

A Framework to Foster Diversity at Penn State: 2004-09

Penn State Shenango—Update: Fall 2006

Introduction and Chancellor's Observations

Penn State Shenango's contribution to **A Framework to Foster Diversity at Penn State: 2004-09** was embedded in the larger plan submitted by the former Commonwealth College. The campus' work was presented to the College administration in the form of a spreadsheet whose cells designated actions to be taken, responsible parties, cost, outcome assessment, and time frame.

The spring 2005 reorganization of the University and a change in campus leadership almost at the same time, suggest that a different approach to the **Framework** update be taken. Without being overly critical of what was previously submitted, the actions it proposed reflect a mindset that the campus is doing what it should to foster diversity and that all it needs to do is continue down its right path. Nor is this without merit. However, satisfaction with the current state-of-affairs will result in *statis*, and "foster" is an active verb.

In my opinion as chancellor, Penn State Shenango is a model campus in terms of its environment for adult learners and women, and it is often cited by the Commission on the Adult Learner for its success in recruiting and transforming the lives of these individuals. It is here we do our most notable work.

In the search for new employees, committees have diligently appointed a diversity advocate; in fact, most of our recent hires for faculty and administrative positions have been women. This mitigates the situation where men occupy the most powerful roles at the campus; however, the campus employs only two African-Americans, and they are tech services workers. This is not an acceptable situation, and it must change. As we reach out to minorities in our community and ask them to come to this campus to study, our commitment to racial diversity is not borne out by the makeup of our work force. As a member of the board of the Shenango Valley Urban League, I feel the discomfort of believing in certain principles and yet not seeming to live by them in my role as a campus and community leader.

The campus has enjoyed some forward motion on diversity matters with the establishment of the Rainbow Lions, a student LGBT club. In our rather conservative *milieu*, starting the club was a courageous act, and it has sponsored serious and important events on campus, most recently a lecture by Judy Shepard. The club currently has strong and active leadership; I have urged its officers to engage in succession planning, for experience has shown that a student organization can wither quickly when its imaginative leaders graduate. We also have a Cultural Diversity club which I personally advised until October 2006. I passed the torch to a newly hired English faculty member whose scholarly interests trench on Queer Studies. In fact, one of the reasons she was hired was to enhance our course offerings in this area of academic inquiry.

Under previous campus administrations, there was a Minority Affairs Advisory Board. Apart from occasional meetings and an annual dinner, there seemed little for its members

to do. In my view, it is more appropriate to recruit leaders from the minority community to our Shenango Campus Advisory Board rather than having a separate board for minority affairs. Minority affairs is the rightful business of the campus as a whole, and relegating it to a separate board is inconsistent with my vision for the campus. To this end, I am working to change the composition of the Advisory Board from a largely white male membership to one that reflects the demography and the cultural richness of our community.

The campus has begun the process of internationalizing the curriculum by adding new classes and developing study abroad programs for its students. Our faculty and DAA have established contacts with the Office of International Programs, and administrators from that office visited this fall to meet with students, faculty, and staff about future planning. We anticipate a significant move in this direction.

Striving to create an inclusive environment, we have been attentive to ADA matters. We do our best to accommodate individuals with documented disabilities, for example, although frankly the array of accommodations is rather limited here. Campus facilities are ADA compliant, with the painful exception of the Auditorium which lacks toilet facilities; people must use bathrooms in the adjacent building, and the mobility-impaired must exit the building and go to a nearby elevator to gain access to toilets. We currently have an architect's rendering of a renovated Auditorium in which this bad situation would be remedied; approval of a fund-raising effort focusing on this project is being sought as part of the upcoming capital campaign.

It is an unfortunate commentary that efforts to promote diversity and inclusiveness often require collateral efforts to combat prejudice and hatred. Penn State Shenango has seen little overt intolerance, however. Two examples—the removal by persons unknown of LGBT announcements, and the appearance of offensive graffiti aimed at Jews and African-Americans—are abhorrent, and statements condemning such behavior and enumerating consequences to the perpetrators have been issued by the chancellor. Students, faculty, and staff have been made aware of these unusual occurrences and have joined in the condemnation. My approach is to share my outrage at such behaviors and to convey the message that Penn State's bedrock values are assaulted when we are confronted with abominations like these. I characterize them rightly as attacks on our communal and individual human dignity.

