

**Feedback on the Diversity Strategic Plan**  
***A Framework to Foster Diversity at Penn State: 2004-2009***  
**Penn State Erie, The Behrend College**

Penn State Erie, The Behrend College, in its diversity strategic plan for the 2004-2009 *Framework* planning period, repeats much of the material presented in its final report on the 1998-2003 *Framework*. Sometimes, blocks of text in the plan are lifted nearly verbatim from the final report (cf., p. 2, final report; p. 7 strategic plan). This structure gives the appearance that the 2004-2009 plan is not carefully crafted, restricts the number of detailed and concrete plans for implementing the 2004-2009 *Framework*, and blurs which items might be reports from 1998-2003 and which items might be plans for 2004-2009. It appears that the guidelines provided in the 2004-2009 *Framework* for developing a diversity strategic plan receive little attention in the Behrend plan. Also, when new or ongoing initiatives are planned for 2004-2009, few performance indicators are presented. Concrete goals, measurable objectives, benchmarks, and metrics to evaluate the success of outcomes would strengthen the plan considerably.

To ensure consistency in the evaluation of strategic plans across units, the points listed under each Challenge below address only material that the review team could specifically identify as “planning.” The College would be well served by taking these points as a starting point for creating a new, more-detailed plan that utilizes effective performance indicators. Consultation with the Office of Planning and Institutional Assessment and the Office of the Vice Provost for Educational Equity might also be useful. Finally, the plan largely focuses on women and people from diverse racial/ethnic groups. Little mention is made regarding individuals with disabilities and even less about members of the LGBT community.

**Campus Climate and Intergroup Relations**

***Challenge 1: Developing a Shared and Inclusive Understanding of Diversity***

- ❖ Behrend continues to use the video, “The Many Worlds of Penn State,” in its orientation programming. Assessment information is lacking regarding its use. Has an evaluation been made regarding the impact of the size of the discussion groups (20-30 students) following the video? What group size promotes good interaction? Perhaps upper-division students, if properly trained, could facilitate some groups so that more groups, with fewer participants, could be formed. With proper assessment, this activity could become a best practice and could help establish baselines on student attitudes about diversity when they matriculate to Behrend.

***Challenge 2: Creating a Welcoming Campus Climate***

- ❖ The faculty survey slated for spring 2004 seems incomplete without the student perspective. Are plans in place to survey students? As one of the foci of the survey is disruptive classroom behavior, including a racial slur on an SRTE, the student voice appears imperative. This incident is quite serious and provides a good opportunity for a climate survey for the entire Behrend community. Plans for focus groups for underrepresented students could be much more informative if discussions are based on the results of a campus-wide survey.
- ❖ Plans are in place for diversity awareness training for faculty and staff, but few details are provided.

**Representation (Access and Success)**

***Challenge 3: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Student Body***

- ❖ Behrend’s plans under this Challenge focus on continuing programs from the 1998-2003 *Framework* period. A stronger assessment of most of these programs would give the College the ability to determine which programs to maintain and which programs to modify or discontinue.
- ❖ The Sleeping Bag Weekend program appears to have good potential. What percentage of students who attend the weekend eventually come to Behrend? What kind of feedback does Behrend get from participants?
- ❖ MAPP/WISE is clearly a signature program with demonstrated outcomes. Behrend’s approach for this program, which includes the evaluation of outcomes, could become a model for other programs. Given the long history of this program, retention outcomes also need to be assessed.

- ❖ Math Options is identified as a “very successful program,” but no outcomes are reported other than the number of students who participate annually. If tracking does not occur now, are plans in the offing for doing so in the future?
- ❖ Behrend’s introduction to Challenge 3 in the plan indicates that it is one of the most crucial for the College, especially given the flat growth rate among undergraduate students of color, but most new initiatives are still in the exploratory stages. It is hoped that Behrend can move quickly to develop programs that can have a positive change in the enrollment of students from diverse racial/ethnic groups.

#### ***Challenge 4: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Workforce***

- ❖ Search committees will forward the résumés of the top candidates who are not among the finalists and are women or are from diverse racial/ethnic groups to the school director and the CEO/dean. It is not clear what effect this action will have on the selection process. Will searches be vetted?
- ❖ More specific information on several of the initiatives in this section would be helpful, including plans for the senior faculty mentor, the cooperative linkage with local colleges, involvement with Erie Insight, and the mentorship program. Are plans in place for the mentorship program to address some of the unique problems that women faculty and faculty of color face in academia? Careful assessment of these programs could identify some of them as best practices.
- ❖ In the final report, the College states, “one new approach we plan to try is to ask UP departments to share resumes or names of minority candidates that they did not hire,” but no mention is made of this idea in the strategic plan. Has this initiative been discontinued?

#### **Education and Scholarship**

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

- ❖ Behrend does not view the transition to the new GI requirement as a difficult challenge, and the plan provides a list of several courses that have been developed that will fulfill the GI designation. Perhaps a more appropriate focus would be to consider how the College could augment the list to further enrich the curriculum. The goal should be to have a selection of courses that offers instruction on a full range of diversity topics.
- ❖ Future planning includes exploring programming through Career Development, developing additional diversity-related learning activities, and raising endowment funds to support study abroad and other international opportunities. More details, along with concrete goals for these initiatives, would be helpful.
- ❖ What plans exist to increase interest among students in international education? This area appears to be a strong point of the Behrend curriculum and ripe for further development. Specific goals, action plans, and anticipated outcomes could make a good program even better. Does the College intend to conduct programs where past participants tell their story to future prospects? With the large base of participants already in place, this approach could be fruitful.

#### **Institutional Viability and Vitality**

##### ***Challenge 6: Diversifying University Leadership and Management***

- ❖ Behrend indicates that much work needs to be done to improve outcomes for this Challenge. The College’s candid appraisal of its progress is appreciated.
- ❖ Given the College’s acknowledged need in this area, the plan needs to be detailed and concrete; instead, it lacks precision and sufficient development. Most of the material under Challenge 6 refers to previous endeavors, and it is not clear that all of these will be continued. One portion of the plan identifies “future priorities,” but only two initiatives are mentioned. One of these initiatives calls for “appointing more women and minorities to the Council of Fellows” without describing the Council or how it will contribute to employee advancement to leadership positions.
- ❖ The use of search firms for leadership and senior staff positions, though still in the exploratory stages, shows promise. If this plan is ultimately implemented, appropriate assessment could establish it as a best practice.

***Challenge 7: Coordinating Organizational Change to Support Our Diversity Goals***

- ❖ Behrend's plan to utilize organizational change demonstrates a good understanding of how budget reallocation and systems of accountability can support diversity goals.
- ❖ Plans under this Challenge include (1) fund raising for undergraduate scholarships targeting a local high school with a high concentration of diverse students, (2) budget reallocation to support the Minority Dissertation Fellowship, (3) a "diversity-oriented" faculty position to teach courses with significant diversity content, and (4) new departments that will attract diverse students and faculty (i.e., nursing and education).
- ❖ One promising initiative is the plan to assess the directors of the four schools on workforce recruitment and retention outcomes. If appropriate performance indicators are put in place to evaluate effectiveness, this endeavor could become a best practice.