

Feedback on Progress Implementing
A Framework to Foster Diversity at Penn State: 2004-09
Penn State Abington
Mid-Term Progress Report
Spring 2007

Penn State Abington is commended for its 2004-2009 diversity strategic plan conveying a commitment to diversity that is appropriately integrated into the College's strategic plan and appears to be part of the College culture. Clear evidence of the commitment is provided by the College's success in achieving a diverse student body. Considering the College's success, it is unfortunate that, unlike the 2004-2009 plan, this midterm update is poorly written, disjointed, and does not convey enough information for the reviewers to provide an adequate review. Problems with the update include language, organization, responsiveness to the questions, specificity, and a limited amount of substantiating data. It would have been logical and helpful, for example, to include updates on the brief list of strategic indicators identified in the plan. The survey is positive, but little information is given regarding how results were evaluated and used. Under many Challenges, most successful strategies are not clearly identified or explained and least successful strategies are not addressed.

Response: The college acknowledges some of the deficiencies in the Mid-Term Progress Report pointed out by this review. However, there is no doubt that our 2004-2009 diversity strategic plan accurately represents the college's commitment to maintaining a welcoming climate that celebrates diversity. It is hoped that some of the brief responses (in blue, below) will assist the reader in determining the strengths of Penn State Abington's extraordinary diversity and the comprehensiveness of the college community's commitment to diversity in all its manifestations.

Campus Climate and Intergroup Relations

Challenge 1: Developing a Shared and Inclusive Understanding of Diversity

- ❖ The College is commended for integrating diversity into its strategic plan. However, the definition of diversity given in the 2004-2009 diversity strategic plan and in the update is peculiar. Diversity is not a strategic plan.
Response: This comment is accurate. Diversity is not a strategic plan. However, our definition tries to convey the very dynamic and organic nature of diversity to us, which is not something separate from our every day life and goals. It would be more accurate to say that for Penn State Abington diversity is an integral philosophy enacted in our decisions, policies, and actions across campus functions and we will revise our definition in this way.
- ❖ It is very good practice for the College to encourage dialogues around diversity through several meetings and events, a listserv, and through First-Year Seminars. Detailed information about these activities was absent, notably, data on the percentage of students, staff, and faculty participating in these events.
Response: For some of these events, data has been collected in the past; for some data was not collected. We will make an effort to more accurately document in the future.
- ❖ The climate survey and the plan to repeat it every three years are positive.
- ❖ The broadly representative Multicultural Climate Committee (MCC) appears to be a fine vehicle for improving climate and promoting diversity. More information about the Committee's activities and proposed recommendations should be provided. It was unclear why non-exempt staff are not included.
Response: The MCC is a group of volunteers. For this reason, from year to year the composition of the group varies. In the 2006-2007 year, non-exempt staff did not participate; however, in other years, there is non-exempt participation. Going forward, we will make the inclusion of all categories of employees an intentional goal and invite people to participate if they do not volunteer in any given year.
- ❖ The College notes many activities to support this Challenge but little specific information.

