

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

Penn State Berks (PSB) is to be commended for its comprehensive update and very good effort in addressing all assessment questions. PSB should be recognized for a number of excellent initiatives, accomplishments, and comprehensive assessment approaches.

PSB includes many populations in its diversity definition; however, its programs do not appear to include all the cited groups. Noteworthy programs are in place, but emphasis appears to be on racial/ethnic and gender issues.

Response: The report cites other diversity programs; sexual orientation (pg. 7, 14), students with disabilities (pg 18), adult students (pg 19), and students from different social-economic backgrounds (pg 18).

PSB has created an excellent combination of data collection measures: local climate survey, faculty/staff surveys, information from diversity focus groups, and various national surveys of student engagement. Together, these measures create a concrete picture and guide for PSB in both programming and additional assessments. The review team considers this coordinated approach to assessment a potential best practice and is confident that these combined measures will lead to further inspiration to move forward in new and innovative directions. In addition, PSB's formal retention plan and the Retention Council are both potential best practices.

Campus Climate and Intergroup Relations

Challenge 1: Developing a Shared and Inclusive Understanding of Diversity

- ❖ PSB has developed a diversity structure that includes the multicultural international counselor, the College Diversity Committee, and the newly formed division-level subcommittees on diversity. The structure lends itself to enhancing open communication and an understanding of diversity.
- ❖ Although PSB was commended for its definition of diversity in previous feedback, the review team agrees that, in its current form, the definition lacks cohesiveness (i.e., by simply listing the 17 categories of diverse groups). The definition would be greatly strengthened by including a narrative discussion of how PSB values the involvement of these groups within PSB community.
Response: PSB values diversity as indicated on page 5 of the report: 1. We recognize individual differences and contributions of every member of the college community. 2. We commit ourselves to establishing a just community where the dignity of the college community members is affirmed and valued. 3. We commit ourselves to enhancing the diversity of the College. 4. We commit ourselves to valuing and serving a diverse population in our communities, the nation and the world.
- ❖ Important first steps have been taken to illustrate the importance of diversity, (e.g., Human Resource involvement with search committees, diversity Web site, definition of diversity on business cards, reinforcement of Penn State Policy AD 42, and diversity themes for the common reading program).
- ❖ A more effective approach in communicating PSB's definition of diversity to employees is needed. PSB may consider concentrating on making diversity information more widely available as well as continuing with efforts to strengthen faculty involvement.
Response: The PSB diversity statement and report are located on the PSB website. We will continue to make this issue a focal point for the coming year.
- ❖ Distributing PSB's diversity definition on a business card is an innovative approach to communication and a potential best practice. However, the distribution is apparently limited to interested students, and broader dissemination across the campus and local community is encouraged.
Response: The diversity business card is distributed to each faculty at the beginning of the academic year. The plan for the coming year is to expand the diversity business card distribution throughout the campus.

Challenge 2: Creating a Welcoming Campus Climate

- ❖ Top leadership's commitment to diversity is evident in the upgrade of the multicultural international counselor position and direct reporting line to the chancellor.
- ❖ As indicated in PSB's update, increased faculty involvement in diversity initiatives and with the multicultural international counselor could greatly enhance the campus climate.
- ❖ PSB is commended for using results from climate surveys and focus groups to encourage faculty leadership in creating inclusive student work groups in the classroom. Important information will be obtained as a result of plans to extend this process to other diverse groups and issues.
- ❖ The informal interaction of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences faculty members with underrepresented students via meals, with a plan to expand to other divisions, is noteworthy.
- ❖ The review team notes several potential best practices supporting this Challenge: subcommittees on diversity, which enhance communication about diversity issues within academic units; diversity forums, which appear to be well received and well attended; and the combination of assessment measures directed to improve climate.

