

Framework to Foster Diversity At Penn State 2004-09

Shenango campus' Final Report: 12/1/09

Overview

There has always been diversity at Penn State Shenango. With more than 50% of its students categorized as non-traditional learners, its almost 2 to 1 ratio of women to men, its 90+% first generation college-goers, and its minority student population at least equal to the percentage of minority residents in its service delivery area, Shenango is historically diverse.

Prior to the establishment of the *Framework* process, however, it would be fair to say that Shenango campus' diversity was a matter of fact and not something that was celebrated or promoted. It was simply a descriptor of the campus' demography. The *Framework* process led to a keener awareness of diversity and to a desire to capitalize on its firm foundation in order to magnify what was already acknowledged to be a strength, a good, and a laudable goal.

Looking back to where we have been and ahead to where we intend to go, it appears to us that we have made progress, particularly on Challenges 1, 2, 3, and 7. There has been some forward motion on Challenges 4, and 5, and not much on Challenge 6.

For the purpose of this final report, we will focus on the feedback received mid-term and our efforts to address the weaknesses identified in that useful document.

Challenge One: Developing a Shared and Inclusive Understanding of Diversity

While there exists an "understanding" of diversity, and while there are several definitions that the campus has developed, we have been awaiting the formal definition promised by the University and anticipated in the University's published *Framework 2010-15* document. That definitive statement, disseminated throughout the University community, will feature prominently in campus publications and in our public places.

At present, during orientation for new faculty and staff, the commitment to diversity is communicated, and this value is repeated in faculty and staff meetings when appropriate to the agenda.

We have established a Diversity Committee, charged to not only ensure the implementation of the campus' plan, but also to monitor our environment and suggest responses to acts of intolerance or perceptions of chilly climate. The committee has faculty, staff, and student representation.

Challenge Two: Creating a Welcoming Campus Climate

Diversity-focused workshops over the last two years have focused on climate issues. Without asserting a cause-effect relationship, however, there have been no acts of intolerance reported in this same time period, nor has there been a repeat of the unacceptable graffiti seen before the mid-term report.

The campus continues to promote the student Diversity Club, as well as the Rainbow Lions, although the latter group currently suffers from lack of leadership. Films and cultural events that promote diversity are part of the campus experience, from Japanese drummers to the movie, *Out in the Silence*.

We have hired a professional counselor to ensure that students who self-identify with disabilities get the accommodations they seek; moreover, this individual is available for three one-on-one sessions with students in need of psychological support.

In fall 2009, we piloted the MAP-Works project, designed to better understand, and thus retain incoming freshmen. This program identifies and seeks to address impediments to student success and retention, and clearly, campus climate is a component of any successful retention effort. Two questions trench on diversity—1.) *How satisfied are you with the University's effort to create a welcoming environment for students of all backgrounds?* 2.) *How satisfied are you with diversity-related activities and information offered to students?* Although we do not yet have any conclusive data, we intend to analyze the results of our work, disaggregating them to better understand the responses by diverse student cohorts. What we learn will inform future action.

The Auditorium has been renovated and now is fully handicapped accessible. This makes cultural events and performances available to all members of the campus and local communities.

Challenge Three: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Student Body

Efforts to achieve success with this challenge are campus-wide. Academic and Student Affairs are full partners in this important work. Retention activities that can benefit all students are underway, including supplemental mathematics practice sessions, FYE diversity workshops, and a Peer Mentoring program for at-risk students. Of course, clubs and organizations and cultural programming are key to keeping students engaged and curious, as well.

Our faculty endorse diversity-related activities by assigning extra credit for students who attend events. They serve as advisors to student clubs and organizations, and regularly provide mini-lectures on diversity-related topics (gender, LGBT issues).

University Park staff have visited the campus to conduct diversity workshops (Ken Lehrman, Allison Subasic, Keith Jervis).

Student Services (Career Services, Game Room, and Fitness Center) are open early morning and evenings to accommodate working adult/evening students.

The Disability Services office is open at various times to meet student needs; primary hours are during peak time (11am – 2pm) when the greatest numbers of students are on campus.