Challenge 2: Creating a Welcoming Campus Climate

- ❖ The Center for Intercultural Leadership and Communication is an effective agent for improving climate. Consider providing information about the Center, including responsibilities, goals, background, date of initiation, and accomplishments.
Response: The Center for Intercultural Leadership and Communication (CILC) is a unique and needed agent for improving climate, both on campus and off. CILC was launched in March, 2006, with a Faculty Coordinator (Dr. Carla Chamberlin-Quinlisk, Associate Professor of CAS), an Advisory Board of 15 diverse members, and a focus on both on-campus education and research and off-campus outreach activities. The goals and a brief description of CILC are attached to this response. One of the main accomplishments in its first year of operation was the achievement of certification of Penn State Abington as the first college campus in the Philadelphia region (and perhaps in the nation) as a "No Place for Hate" organization. "No Place for Hate" is a program of the Anti-Defamation League that generally certifies governmental entities (such as towns and municipalities) and schools. To earn and maintain certification, certain educational standards must be met each year. There is a "No Place for Hate" subcommittee of the MCC and this program comes under the aegis of CILC.
- ❖ Focus groups could be a good vehicle to monitor climate and identify issues. No information is provided about the focus groups, when they were/will be conducted and how information gathered will be incorporated into changes to improve and maintain a diverse climate.
Response: Our next Diversity Plan will contain information obtained from these focus groups, planned for 2007-2008.
- ❖ The update does not describe how the College responds to climate issues nor mechanisms and safeguards that exist for reporting climate issues.
Response: We referenced several avenues for reporting and responding to climate issues, including the Climate Study, the MCC (which meets regularly and has regularly taken up issues brought to it, the newly-created Task Force on Adult Learners, the careful review and immediate administrative response to the Climate Study, and the intensive outreach of the Coordinator for Intercultural Affairs. We have found that proactivity and the simple and evident fact of our diverse population go a long way to avoiding climate issues, but we have the safeguards in place as well.
- ❖ The extensive use of "multicultural" and "intercultural" suggests a narrow, even restrictive, definition of diversity that appears to focus almost exclusively on race/ethnicity. Attention to additional underrepresented/underserved groups such as the LGBT community, international individuals, people with disabilities, adult learners, and low income and/or first generation college students should be described.
Response: We use the term "multicultural" and "intercultural" to reflect the latest thinking about terminology for diversity, on the recommendation of experts in the field. There is no intent to limit these terms to race/ethnicity. The results of our climate survey cover all the underrepresented/underserved groups mentioned by the review and indicate that all groups expressed essential satisfaction with the climate.
- ❖ Data were provided from the last survey, but no information was provided about how these data were interpreted and used and what changes were made and/or are planned.
Response: This is an excellent point. The MCC reviewed all data, as did the senior leadership of the college, and then the MCC made a series of recommendations. Since the data were so positive, we worked to find areas which needed to be changed and concluded generally that we needed to put our efforts into the area of increasing faculty and staff awareness of and expertise in dealing with diversity issues. This focus on faculty/staff awareness began immediately after reviewing the survey results and will continue this year.
- ❖ It is not clear that the results of the climate survey accurately represent the climate. For example, how are the perceptions reported by underrepresented students valued in relation to those reported by all students?
Response: Since the perceptions reported by underrepresented students were very close to those reported by all students, the college is surprised to hear this comment from the review group. We believe that this climate survey supported our efforts to maintain a welcoming diverse climate and we

also believe that these results are better than could be obtained in many other college environments. Nonetheless, we reviewed very carefully the narrative comments and, as mentioned above, concluded that we needed to put more effort into faculty/staff awareness and training, which we are doing.

- ❖ It is impressive that the groups that represent 25% of all student organizations have sponsored half of the overall student-sponsored events.

Response: We agree. This trend continues.

- ❖ The list of actions demonstrating leadership commitment should include more specifics such as the outcomes of including a member of the diversity committee on search committees, publications utilized for advertisements, hurdles encountered in developing the program for Korean students; etc.

Response: We regret the lack of specificity, which is explainable by our concern to keep our report within the requested page limits. Some of the information requested above is contained in our report, but it was not well enough organized to aid the reader. We will remedy this in future reports.

Representation (Access and Success)

Challenge 3: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Student Body

- ❖ The College has had notable success in attracting a diverse student body. It would be helpful for the update to more clearly describe recruiting and retention activities and the reasons for their effectiveness. Data regarding enrollment trends should be provided, as well as information on diverse populations beyond gender and race/ethnicity such as students with disabilities, adult learners, etc.

Response: We believe that our success in attracting and retaining a diverse student body comes from the combination of a variety of measures, described in the report. The trends are very positive: from 1998 to 2006, our racial and ethnic diversity increased by 43% (overall enrollment). Our work with adult learners is yielding very slow results, but we remain hopeful that some of our efforts (notably an online "E-Orientation" being designed for Fall 2007) will offset the tremendous price disadvantage we face (the local community college rate is one-third Penn State's tuition, for instance). In 2006-2007, we had 20% adult learners, up from the teens a few years before.