The update which follows tells you what we have done so far and what we intend to do from now on. Reviewing the four dimensions and the seven challenges, I believe that Penn State Shenango is adequate or more-than-adequate in several areas being assessed; the racial diversity of its work force is a glaring exception, and a serious shortcoming. Until we hire minorities, our institution will be perceived as being less than fully committed to an agenda of diversity, and perhaps this perception is not wrong.

Note: In addition to my narrative, significant parts of the following sections have been authored by the heads of Academic Affairs, Student and Enrollment Services, and

Business/Finance. Each provides insight into how his or her unit has approached the goal of fostering diversity. This accounts for the stylistic differences in the responses.

Update: Challenge One—Developing a Shared and Inclusive Understanding of Diversity

The fall 2006 enrollment at Penn State Shenango is 893. Of this number, 602 are female; 470 are 24 years of age or older; 93 are minorities. Our demography has, in large measure, generated our definition of diversity. While the number of women in higher education grows, we are farther ahead than most institutions; within Penn State, we have the highest percentage of adult learners (52.6%); our percentage of minority students (10.4%) exceeds by double the percentage of minorities in general population of our service delivery area. These figures are not idiosyncratic; they have been observed for some time, with variations, of course.

Our campus notion of diversity, therefore, is descriptive of our *état présent*, defining it as the creation of an environment where inclusiveness, mutual respect, and the value of every human being are promoted and celebrated. It should be noted that there is no formal dissemination of this definition, since it is a description of how things are rather than a slogan. However, Challenge One suggests that the definition should serve as a point-of-departure for developing “objectives and initiatives.”

A review of the assessment questions and the previously submitted campus plan show that we have failed to meet this challenge in its full dimensions. To remedy this situation at this half-way point in the **Framework** implementation, we intend to:

- develop and disseminate a formal definition of diversity
- establish a Diversity Committee to create and monitor a clear set of objectives and initiatives
- evaluate and adopt the best practices that emerge from the University’s current progress assessment.

Update: Challenge Two—Creating a Welcoming Campus Climate

In order to demonstrate the campus’ commitment to diversity, the Academic Affairs office has supported, through faculty leadership, the establishment of the Rainbow Lions, an LGBT student organization that holds cultural programming and events for the broad education of the entire campus community. Two faculty members closely advise the student group and have been principally responsible for shaping its active profile and efforts. This fall, the group sponsored a notable speaker, Judy Shepard, to raise local, as well as campus understanding of the prejudice and violence still imposed on gay and lesbian individuals and communities nationwide.

Adult learners as a special population have also been targeted by Academic Affairs to receive additional support activities and services. To aid adult learners, Academic Affairs initiated, along with the Learning Center, the “embedded tutors” program that provides students directly with academic assistance as part of regular class time. This service is especially beneficial for working adults whose limits on time often preclude separate tutoring sessions. The embedded tutors also reflect emerging “best practices” for adult learners who prefer to work in peer groups and support each other in the learning process over individual, after class sessions. Since adult and LGBT students often face special anxieties and problems tied to changing or emerging identities, campus administrators are exploring, along with faculty advisors, avenues to extend professional counseling services in addition to traditional tutoring and learning assistance.

On behalf of international and intercultural interests, a faculty member serves as the campus’ international advisor and has taken the lead for several years in organizing and conducting student trips abroad with the assistance of other faculty. A faculty member also advises the campus Cultural Diversity Club which promotes events and opportunities to raise campus awareness and experiences related to international and intercultural education. It should be noted that financial support is provided to student clubs and organizations with a diversity focus.

In order to assess campus climate, this past summer, Academic Affairs, in conjunction with Student Affairs staff, revised the existing Student Satisfaction Survey to include special questions aimed at adult learners. The surveys were distributed in the summer DUS sessions and garnered initial feedback from adult students on campus/learning improvements. The questionnaire will be distributed at various points of advising through the students’ course of study at our campus. A questionnaire will also be developed to gauge the academic and social experiences/concerns of minority students; that, too, will be distributed through DUS. In conjunction with the Career Services staff, Academic Affairs is also supporting the launch of a course in spring 2007 on career planning and professional development to assist adults, minority and other students in preparing for post-graduation jobs and professional markets. The course will be innovative in that it will utilize the University’s e-Portfolio system to encourage and empower non-traditional students to craft professional identities and portfolios that will successfully promote their talents and accomplishments in competitive regional jobs markets.