Representation (Access and Success)

Challenge 3: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Student Body

- ❖ PSB is commended for developing several outreach programs to recruit and retain a diverse student body (e.g., Reading School District PEPP Program, Hispanic Center in partnership with the Higher Education Council of Berks County, Project Lead the Way, and Be a Part From the Start).
- ❖ PSB offers a healthy mix of student organizations to serve diverse populations, though there is no mention of programs for persons with disabilities. Ways to encourage student leadership and sustained interest for some underrepresented/underserved groups need to be explored.
- ❖ It would be a plus if the budget allowed a multicultural admissions counselor to be hired very soon.
Response: PSB is unable to hire the multicultural admissions counselor position due to lack of physical space and budget resources.
- ❖ The steady increase in the number of students and graduates from diverse racial/ethnic groups is notable.

Challenge 4: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Workforce

- ❖ Having the Human Resources representative provide early guidance to search committees is a proactive initiative in PSB's effort to diversify the workforce.
- ❖ Other than including the University's nondiscrimination statement in literature, the update notes little about what is being done to attract a diverse applicant pool. The update mentions advertising in Allentown and Philadelphia newspapers "at times," but it seems reasonable to take such actions more regularly.
- ❖ The update could be strengthened with a description of professional development efforts and the frequency with which they are utilized to prepare underrepresented employees for promotion.
- ❖ Attempts to collect data to determine "best" recruiting sources are laudable.
- ❖ The update mentions limited retention activity for PSB employees; faculty mentoring appears to be the sole initiative. Developing a formal plan for employee retention, as is done for Challenge 3, may help PSB move forward in this area.

Education and Scholarship

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

- ❖ Heightening faculty understanding of culturally responsive teaching through the workshop, "What's New to You about Student Learning," as well as having faculty share methods for internationalizing their courses in a Celebrating Teaching Colloquium are both noteworthy.
- ❖ A credit-bearing program to train students as mentors for students from diverse racial/ethnic groups is commendable. Expanding this program to reach other diverse populations seems a logical next step.

- ❖ While these individual efforts are very positive, PSB could make even greater strides by developing a more formal plan for curricular integration.
Response: PSB will make efforts to integrate all the diversity initiatives in the curriculum in a single coherent plan.
- ❖ Revising the theme of the common reading program to address diversity concerns is a positive example of how PSB is addressing diversity issues within the academic setting and is a potential best practice.

Institutional Viability and Vitality

Challenge 6: Diversifying University Leadership and Management

- ❖ The chancellor leads by example--providing diversity forums on a monthly basis, setting aside funds for diversity efforts, and serving on the College Diversity Committee.
Response: The examples are not exactly ad hoc, since they are planned and scheduled. We do allow room for the opportunity to respond to emerging issues as well. The advantage of a community the size of Penn State Berks is that most of our programs and efforts are visible by the whole community. We believe that our Framework for Diversity plan is comprehensive and when taken in total, represents our expectations. Finally, it is important to say that all administrators are expected to lead by example. We are having success with that philosophy which means that many leaders can have an impact on the outcomes.
- ❖ The update offers a few ad hoc examples of what appear to be worthwhile initiatives. However, it is not apparent that a comprehensive plan is in place for this Challenge.

Challenge 7: Coordinating Organizational Change to Support Our Diversity Goals

- ❖ Cooperative arrangements are in place both within the campus setting and in the external community to meet diversity goals.
- ❖ While the chancellor sets aside funds to support diversity focused programs, incorporating these programs within strategic planning and budget processes may help embed diversity in PSB's mission.
Response: The mission statement and other components in the strategic plan emphasize PSB's commitment to diversity. Fairly comprehensive marketing and public relations strategies are in place to communicate the importance of diversity. All budget decisions for the college are made by the administrative council. Every request must be accompanied with a strategic plan justification. When we created the Framework for Diversity, we tried to also coordinate that document with our current Strategic Plan. As such, decisions made in the Framework are also a part of the Strategic Plan and thus have the mechanism in place for making financial decisions. The biggest challenge comes when University Park changes the budget model or takes growth money from the campus, thus significantly altering any financial decisions.
- ❖ The mission statement and other components in the strategic plan emphasize PSB's commitment to diversity. Fairly comprehensive marketing and public relations strategies are in place to communicate the importance of diversity.