- ❖ Collaboration with community resources is potentially positive. More information should be provided.

- ❖ The update provides no data on or discussion of retention.

Response: We are disappointed that our retention efforts do not yield success more quickly, but the trend is encouraging. Based on the data provided for this update report, our first-year retention of multicultural students tracks very closely to the retention rates for white students for Fall 01, 02, 03, and 04. This is materially different from our experience in Fall 99 and Fall 00. These data are encouraging, especially in the all-important third-year retention. Compared to the All-University data for 3-year retention, Fall 01 retention for multicultural students across the university was 7.8% lower than that of white students and University Park multicultural students were 16.2% lower while Abington multicultural students were 11.9% lower than white students. We were able to make significant progress in Fall 02 when All-University data show multicultural three-year retention as 8.9% lower than that of white students and University Park multicultural students 16.1% lower than white students. The same year's data (Fall 02) show that Abington's three-year retention rate for multicultural students was only 0.1% lower than that of Abington's white students. We will continue our retention efforts and monitor this situation carefully since we know that only over the long haul can we have a serious impact on retention.

Challenge 4: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Workforce

- ❖ The update provides no information about retention strategies for faculty and/or staff from underrepresented groups.

Response: We have in place a faculty mentoring program, a staff mentoring program, faculty development workshops on Promotion and Tenure, an exciting staff leadership program and an extremely active and diverse Staff Advisory Council. We are tinkering with these programs each year, based on the feedback we receive from faculty and staff. As a college with a low hiring rate (from one to five new people per year), it is necessary to conduct our orientations and mentoring on an individual

one-to-one basis, always putting the comfort and preferences of the new person ahead of any preconceived procedures.

- ❖ The Minority Fellows Program's sole participant had great success. While there is no *a priori* guarantee the program would have a high success rate with additional participants, it is unfortunate for the program to fall victim to budget cuts. It is time to either find the resources or develop alternative means to recruit minority faculty.

Response: We agree. In light of the fact that this program could potentially impact all locations of the University and the fact that we were forced to eliminate it due to budget cuts, we are seeking to establish collaborative arrangements across the University in order to resuscitate it. We are grateful for the interest of the Vice Provost for Educational Equity and the encouragement of the Provost that we work together to continue this project since we cannot manage this ourselves. The commitment of the University leadership is necessary to match our commitment and with that collaboration, we believe this program could work well for many campuses across the university.

- ❖ Other than the results of the College climate survey, no data are presented to gauge progress.

Response: We believe that the results of the College Climate Survey are a significant addition to the data available. Beyond that, it is very clear that creating and maintaining a welcoming and harmonious climate (measured by the actual numbers as well as the lack of incidents) is in itself a testament to the progress of the college towards its celebration of diversity as one of our defining strengths.

- ❖ The review team recommends applying inclusive practices, as outlined by the AAO video briefing, uniformly.

Response: We are grateful for the suggestion of the review group. However, we wish to respectfully point out that our specific commitment to bringing additional interview candidates to campus is in alignment with the use of the inclusive practices referenced by the review. This practice was identified as a "best practice" at two other institutions and that is the reason we have adopted it, hoping to bring all possible efforts and new ideas to the task.

- ❖ More information is needed regarding the faculty mentoring program and reasons behind not matching mentors and mentees according to diversity or ethnicity.

Response: The faculty mentoring program is under continuing review for improvement. Up to now, we have matched faculty and staff according to diversity or ethnicity when it is possible without forcing someone to volunteer or to make someone feel uncomfortable. Since we have a very staple workforce and our hiring is conservative (from one to five new people in any given year), we deal with individual cases, not with broad theoretical procedures. The comfort of the new faculty or staff member and the sensitivity to his or her wishes is clearly the leading principle in these cases. Other factors include similar disciplines, research interests and expertise, and overall enthusiasm and commitment to the college climate.