Finally, we are devoted to the Penn State Principles, and they are posted in high visibility areas around campus.

Update: Challenge Three—Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Student Body

In order to meet Challenge Three, the following actions have either occurred or will shortly:

- Student Affairs staff have joined *Zero Tolerance Network* and will display member symbols outside of offices.

- The Shenango website references resources and promotes activities where interaction with staff and student groups are possible.
- The Student Affairs office has been moved to a central student location on campus.
- Many adult learners and students of color at Shenango are first generation college students and do not have computer access at home or are not skilled in the use of computers. The Office of Student Aid seeks to identify families in need of assistance in completing the FAFSA, and electronic forms for both state and federal aid. Further, we monitor the progress of these students and contact them with information and instructions in an effort to meet deadlines and allow eligibility for maximum consideration. These services are also provided to area groups such as Career Link Job Club and Talent Search.
- Admissions staff have scheduled meetings with Talent Search Coordinators to visit the campus, view the renovations, and meet with appropriate staff for sharing of information. The goal is to determine how we can assist them in ways that would provide greater success in recruiting both minority students and increasing our EOP student enrollment.
- Student Affairs has engaged in the following initiatives: expanded the evening hours; offered events focused on adult issues; utilized faculty who were adult learners; encouraged adult learners to become Lion Ambassadors and speakers; conducted Open Houses and Offer Receptions specifically for adults.
- The admissions staff work cooperatively with GED programs in Mercer and Lawrence counties. Staff have provided admissions seminars and financial aid workshops; they have participated in GED graduations and conduct GED-only Open Houses on campus.
- Staff routinely take an active role in community events such as Women's Expo and Veterans Outreach Programs designed to target specific adult populations. Further, the campus utilizes information from the UP Veterans Office to target recently discharged veterans and to provide information on academic programs, VA Educational Benefits, as well as traditional student aid.
- Admissions and Career Services staff provide services to Job Club at Career Link in the areas of career development and college admission process.
- Scholarships specifically aimed at adult learners were created at Shenango—George H. Allen, Jr.; Pedas-Sava (for adults beginning college with GED only); PHN Charitable Foundation; and the Shenango Valley Foundation/Alice D. Robinson Memorial Scholarship (for single mothers of color).

- The campus is actively involved with TRA/TAA/WIA through Career Link to provide early intervention to prospective adults whose jobs have been eliminated. Staff members provide a variety of services as permitted by Career Link including information sessions and application sessions.
- We have created an environment that encourages adult learners to take on leadership roles in clubs/organizations and activity planning, and adult learners hold 25 of 49 current leadership positions.
- The composition of the Student Activity Fee Committee reflects the campus population of adult learners. The APCA Activity selection committee is 50/50 traditional/adult. It also reflects the campus' minority student population.
- Numerous clubs offer multiple meeting times—day and evening—to accommodate adult/working students.
- Student Affairs staff are available from 8 a.m. to 8.p.m. to accommodate day and evening student needs.
- We hold adult-offer and evening orientation sessions.
- Student Affairs and clubs offer family-related activities, e.g. Human Development and Family Studies Halloween and Easter Parties; Family Day; children's movies.
- Student Affairs and clubs offer adult-relevant personal enrichment discussions, e.g. taxes, budgeting, stress relief.
- The campus Fitness Center is open from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., and the Game Room is open from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m.
- A Career Services course is offered with special attention paid to development of technology skills needed for the job search process. A technology tutor will be hired to assist students with technology questions.
- Career Services office hours are 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.; evening workshops are offered.
- At the Summer Leadership Conference, 3 of 3 Shenango students were adult learners.
- Student Affairs and clubs offer activities focused on diversity related to minority populations, e.g. Black History Month.
- Career Services offers free transportation to "Stepin' Up", an annual minority job fair at UP.
- Rainbow Lions organization was established during 2005-2006.

