

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

It is commendable that a group of Wilkes-Barre faculty and staff attended two sessions of “Best Practices in Diversity Strategic Planning.” Recognizing the Wilkes-Barre plan was “severely lacking in substantive actions and meaningful measures of assessment,” this group set out to address these weaknesses. The revisions of this remarkable report are to be understood considering the following issues: the 2004 Faculty/Staff Survey revealed serious concerns of “respect” toward faculty and staff by administration; the Commonwealth College reorganized in 2005; and Campus administration changed significantly since the original development of the plan. The matrix which identifies actions, accountability, implementation, cost, outcome assessment, and timeframe could be considered a potential best practice. It is laudable that the Campus Environment Team (CET) works with student and staff organizations to promote diversity on campus; identifies areas of diversity not usually thought about (poverty/hunger and intellectual diversity); provides and promotes programming; and attempts to designate outcome assessments for each Challenge addressed. The review team commends the Campus for recognizing the need for data collection and assessment, and it looks forward to viewing this data in future reports.

***RESPONSE:** With the changes in the leadership team, it was determined that the campus essentially had lacked focus. It is believed that many of the issues brought forth in the previous assessments were related to the campus not knowing “who they were” and “where they were going”. Thus in addition to the short-term changes that were made upon the new leadership team’s installation, a concerted effort was made to begin the process of remediating the existing situation. In Spring, 2007, a campus task force was put together with faculty, staff, and administration (Chaired by faculty member, Chancellor as ex officio) to formulate a new campus mission, vision, and values. All faculty and staff were scheduled to participate in a series of focus groups led by a corporate consultant. The net result was a comprehensive mission (“who we are”), vision (“where we want to go”), and set of values that underlie the entire focus of the campus. (A copy is attached, and under review by Commonwealth College.) The next step is to integrate this focus into the strategic and operational plans of the campus.*

This accomplishment focuses more on the future than the past, but has the potential of pulling the Penn State Wilkes-Barre campus family closer together as it moves forward to accomplish its goals. At the same time, progress has been made on a number of the specific issues cited below. They are duly noted in the attached responses.

Campus Climate and Intergroup Relations

Challenge 1: Developing a Shared and Inclusive Understanding of Diversity

- ❖ It is an excellent strategy to promote diversity by beginning with the highest Campus administration level and seeking contributions from stakeholders.
- ❖ The Wilkes-Barre CET was acknowledged as a “Best Practice” organization in 2004. It is positive that faculty, staff and students are awarded yearly for diversity initiatives.
- ❖ The review team recommends that the Campus create an inclusive definition of diversity which may help to address some of the underlying issues of anger.
- ❖ CET has hosted two programs; however survey results on the programs for disabilities and poverty/hunger are not provided in the update.
- ❖ It is unclear if the Campus plans to reinstitute its membership in “NEPDEC” (Northeastern Pennsylvania Diversity Education Consortium), which could be a \$4500 financial concern.
- ❖ Wilkes-Barre is encouraged to continue its efforts on Web site updates. Creating a diversity tab or other means of searching for relevant diversity information would be helpful.
- ❖ The Campus could consider collaboration with other North East Penn State campuses to create a regional multicultural coordinator position.

RESPONSE: The leadership of the campus is committed to promoting diversity throughout, and in all searches to date has sought out diverse candidates and include all qualified candidates regardless of their background. The campus is currently investigating the possibility of rejoining the Diversity Institute, especially in cooperation with other Penn State campuses. However, the director of the Institute is out of the country.

Challenge 2: Creating a Welcoming Campus Climate

- ❖ Using the Faculty/Staff Satisfaction Survey to identify diversity concerns, widely disseminating findings, and then incorporating those issues into a revised strategic plan of action is laudable.
- ❖ The review team suggests considering another survey focused specifically on probing for the perceived existence of gender discrimination.
- ❖ Wilkes-Barre is commended for addressing issues of accessibility.
- ❖ The update notes excellent ideas relative to increasing diversity of community member involvement in campus activities (recruiting under-represented groups to advisory boards of degree programs, etc.).
- ❖ Potential best practice: Attending sessions of “Best Practices in Diversity Strategic Planning” proved significant in helping to formulate substantive actions and meaningful measures of assessment. Expansion in the number and breadth of measures of assessment is recommended.

RESPONSE: The leadership changes have continued to add diversity to the campus. As for gender issues, the current campus leadership team has 5:2 female:male ratio. Gays and lesbians are included among the faculty, staff, and administrators. Two administrators of significance in relating to students – Senior Admissions Officer and Learning Center Director/Learning Disabilities Officer – are African-American.

Representation (Access and Success)

Challenge 3: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Student Body

- ❖ It is positive that the Campus identifies diverse student populations to track (adult, and under-represented students).
- ❖ The stated intention of recruiting minority students from beyond the Campus service area elicits concerns not yet addressed in the update; it is not apparent how the Campus plans to address the challenges of not having on-campus housing, of having a café that closes at 3:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, and of transportation difficulties that will face students forced to live off-campus. Issues of campus access have already provoked dissatisfaction among faculty and staff.
- ❖ It is not clear whether the Campus plans to reactivate student organizations mentioned on its Web Site as *inactive*, such as the Society of Women Engineers and the Multicultural Student Organization. These organizations in the past have addressed diverse student populations’ interests and concerns. Student involvement is known to help foster retention.
- ❖ The Campus may want to consider collaborating with other North East Penn State campuses to recruit and retain a more diverse student population.