Education and Scholarship

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

- ❖ Much of the response to the first question under this Challenge does not address the question of what the College is doing to develop a curriculum that fosters intercultural and international competencies, for example enrollment, pre-college programs, and participation of a MCC member on all search committees.

Response: The college is pursuing many avenues, including utilizing the resources of CILC to assist faculty in intercultural and international perspectives, providing enhanced ESL and other courses, encouraging undergraduate research projects that treat diversity projects, encouraging the development of special topics courses within majors, and developing "embedded study abroad courses" to make international travel and study available to our students at an affordable cost.

- ❖ The College is commended for its broad range of courses that address diversity issues.
- ❖ More information about the undergraduate research projects that treat diversity issues is needed.
Response: Some examples this year include: presentations on “poor chic” and the “McDonaldization” of American culture, which deal with issues of race and class in an urban setting and an interdisciplinary research project described as follows: “Using a popular medium (videorecording) and an engaging research technique (field-investigation), this ACURA project will examine and critique selected components of the cultural tapestry of Philadelphia’s African American communities, specifically, the murals, the poetry, the storefront church preaching and street corner rapping. These cultural productions have long contributed to the City’s reputation for creativity in the arts and, though often overlooked or misinterpreted, they reflect significant aspects of Black community life in the urban setting. To capture the vibrancy of these powerfully expressive and incredibly creative cultural productions, the ACURA students will produce, in twenty-minute segments, a one-hour video with the following thematic headings: “Black Mural Art in Philadelphia: Reading African American History Off the Wall,” “Voices of the New Wave: Young Urban Poets & Writers” and “Storefront Preaching and Street Corner Rapping: A Cultural Synthesis”. Students will also be required to submit an 8-10 page prefatory research paper for each segment which will briefly highlight the historical and contemporary significance of each art form.on rap and hip-hop.”

Institutional Viability and Vitality

Challenge 6: Diversifying University Leadership and Management

- ❖ Abington’s leadership, by its actions and by its composition, appears to be committed to and representative of diversity.
Response: Abington’s leadership is committed to and representative of diversity and in this has the support of the college community.
- ❖ The highlighted programs of the Staff Advisory Committee – committee members working toward leadership certificates and the New Staff Mentoring and Orientation Program – are very positive steps and should be pursued with diligence and care. It is unclear to what extent diversity is a priority in the leadership certificate with only one class of twelve devoted to the topic. The criteria for the Diversity Award are unclear.
Response: Providing leadership certification opportunities for members of the Staff Advisory Committee offers an institutional response to advancing and promoting the leadership abilities and values of all members of the college community, regardless of position. Part of the leadership opportunity is for the Staff Advisory Committee members themselves to determine the curriculum and to track progress towards certification. We agree that more than one class of the twelve would be preferable and we will institute more classes as our CILC efforts get up to speed. It is, however, very indicative of the commitment of our staff that they requested and required the inclusion of this course. We are all aware of leadership training opportunities, even as close as in Montgomery County, that did not include any treatment of diversity. The Diversity Award is given by the MCC and the criteria emphasize commitment to diversity in action during a given academic year. There is an award for a student and one for faculty or staff, given each year. Actions that might be recognized include: efforts to increase cross-cultural awareness, efforts to improve communication among various communities represented on campus, efforts to build bridges between the college and ethnic and cultural centers, and efforts in designing and teaching new courses related to diversity.
- ❖ Much of the discussion under the fifth question under this Challenge is not responsive to the question of diversifying Abington’s leadership and management and would be better placed under Challenge 4. The College’s approach of incorporating and practicing diversity in all it does, rather than marginalizing or compartmentalizing it, is indeed positive.
Response: We believe that the best way to diversify the college’s leadership and management is to provide training and routes to move upward within the college, not only to search externally. That is why we stressed our work to develop all faculty and staff and to bring out the leadership abilities in them. Other methods include proactive searches, flexibility in defining leadership opportunities,

opening our executive committee to include the convenor of the Staff Advisory Council (opening the higher level executive discussions to individuals, one at a time, who are not usually included in such discussions at Penn State). Because we put such a priority on living diversity throughout the year, many of our activities don't necessarily strike the reader as "strategic," and yet we have found that this approach affects climate and aspirations very effectively.

