority faculty and staff (as previously noted in both the 1998-2003 feedback and the 2004-2009 midpoint report feedback). There are numerous programs in place to support underrepresented populations including returning adults, students of color, and the LGBT community; however, learning outcomes are not clearly stated nor are the number of participants noted.

Campus Climate and Intergroup Relations
Challenge 1: Developing a Shared and Inclusive Understanding of Diversity
- ❖ As seen in its mission statement the College clearly has integrated diversity in all its forms into its learning community, from classroom instruction and faculty research to co-curricular learning. The extent to which the Penn State Altoona Mission Statement involves the local community is notable. Widely sharing this mission statement and the College's diversity definition appears to be a priority for both academic and student orientation, but does not appear to be a part of the staff orientation process.
- ❖ Web-based training modules developed to assist new hires in understanding diversity is a positive initiative. More information about these modules, including how many employees have completed them, would be helpful.
- ❖ MOSAIC, the College-wide diversity committee, is an integral part of diversity planning and implementation and is commended for the work it has done.

Challenge 2: Creating a Welcoming Campus Climate
- ❖ Altoona has made a great effort to introduce diversity into programming for new students. It appears that every new student completes an on-line MOSAIC Diversity Module. This could be a potential best practice. It will be helpful to know how the effectiveness of this programming is being assessed. *Response: We are currently reviewing the most effective practices for assessing the effectiveness of these modules. Some assessment measures currently being reviewed include value added measures such as pre and post test evaluations. In addition we would like to include some qualitative assessment measure such as focus groups and individual interviews with students.*
- ❖ The proliferation of multicultural student organizations is notable. LGBT support has increased and associated programs are sponsored, apparently with much student support. It would be helpful to see program attendance numbers and evidence of support from faculty and staff.
- ❖ Collaborating with the Human Infrastructure Group of Blair County to establish business internships marketed to students of color could be considered a best practice in its collaboration with the local community for diversity enhancement. How many have participated and what assessment has been done to evaluate the success of the program? *Response: The Human Infrastructure Group of Blair County is no longer in existence.*

Representation (Access and Success)
Challenge 3: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Student Body
- ❖ There is no discussion of the recruitment and retention of adult learners. *Response: The recruitment and retention of adult learners in being addressed in the most recent framework with the adult mentoring program.*

❖ It appears that students are invited to participate in FastStart and other retention initiatives; however, the level of participation in these programs is not clear. The report mentions that a tracking system has been developed but does not provide enough information to determine its success. Clarification as to how student intervention occurs would also be useful. ***Response: Student intervention previously has occurred to one on one mentoring as well as through programming initiatives both academic and social in nature. The intervention of programming has had a dualistic approach focusing on the isolation of first year students (particularly minority students) and the academic pitfalls associated with freshman students. Also, Program attendance sheets record the participation of each event.***

❖ It is of special note that Altoona has increased the population of underrepresented students and reached its goals four years ahead of schedule.

Challenge 4: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Workforce

❖ The update indicates that a training module for supervisors and search committees for developing diverse applicant pools is widely available. This is a potential best practice, pending more data to assess its effectiveness. How widely are the modules being used? What measurable impact has this program had on the makeup of applicant pools? ***Response: At every charge meeting for search committees the HR representative encourages the committees to use the Diversity talent database. Further, it is noted that there are not enough categories (3) in the diversity talent bank and the database are not very user friendly. Finally, more information from UP Human Resources is needed to review the numbers of minority applicants from 2004-2009.***

❖ As noted in the update, minority staff numbers are significantly lower than the University average. It is encouraging that the College recognizes the lack of diversity among faculty and staff and understands the challenges. Benchmarking with other campuses is a positive step to developing realistic goals for this Challenge. ***Response: It should also be noted here that due to the limited racial categories on the EEO form that faculty and staff complete, some minority faculty and staff members either check "white" or leave it blank if there is no category that represents them. If this is the case, HR sometimes will give them a category that may not be consistent with their actual race/ethnicity. This problem sometimes negatively skews the number of actual minority hires with have at Penn state Altoona.***

Education and Scholarship
Challenge 5: Developing a Curriculum That Foster Intercultural and International Competencies

❖ It is unclear whether First-Year Seminar courses are still engaged in providing diversity instruction as a part of the curriculum. ***Response: The first year seminar was done away with university wide.***

❖ Academic and co-curricular programs are very prominent in support of this Challenge. Altoona offers a wide variety of courses that include opportunities for international study, service learning, and undergraduate research related to diversity. Appendix C provides numerous examples of faculty research related to diversity, which is very helpful in demonstrating faculty participation and commitment to diversity.

❖ As noted, Altoona offers some majors in fields with significant emphasis on diversity issues, as well as many general education classes. Altoona is encouraged to take the next steps to integrate the curriculum beyond the general education courses and across all majors.

❖ The annual African American Read-In is an excellent example of community collaboration.

❖ The efforts of the faculty to bring a visiting Fulbright Scholar specializing in Islamic cultural studies to the College community constitute a best practice.

Institutional Viability and Vitality
Challenge 6: Diversifying University Leadership and Management

❖ Many initiatives under this Challenge appear to be "in process" or delayed. The update could be more specific about why such issues have not been addressed in this planning cycle.

❖ Positive steps have been made to diversify the College advisory board.

Challenge 7: Coordinating Organizational Change to Support Our Diversity Goals

- ❖ Establishing the Office of Institutional Equity, maintaining MOSAIC, and including diversity learning outcomes as an integral part of the College mission all demonstrate a commitment to supporting the College's diversity goals.
- ❖ Developing the diversity training module for advisory board members is a potential best practice. It would be interesting to know how many participate and what learning outcome/assessment is in place for this initiative. ***Response: This training is currently in development, along with assessment measure and learning outcomes.***