RESPONSE: The newly developed mission and statement of campus values truly do clearly state the intention of the campus to be a welcoming and supportive environment for persons of all background. Additionally, the leadership team has determined that that it is important to specifically begin a marketing effort to the Hispanic community. This effort includes the necessity of preparing the campus to be as supportive and welcoming to this group as all others.

Challenge 4: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Workforce

- ❖ It is an excellent idea to tie the annual review of directors and supervisors to demonstrated effectiveness in promoting diversity.
- ❖ Campus climate issues could be added to the outcomes assessment for the annual review of directors/supervisors.
- ❖ The Campus is commended for its proactive initiatives to recruit and retain a diverse workforce: search committees with time and financial resources, mentoring, and the ‘welcome’ package.

- ❖ It is unclear how Wilkes-Barre plans to acknowledge the diverse traditions of staff and faculty.
- ❖ Collaboration with North East Penn State campuses on recruitment/retention issues is suggested.
RESPONSE: The leadership team has begun to gain a new spirit in the last year with the administrative changes, the stabilization and growth of the student body, and the coming implementation of the zero based budgeting system. These changes along with their participation in the formation of the mission, vision, and values have built a new spirit. The future operations of the campus will better align the evaluations of administrators, faculty, and staff with the mission, values, and spirit of the campus.

Education and Scholarship

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

- ❖ It is laudable to promote diversity topics in first-year seminars.
- ❖ Faculty encouragement of student attendance at intercultural/international events is positive.
- ❖ The Campus's desire to encourage travel study courses is acknowledged. Promoting study abroad is also suggested.
- ❖ Potential best practice: Incorporating service learning options into course requirements.
RESPONSE: Actually, many of the items mentioned here are already in practice. Faculty and students are encouraged to attend intercultural and international events, but the CET brings such events to the campus as well. A Lion Ambassador is scheduled for international study. Service learning is used both through internships and through specific course work, such as surveying the Lands at Hillside for historical registry by the Surveying Engineering class (this past year). It is the intent of the leadership team to encourage continued use and growth in these areas.

Institutional Viability and Vitality

Challenge 6: Diversifying University Leadership and Management

- ❖ Continued participation in the University's Administrative Fellowship program is supported.
- ❖ To help ensure diversity questions are included in searches, the Campus may want to consider utilizing the "Hire Power" training program available through the Office of Human Resources.
- ❖ Wilkes-Barre Human Resources has helpfully incorporated links to Educational Equity and University Holidays on its Web site.
RESPONSE: Again, the accomplishments here have resulted in the diversity at a number of positions, such as among the leadership team as cited above. That group is now 5 female and 2 male. Gay and lesbian members are represented on campus, and the campus continues to seek qualified diversity candidates for all openings.

Challenge 7: Coordinating Organizational Change to Support Our Diversity Goals

- ❖ The review team finds the statement about partnering with regional Penn State campuses to promote diversity programming to be the key to increasing opportunities in other challenges.
- ❖ It is suggested that the Campus work with diverse community groups in the Wilkes-Barre area.
- ❖ The review team encourages full involvement of top administrators for implementing this plan.
- ❖ Potential best practice: Annual awards to faculty/staff that promote outstanding diversity initiatives.
RESPONSE: The campus is continuing to reach out to other campuses and the broader community to deal with diversity issues. The Chancellor serves as Chair of the Council of Presidents (of Colleges and Universities) in Luzerne County (includes Penn State Hazleton) which discuss and work on a variety of campus and community diversity concerns. The Chancellor also now chairs the Community Spirit (Immigration) subcommittee of the Luzerne County Diversity Task Force. These positions allow for visible evidence of the commitment of Penn State Wilkes-Barre to supporting diversity on campus and throughout the community.

Response: The following is the Wilkes-Barre Mission Statement per the response in the first paragraph.

Penn State Wilkes-Barre

Mission:

Penn State Wilkes-Barre provides the opportunities and rewards of an internationally recognized university in a collaborative educational environment where experienced, dedicated scholar-teachers and staff help students of all ages develop their potential to become productive and responsible citizens. We serve the broader community as an educational, technological, cultural, and economic resource.

Vision:

We will become the educational resource of choice for the region, by:

- Being student-focused.
- Promoting personal and intellectual diversity.
- Providing lifelong learning opportunities.
- Providing greater access to programs through technology and location.
- Responding to community needs academically, technologically, culturally, and economically.

Values:

- **Student-Focused Environment:** We value a campus where the focus is on a learning environment where students are provided the opportunity for an excellent academic and personal growth experience.

We are committed to a strong faculty and staff who: help and encourage students to become productive and responsible citizens; incorporate strong positive values in academic and co-curricular programs; and emphasize the value of life-long learning.

- **Excellence:** We value excellence in all our endeavors. We are committed to hiring, supporting and developing highly qualified faculty and staff. We are dedicated to providing quality teaching and service. We foster intellectual curiosity, exploration, innovation and open inquiry. We support faculty and undergraduate research.
- **Community service:** We value the opportunity to be a community partner supporting educational, economic, and social development.
- **Campus community:** We welcome all who desire to become part of a campus community in which all members treat others with respect, honesty and dignity.
- **Ethics and Integrity:** We support all aspects of academic freedom. We commit to teaching students to become responsible, accountable, and ethical citizens. We commit to providing a campus community in which all members are expected to take responsibility for their actions and engage in ethical behavior at all times.