- ❖ Measures of success should be identified to gauge Abington's progress in diversifying leadership and management; longitudinal data should be used to gauge progress.

Response: We agree. As our organization is very flat and we have (fortunately) great stability in the senior leadership, there is little change from year to year, but we should have referenced the current status. Our senior leadership is evenly distributed in terms of gender. In the coming year, we have changed the gender balance among Division Heads from three males to two males and one female and we have promoted someone from an underrepresented group to a new position to oversee the Division Heads, chair our Strategic Planning and Assessment Committees, and represented the Chancellor and Associate Dean in their absence. In the past year, we made two faculty hires; one is white and one is Asian-American. Both are female. We have also made progress since our last update in the diversity of our Assistant Professors, although this year we are losing two African-American faculty from those ranks.

Challenge 7: Coordinating Organizational Change to Support Our Diversity Goals

- ❖ More information should be provided, particularly in response to the second question under this Challenge, since the current answer does not adequately address this question.

Response: In our report, we actually delineated and referenced the following actions: (1) emphasis on living diversity throughout the year – this is a structural change in the way we go about engaging speakers, designing programs, budgeting for lectures series, etc, since we insist on having a spectrum of diverse participants in each activity; (2) founding CILC and becoming certified as a "No Place for Hate" college campus, the first in the region – this involves a structural and budgetary commitment to make sure we meet certification expectations each year; (3) changing the structure of our search committees to be sure we have intercultural issues appropriately represented during the search; (4) establishing a strategic plan to internationalize the college with an emphasis on intercultural communication as the underpinning of each study abroad experience; and (5) establishing the "Intercultural Awareness Fund" to support faculty in organizing mini-projects in their classes on a flexible timeframe so that opportunities that come up unexpectedly can be incorporated into the current syllabus. We did not reference the following: (6) giving priority during the annual budget cuts to preserving our multicultural activities, retention work, and recruitment of a diverse class. We agree with the review committee that we needed to be more clear about this last factor. Please note that our budget never grows; in the last 15 years we have been required to cut our budget for internal or university-wide recycling each year, a fact that escapes most external audiences and many PSU colleagues as well. For that reason, the major diversity commitment has been in preserving support for the above activities from a continually shrinking budget by eliminating other deserving or important activities. We are proud of the fact that when we have needed to make these decisions, we choose in favor of diversity support, despite the financial constraints.

Final Response: We thank the review committee for their questions, comments, and suggestions, and we hope that this commentary will clarify and enhance the understanding of the university community about Penn State Abington's ongoing commitment to diversity.



Center for Intercultural Leadership and Communication (CILC)

A resource center seeking to improve communication and leadership skills in multicultural and multilingual communities.

Goals:

CILC supports the development of effective leaders and communicators by providing participants with the tools they need to effectively interact with members of inclusive communities. Our aim is to identify and promote best practices in intercultural development within the fields of healthcare, education, industry, law, government, public policy, arts and culture.

Programs and Services:

CILC delivers customized workshops, courses and consultations directly to organizations at their place of business and sponsors events and programs for students, faculty and staff. Services provided by CILC include the following:

- resources to address language, culture, and communication skills relevant to culturally diverse settings
- consultations for improving communication dynamics in multicultural settings, including cross-cultural and gender communication
- courses in English for Specific Purposes (academic, business, healthcare, manufacturing, etc.)
- regional conferences and events for educators
- half-day and full-day in-service Pennsylvania ACT 48 workshops in intercultural communication and teaching English as a second language for K-12 teachers
- adult literacy programs for non-native speakers of English
- placement of student interns in multicultural businesses and organizations

For more information, please contact:

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