- All campus events sponsored by Student and Enrollment Services are held in appropriate locations to allow access for students with disabilities.
- Students with disabilities are not specifically recruited to Penn State Shenango, but we make every effort to provide appropriate accommodations; a process for working with students with disabilities has been established in the Student Affairs office.
- The University provides scholarships specifically designed for students with disabilities. While these scholarships are not awarded through the Student Aid system, but through Student Affairs, these offices work together to provide web site information where applications can be secured, along with deadlines to apply. We also provide this information in the *Campus Chatter* (our student newspaper) and on bulletin board postings.
- Student Affairs staff help students with disabilities to advocate for themselves, in addition to advocating on their behalf.
- Career Services has career exploration resources that take into account a student's disabilities.
- Admissions and Student Affairs are coordinating a joint Martin Luther King Day event. This will involve our "Student for a Day" program, specifically designed for minority students.
- Student Government Association established "House of Representatives" monthly meeting of club presidents. This group is made up of traditional, adult, minority and LGBT students. The goal of meeting is to encourage collaboration among student groups.
- Student Affairs tracks student group activities and encourages collaboration where appropriate.
- Outreach efforts are made by Student Aid staff to identify families in need of assistance with the college admissions and student aid process.

Update: Challenge Four—Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Workforce

The campus adheres to University recruiting strategies. We advertise job openings in various publications, as well as in *The Buckeye Review*, a local newspaper with a large minority readership. Additionally, we contact the local job services organization, notifying its administrator of openings, as well as posting jobs on the Internet. Finally, we use our contacts in various community groups to publicize campus positions.

The Director of Business Services and Finance ensures that all search committees develop a diverse final pool of candidates although, as noted earlier, the campus' efforts to hire a diverse work force have not succeeded.

Recognized and realized changes in employment conditions, employee attitudes, and an inclusiveness of atmosphere are essential to fostering diversity in the work place. Often the social barriers to retaining diverse faculty and staff are hidden or obscured by long-standing conditions and practices that first need to be identified and then addressed. Strategic objectives for 2007-08 are as follows

- The chancellor, along with the DAA and the faculty Diversity Advisor, will enlist the aid of University experts, e.g. Dr. Ron Jackson, Provost Office, members of the Diversity Planning Committee, Prof. Sue Rankin, etc.) to begin to examine and then plan for initiatives and activities intended to bring greater diversity into the campus faculty and work force.
- Shenango will develop a campus Diversity Committee that allows for wide involvement by a number of campus constituents.
- Once formed, the Diversity Committee, with the help of Penn State faculty/staff experts, will devise a climate survey that targets, specific to the Shenango campus, conditions that prohibit/promote greater diversity. An additional survey may also be developed and offered to local community partners involved in diversity promotion as a way to gain an externalized view of Shenango's reputation and climate among diverse work force populations. Survey(s) will be administered starting in fall 2008 and will serve, in part, as a basis for long-term planning.
- In addition, the DAA and faculty Diversity Advisor will work with Dr. Ron Jackson, Administrative Intern to the Provost's Office, to solicit support/funds/connections to enable faculty of color to be invited as either teaching fellows/fixed-term faculty to begin diversifying the campus teaching population.

Update: Challenge Five—Developing a Curriculum That Fosters Intercultural and International Competencies

The campus curriculum is rich in offerings that promote and explore diversity. We offer well-enrolled courses in Human Development and Family Services addressing special and ethnic populations. The campus routinely schedules courses in sociology, foreign languages, the Holocaust, world music, literature, religion, Native American and world ethnicities history, international business, anthropology, and international affairs, in addition to providing international study abroad opportunities. Starting in 2007, the campus will offer a rotating selection of courses focusing on Women's Studies,

minorities, and Queer Studies, the last being taught by a new tenure-track faculty member whose scholarship in Women's and Queer Studies has already garnered considerable interest in her national professional associations and scholarly network.

