

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

Penn State Mont Alto, situated in a rural setting with a homogenous demographic, is challenged to diversify its student, faculty, and staff population. Laudably, the Campus recruits underrepresented groups from urban areas: Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Baltimore, New Jersey, New York, Maryland, Virginia and DC. Some successful student recruiting and retaining efforts are noted; however, the impact appears greater in recruiting underrepresented students than in retaining them. The review team notes successful efforts in diversifying faculty through international hires, with less success in recruiting faculty from other underrepresented groups. The continuous need to diversify the faculty and upper administration is noted. The review team acknowledges the existence of “Diversity Month” and “Disability Month”; however, it is unclear whether these are ‘distinct’ initiatives. The update identifies some descriptive metrics for most Challenges. However, measureable outcomes are not identified to enable the assessment of ongoing progress and impact of strategies. Doing so will strengthen reporting considerably and bring clarity and consistency to the implementation process.

Campus Climate and Intergroup Relations

Challenge 1: Developing a Shared and Inclusive Understanding of Diversity

- ❖ The Campus has accepted a positive diversity definition that aligns with the University’s non-discrimination policies.
- ❖ The Campus Climate Committee (CCC) and Faculty Senate standing Committee on Diversity are valuable committees but are described in general terms. It would be helpful to indicate specific goals, strategies and accomplishments associated with each committee.
- ❖ The Campus experienced a significant 57% increase in diversity programs from 2005 to 2009.
- ❖ Surveys given during Diversity Month (labeled in Challenge 2 as Disability Month) indicate students were pleased with knowledge gained from activities.
- ❖ While the increase in diversity and multicultural programs is praiseworthy and the participant survey appears to reflect this as a potential best practice, no measurable ways to gauge program success are reported. The Campus should include measureable outcomes to assess the progress and impact of its promising initiatives. Also, “meaningful diversity” (mentioned in several Challenges) is unclear.

Challenge 2: Creating a Welcoming Campus Climate

- ❖ Commendable are: the monthly Chancellor’s brown bag lunches offered to students, faculty, and staff; focus groups held with adult students and other constituents through Residence Life, SGA, and other venues; and the annual *Meet the Chancellor* session.
- ❖ Problems arising from climate or diversity issues are notably handled through mediation or the Judicial Affairs Committee. Further information on how mediation occurs and who is involved would be helpful.
- ❖ First-year retention rates for minority students have increased and are relatively higher than that of white students. While overall graduation rates are an ongoing concern for the Campus, improvements for minority cohorts over time are noted. These data do suggest a welcoming and supportive environment.
- ❖ The Campus should consider implementing systematic approaches to assess students’ attitudes (e.g., via focus groups, surveys) and gauge climate issues.
- ❖ The commitment to making the campus more accessible to people with physical disabilities, in conjunction with the Campus’s Master Plan, is admirably noted.

Representation (Access and Success)

Challenge 3: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Student Body

- ❖ Noteworthy are efforts to admit international students and increase scholarship funding.
- ❖ Start Smart and Jump Start programs have provided academic support to first-generation students; first-year retention of this group was 90% compared to 77.5% for other students. This is most encouraging.
- ❖ A Student Success committee has been formed to address issues of retention and student success.
- ❖ Students from underrepresented groups have increased their participation in the SGA Executive Board.

- ❖ The Dual enrollment program lacks data to evaluate programmatic success.

Challenge 4: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Workforce

- ❖ Difficulty in recruiting faculty/staff from underrepresented groups in a rural location is acknowledged. The review team commends efforts to recruit and retain diverse faculty; however few efforts appear for diverse staff. As 8% of current faculty represent a diverse group (down from 15% in 2006), and upper administration is almost exclusively white, continued efforts are encouraged. No data are provided on strategies to ensure staff professional growth and development.
- ❖ The Campus claims women are well-represented; however, available University data suggests otherwise- no female full professors, the number of female associate professors has increased by 1 while the percentage (45.5%) has dropped due to the increase in the total number. Also, the number of female assistant professors has dropped somewhat (33.3%). Staff data show that females make up 62% of staff and administrators; however they are clustered at grades 11-19 and tech service level 1-7.
- ❖ Potential best practices: the policy of assigning a “campus mentor” as well as a “discipline mentor” to new tenure-track faculty to allow them to attain a certain comfort level on campus as well as a solid P&T portfolio. Non-native English speakers are given a third mentor to help them work on accent and US teaching styles.

Education and Scholarship

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

- ❖ The Campus has optimally sustained: an average of 37 sections per year of US or international diversity focused courses, and its three cross-listed, team- taught diversity course offerings. Course data and enrollments would be helpful.
- ❖ No study abroad program has been offered since 2007, although some faculty members have taught in the summer HDFS Rome program; the Campus is encouraged to renew study abroad opportunities.
- ❖ Courses and research presentations that showcase faculty research relative to diversity may contribute positively to the Campus’s course and programming portfolio.

Institutional Viability and Vitality

Challenge 6: Diversifying University Leadership and Management

- ❖ The campus might want to re-think recruitment strategies, given its limited success with this Challenge.
- ❖ Laudably, the Faculty Senate created a Diversity Committee to address diversity issues; the Chancellor has charged the Campus Climate Committee to develop strategies to achieve an “open and inclusive campus environment.” The scope of work, processes, and strategies to be overseen by these leadership committees are not provided; nor are mechanisms to gauge progress and impact.
- ❖ The campus may wish to tap into existing diversity resources and have multiple point persons trained in addressing issues including: sexual harassment, LGBT safe space, and climate concerns - to optimize resources available to students. These persons would meet regularly with leaders to discuss climate issues.

Challenge 7: Coordinating Organizational Change to Support Our Diversity Goals

- ❖ Additional funding to Enrollment Management to facilitate recruitment of out-of-state and out-of-area students and the additional allocation to the Student Success Committee for various retention initiatives are laudable actions. Measurable goals for improvement should include retention beyond the first-year to five-year graduation rates for underrepresented cohorts.
- ❖ Mont Alto is admirably awaiting permission to recruit international students to diversify its student body.
- ❖ Praiseworthy are a number of new initiatives, including committees, in place to address overall climate issues. The Campus discusses: accountability and mid-point reporting of responsible groups, committees and individuals on progress. It was unclear how (and how often) these various responsible parties will interact to ensure a proactive approach to climate issues outside the formal reporting at the mid-five year point.