Disability Services procedures and guidelines have been revised; this has helped to streamline services to students.

A culturally diverse group of students is chosen each year to attend APCA Conference where cultural programs for the following year are selected.

Community groups such as MCAR (for developmentally disabled individuals) routinely attend campus cultural programs.

Diversity training is presented to all freshmen during Student Affairs orientation program.

The 2009 Gulfport Alternative Spring Break program gave several students experience living and working in a culturally diverse community in Mississippi. In spring 2010, the Alternative Spring Break program will take place on a Navajo Reservation.

The campus designated a unisex bathroom on campus for transgender student use.

Challenge Four: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Workforce

This challenge has been difficult to meet, but we have made a concerted effort to meet it over the past two years. There have been few vacancies here, and we have, by design, resisted enlarging the staff in light of fiscal constraints. Despite these limitations, we have made some progress.

In fall of 2009, the campus welcomed four new faculty members, all of whom are women and one of whom is Taiwanese. She is the first international faculty member we have hired in several years. Her expertise is in gerontology, a minor in the HDFS program, and we believe she will make a significant contribution to our students' understanding and appreciation of cultural differences.

On the staff side, we have filled our few vacancies with women, one of whom is African-American. So far, she is the only African-American employee not in technical services, but we hope that her presence will be the harbinger of future minority hires.

A female faculty member will assume the role of director of the campus' Physical Therapist Assistant program in spring 2010. This important position will entail program oversight and preparation for CAPTE reaccreditation in 2012.

Finally, the campus Director of Academic Affairs attended an ALF workshop on recruiting women in engineering; many of the strategies presented there are applicable to other disciplines and will be used in future searches.

Challenge Five: Developing a Curriculum that Fosters Intercultural and International Competencies

The interest by students in the Diversity Certificate has begun to grow, with four students earning the Certificate in spring 2009. We anticipate even higher participation over time, as word of the Certificate spreads through our marketing efforts.

The Director of Academic Affairs has created a campus Globalization Committee. This committee will review the curriculum and recommend areas where it can be expanded to include more exposure to other cultures; create multicultural events of an academic nature; and develop and publicize study abroad opportunities for Penn State Shenango students.

The Alternate Spring Break program is now being incorporated into HDFS 287Y, *Intercultural Communication*. Offered for the first time in spring 2010, this course will include a service-focused residency at a Navajo Reservation.

Finally, the campus continuously offers courses that fulfill the University requirement for United States and International cultures.

Challenge Six: Diversifying University Leadership and Management

The area at Shenango where leadership diversification has occurred is in the selection and appointment of campus Advisory Board members. Our current Board President is female, and our treasurer is an African-American female. At present, there are several vacancies on the Board, and it is a campus goal to continue seeking members who reflect the diversity of the community in which we live.

Women employees serve in a variety of key positions including that of Director of Student Programs and Services; Public Relations; Continuing Education; the Chair of the Campus Faculty Senate; 2PTA Program Director; Associate Director of Student Affairs; and Career Services.

With multiple anticipated vacancies in the next 5 years due to retirements in the leadership cohort, the opportunity to assemble an even more diverse team at Shenango will present itself.

Challenge Seven: Coordinating Organizational Change to Support Our Diversity Goals

Fulfilling this important challenge will be facilitated by the Diversity Committee and through the implementation of the campus Strategic Plan.

At present, no formal organizational structure exists to support the Diversity Committee, and this will be remedied by the next phase of the *Framework* process.

Final Observations

From 2004 to now, Penn State Shenango has made progress in the context of the *Framework* process. We have used the impetus towards greater diversity and access to enrich the curriculum; to select cultural programs that have a global component; to establish clubs and organizations that support a wider range of student orientations; to provide better services to students with disabilities; to comply fully with ADA requirements; to reinforce the message that the campus welcomes all comers; to monitor more carefully concerns about intolerance; to sensitize all employees to the importance of civility. It would not be an exaggeration to assert that Penn State Shenango is now a better place to work and study than it was 5 years ago because of our community's efforts to demonstrate that it values diversity and promotes it.