

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

The original Berks-Lehigh Valley diversity strategic plan was written as a collaborative effort between both campuses, though much if not most of the plan pertained more to Berks than to Lehigh Valley. Lehigh Valley and Berks have recently separated due to a University-wide reorganization, and Lehigh Valley is now in a transitional period where they are reporting on their diversity endeavors while, at the same time, they are still in the process of developing their own separate diversity strategic plan. For the purposes of this update, Lehigh Valley has indicated that they are not utilizing the previous Berks-Lehigh Valley plan. The review team accepts this approach but urges the Campus to have their own plan in place by no later than January 2008. Particularly important will be the development of metrics to measure progress towards key performance indicators.

Lehigh Valley has made progress in understanding and describing a comprehensive approach to diversity planning and programming and is actively involving faculty, administrators, staff, students, and alumni. The review team commends the Campus for the thoroughness of their update in this transition period but encourages focusing more extensive efforts on *Framework* constituents beyond those from diverse racial/ethnic groups, such as LGBT, disability, low-income students, etc. The team hopes that the feedback below will assist Lehigh Valley in developing a comprehensive diversity strategic plan that accomplishes significant goals while optimizing Lehigh Valley's resources.

Campus Climate and Intergroup Relations

Challenge 1: Developing a Shared and Inclusive Understanding of Diversity

- ❖ The activities of the Diversity Committee are commendable, particularly the collaborative efforts on campus and between Lehigh Valley and the local community.
RESPONSE: The PSU-LV Diversity Committee will identify a variety of community groups that we can continue to partner with in the future.
- ❖ The review team suggests creating a comprehensive definition of diversity that specifically identifies constituents in the upcoming diversity strategic plan.
RESPONSE: The Penn State Lehigh Valley Diversity Committee will work with various campus groups (Senior Management, Faculty Senate, Continuing Education & Student Affairs) in creating a comprehensive definition of diversity that identifies constituent groups.

Challenge 2: Creating a Welcoming Campus Climate

- ❖ The review team recommends sharpening the diversity focus of the current Wellness and Diversity Committee by creating a separate diversity committee with clearly defined roles and responsibilities.
RESPONSE: The separation of the Wellness & Diversity Committee will be discussed by the Senior Management Group, LV Faculty Senate, and the Wellness & Diversity Committee. Based upon feedback and recommendations, a separate Diversity Committee may be created.
- ❖ The team also suggests the development of a survey to establish baselines on the climate and demographic characteristics of the Campus (e.g., the LGBT community). These data can be used by the Diversity Committee to assess their current endeavors and guide future activities, including the use of focus groups, follow-up surveys, etc.
RESPONSE: Presently, we are working with a Psychology faculty member on determining our assessment goals and potential surveys. We hope to complete a baseline diversity assessment within the next academic year.
- ❖ The strategic placement of Student Affairs staff in the Multipurpose Room in order to interact more with students is commendable. Follow-up information on improvements that have come from this change would be useful.
- ❖ Any information about LGBT initiatives and issues would be especially appreciated since there is no specific mention of programming directed to this population. The team recommends utilizing existing

resources, such as the LGBT Support Network, the Commission on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Equity, and the LGBT Student Resource Center before launching Campus-specific programs.

- ❖ The “Diversity Ombudsman” and training of future faculty and staff are excellent ideas, though more details would be helpful.

RESPONSE: The “Diversity Ombudsman” is a work in progress. We will be defining the role, establishing goals; and selecting a candidate for this during the Fall of 2007.

Representation (Access and Success)

Challenge 3: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Student Body

- ❖ The progress report mentions that multiple steps have been taken to improve retention, including an “evening administrator” and an admissions counselor who focuses on transfer students. These ideas have excellent promise. Have other steps been taken, and if so, what are they?

RESPONSE: The Recruitment & Retention Committee and the Campus Intervention Team have both played a role in retaining students. Additionally, we have hired another DUS counselor with evening and weekend hours in order to meet the needs of our student body.

- ❖ Since diverse students comprise a high percentage of peer tutors in the Learning and Writing Centers, these Centers could be promoted as mechanisms to recruit and retain a variety of students by highlighting the accomplishments of these students and the value of service to current and prospective students.
- ❖ The review team welcomes the idea of attempting to improve the lower-than-average enrollment of female students through the diversity strategic planning process.
- ❖ The review team is pleased to hear that 17.3% of students at Lehigh Valley are from diverse racial/ethnic groups and hopes that strong efforts also will be placed on recruiting and retaining students from other diverse groups.

RESPONSE: We feel that this percentage misrepresents the diversity of our student body because it does not measure students from Eastern European and Middle Eastern backgrounds. These two ethnic groups have a large contingency of students enrolled at PSU-LV. Thus, we believe the PSU-LV student body is even more ethnically diverse. It is not uncommon to overhear 5 or 6 languages being spoken on any given day around the campus.

Challenge 4: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Workforce

- ❖ The Lehigh Valley response to this Challenge came across as uncharacteristically perfunctory in the context of other portions of the update. Campus leaders are encouraged to revisit and, where necessary, revise and augment their current processes and to utilize both University (e.g., the President’s Opportunity Fund) and external (e.g., CIC) resources to better address this Challenge. Longitudinal tracking and reporting of results will be vital in establishing actual progress.

RESPONSE: As a small campus, we have had minimal faculty and staff turnover over the past 5 years. As positions become open, we will make a more concerted effort to hire a diverse workforce.

Education and Scholarship

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

- ❖ Lehigh Valley has made effective strides in developing classes with intercultural understanding, such as HD FS 287X, which includes innovative community-based service learning experiences. The Campus has also expanded its initiatives that include international learning opportunities. With appropriate appraisal and data collection, such as the number of students who enroll in US or IL courses, some of these initiatives might be considered best practices.

RESPONSE: PSU-LV is proud of its formal education efforts that foster intercultural and international learning experiences. For example, we offer additional languages (Arabic and Chinese), formal service learning experiences (involving ESL), and international travel.

Institutional Viability and Vitality

Challenge 6: Diversifying University Leadership and Management

- ❖ The review team commends Lehigh Valley's faculty and staff outreach efforts. Some assessment of the effectiveness of these activities should occur.
RESPONSE: Presently, we are working with a Psychology faculty members on determining our assessment goals. We hope to complete a baseline diversity assessment within the next academic year.
- ❖ Although Lehigh Valley faces definite constraints in addressing this Challenge, such as the current reorganization phase, by developing goals and objectives with specific metrics to continually gauge progress, the Campus could give a better accounting of its endeavors and perhaps see some improvement in diversifying its leadership.

Challenge 7: Coordinating Organizational Change to Support Our Diversity Goals

- ❖ The review team applauds Lehigh Valley for its partnerships with both internal and external entities.
- ❖ It is once again emphasized that Lehigh Valley needs to continue developing a solid diversity strategic plan specific to the needs of its students, faculty, staff, administration, and community and include sustainable metrics to document progress.