The HDFS faculty has launched a Center for Family and Community Empowerment to draw grant support, donor interest, scholarships, special projects, etc. to address the severe nature of local economic and social problems directly endured by the area poor, predominantly comprised of African-Americans, women, unemployed blue collar family members, and the elderly. The Center will substantially raise the campus' research efforts and profile as well as outreach capabilities in support of local economic development, educational impact, and human empowerment. On an individual basis, tenured and tenure-track HDFS faculty continue to publish in notable professional and academic journals with one member having secured a sabbatical to engage collaboratively with scholars in New Zealand next year. Despite our small numbers, the faculty has been extremely energetic in keeping our curriculum fresh by offering existing and new courses and topics related to intercultural and diversity studies, issues and scholarship trends. The predominance of our HDFS 2- and 4-year programs stands as a testament to the relevance and vitality of our curriculum. We have not explored embedding intercultural and international competencies in courses campus-wide but may consider doing so to promote a greater understanding of culture, the connection of multiculturalism to students' lives and careers, and an enhanced sophistication among our students, many whom are location-bound, first generation college attendees. Moreover, singularly and in partnership with other University College campuses, Academic Affairs is planning to apply for federal grants, e.g. STEP, Alliance, Gear Up, Jump Start, McNair Scholars, etc. to build scholarship and educational financial support for local minority students seeking to attend Penn State and especially those students considering careers in engineering, environmental sciences, information and computer science and mathematics.

At present, however, we do not have a systematic means to measure learning outcomes in diversity/intercultural/international offerings, but Academic Affairs will be working with faculty to collect data and garner student feedback/development information before the end of 2009.

Update: Challenge Six—Diversifying University Leadership and Management

Hiring practices at Penn State Shenango are consistent with University HR policies, as we have stated earlier. The opportunity to hire at the level of director doesn't occur often. Currently, however, the campus' leadership cohort does have women in key roles. The Director of Academic Affairs, Jacqueline McGlade, began serving here in spring 2006. The campus Director of Student and Enrollment Services, Jane Williams, has held a variety of leadership positions over her 21 years at the campus. She has two associate directors under her supervision, both of whom are women. Additionally, the Public Information Coordinator, Liz Izenas, has significant responsibilities and is part of the leadership team, reporting directly to the Chancellor.

This academic year, the chair of the campus faculty senate, Kathleen Mastrian, provides leadership to her colleagues and participates in Advisory Board meetings as their representative.

What we lack, however, is a local mechanism similar to the University's Administrative Fellowship Program whereby new talent can be cultivated. To remedy this, we will explore the possibility of creating opportunities for current faculty and staff to work with campus directors. We do have campus representatives to various University-wide commissions. But there is no upward route from this service to management roles here.

In the past, two female campus employees were University Administrative Fellows—Claudia Limbert, who went on to become DAA and then CEO at Penn State DuBois, and now President of the Mississippi College for Women; and Gail Gilchrest, who is Director of Academic Services and Records in the Office of the Vice President for Commonwealth Campuses. The campus has actively disseminated information about University-sponsored programs such as these among the faculty and staff and will continue to do so.

There are leadership positions at Penn State Shenango that are likely to become vacant in the next 3 to 5 years due to retirements. As with all openings, these will present opportunities for the campus to affirm its commitment to diversity; and the exceptional visibility of these positions in the community could give the lie to the perception that our rhetoric has no corollary in action.

Update: Challenge Seven—Coordinating Organizational Change to Support Our Diversity Goals

Beginning in FY 2000-01, Penn State Shenango established the position of Diversity Specialist within Student Affairs. There were some benefits derived from this move; there was a well defined point-of-contact between the campus, its students, and the Office of the Vice Provost for Educational Equity; a liaison to the Minority Advisory Board was created; diversity was given the prominence associated with having a staff person assigned to it. When the individual occupying this position left the campus, she was not replaced. In fact, the promise of the Diversity Specialist role was not fulfilled, and it was decided that the campus would benefit more from a staff member with a broader portfolio of responsibilities. In all candor, the initial idea was a good one but the reality proved disappointing.

In attempting to fulfill Challenge Seven, a new way was found to ensure the continuity of the concept underlying the Diversity Specialist role. Our Associate Director of Student Affairs has enthusiastically offered to assume Diversity Specialist responsibilities.

Conclusion

Assessing our progress toward realizing the objectives of **A Framework to Foster Diversity at Penn State: 2004-09** at the halfway point, it is clear that our results are mixed. Progress has been achieved in meeting *Challenges One, Two, Three, and Five*. The same cannot be said yet for the remaining *Challenges Four, Six, and Seven*. It is upon these that the campus must focus, and we anticipate that a series of best practices recommendations will emerge from the review process. We have the will and the resolve to do better in the second half of this important endeavor, and we appreciate and value the feedback and advice that will be forthcoming from the Office of the Vice Provost for Educational Equity.