

Feedback on the Diversity Strategic Plan
A Framework to Foster Diversity at Penn State: 2004-2009
Berks-Lehigh Valley College

Berks-Lehigh Valley College's Diversity Strategic Plan for 2004-2009 seeks to build on the successes of the initiatives instituted in the 1998-2003 *Framework* period, while designing and implementing new measures and initiatives to address targeted areas for improvement. The lack of strategic indicators, metrics, and prioritization of actions indicate a lack of intentionality in the plan. This omission makes it difficult for the team to provide an effective review.

Campus Climate and Inter-group Relations

Challenge 1: Developing a Shared and Inclusive Understanding of Diversity

- ❖ The College's definition of diversity is inclusive and comprehensive.
- ❖ The College has set goals for its Diversity Committee to undertake planning, development, and partnering activities that will enhance diversity and climate in the college. Elaboration on how partnering with the designated external organizations and entities will contribute to the improvement of diversity in the College, and how it proposes to measure these contributions would be useful.
RESPONSE: *Typically through offering scholarships to organizations such as the Hispanic Center has generated several enrollments by minority students. Additionally, by working through the external organizations, our current students are able to mentor and interact with potential students to help them make good career and educational choices.*
- ❖ The plan to address the divergence in the understanding of diversity among students is important. It would be helpful if the plan indicated how the College intends to measure progress in this regard.
RESPONSE: *Benchmark data is available through our Climate survey. That will be used as a standard against which future surveys will be compared.*

Challenge 2: Creating a Welcoming Campus Climate

- ❖ The review team was under the impression that the Multicultural/International Student Counselor was known and seen in the College as occupying the top position on diversity. Information on how the College proposes to give the position the visibility and legitimacy it needs in order to be more effective, and how it will determine the success of this initiative would be useful.
RESPONSE: *The Multicultural/International Student Counselor is increasing her involvement with students which also increases her visibility with the students. She is using word of mouth, flyers and e-mails to try and reach the students.*
- ❖ The plan states that the Lehigh Valley campus will have its own Diversity Committee. However, the introduction to the final report for 1998-2003 stated that the College Diversity Committee included faculty from both Berks and Lehigh Valley. An explanation of how these committees function and collaborate would be useful.
RESPONSE: *Becoming a vibrant college has been an evolutionary process. Initially a joint committee was established (prior to the current administration) but most of the meetings were held at the Berks campus. Eventually the Lehigh Valley folks stopped attending. Because one campus is a residential campus and the other is exclusively commuter, the issues are different. It makes far more sense to have to distinct committees that can more adequately address the unique challenges of each campus. The leadership of each committee will still report to the Director of Student Affairs.*
- ❖ The proposed diversity forum is an excellent idea and appears to respond to the shortcoming noted in the 2001 feedback noting the absence of open exchange and dialogue on climate issues involving all college constituents.
- ❖ The College's intent to develop metrics for measuring the success of diversity initiatives is commended. A plan for the program's implementation would be useful.
RESPONSE: *Follow-up data were collected in 2003-04 and will be revisited on a regular basis.*

- ❖ The proposed plan for the respective academic divisions to solicit minority student perceptions about how welcome they are will be a useful climate-monitoring tool.

Representation (Access and Success)

Challenge 3: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Student Body

- ❖ The action plans outlined to increase the percentage of underrepresented students (e.g. creating Hispanic and Middle Eastern student organizations, acquiring the names of all potential students from underrepresented groups in the college's service area, etc.) is commendable.
- ❖ An Admissions Counselor to specifically target students from underrepresented groups is an excellent recruitment strategy.

Challenge 4: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Workforce

- ❖ The intent to recruit minority faculty to senior positions is commendable. It would be useful to include implementation strategies for this action.
- ❖ Appointing mentors for minority faculty is an excellent retention tool. The development of mentoring guidelines by the College would give structure and direction to the mentoring system.
- ❖ The plan contains no measures or strategies aimed at hiring minorities for senior staff positions at grades 26 and above. There were no minorities in these grades over the *Framework* period.

RESPONSE: It is important to understand that all positions of grade 26 and above, have been held by persons who have been in their positions more than 10 years with some up to 35 years. We are not going to fire someone so that we can place a minority person, however, when any retirement or resignation occurs, we will be very mindful of the need to have a minority presence. We have made considerable strides to increase the minority face of our staff and faculty as a whole over the past three years and will continue to do so.

Education and Scholarship

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

- ❖ Expanding the "Community Building" class taught once a year by incorporating an appropriately-tailored module from it in all FYS courses will introduce new students to this topic at the very inception of their educational careers. This is viewed by the review team as a "best practice."
- ❖ Opportunities for service learning in multicultural settings already exist. The review team suggests broadening these initiatives to include international learning opportunities.

RESPONSE: Our new Global Studies degree requires a semester over-seas and will be the front-runner for this expansion.

Institutional Viability and Vitality

Challenge 6: Diversifying University Leadership and Management

- ❖ Making a candidate's potential contributions to college diversity a criterion in searches will enhance opportunities for minority candidates to be hired. The college could document successes from the point of implementation of this initiative.

RESPONSE: For the 2004-05 school year four minority faculty members were hired (out of a total of seven hires).

Challenge 7: Coordinating Organizational Change to Support Our Diversity Goals

- ❖ The college does not set forth any plans on proposed changes to the way it functions as an organization, or to its organizational culture, philosophy, or structure to enhance the achievement of the diversity goals in its 2004-2009 strategic plan.

RESPONSE: Given our high degree of satisfaction as reported on the Climate surveys, it is not necessary to make revisions in how we do business. Our goal is to always strive to do better and to treat everyone equally and it shows.