

**Feedback on Final Update on Progress Implementing
A Framework to Foster Diversity at Penn State: 2004-09
The Dickinson School of Law
Spring 2010**

It is clear from the final update that the Dickinson School of Law has made outstanding progress in meaningful ways during the review period. The report is robust, with evidence dispersed throughout the update. Given that the School is in a period of transformation with two new facilities, the review team was unclear whether any unique challenges may have been encountered at the specific campuses. Although efforts have proven to be quite successful in recruiting students from diverse racial/ethnic groups, efforts are limited in developing partnerships with other underrepresented/underserved groups such as persons with disabilities, veterans, and the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community.

Campus Climate and Intergroup Relations

Challenge 1: Developing a Shared and Inclusive Understanding of Diversity

- ❖ The Web site heading, “Diversity Initiatives,” along with the diversity statement depicts a clear message that diversity is a substantial and engrained aspect of the overall educational climate.
- ❖ The mention of facilitating a robust and respectful dialogue to enhance understanding seems particularly appropriate given the nature of creating a law school community where divergent views can be openly shared and debated.
- ❖ Distribution of diversity programs takes place via the School’s Web site and flyers posted at both the University Park and Carlisle campuses. Including participation rates by students, faculty, and staff of on-site versus the non-host site locations would be a valuable addition to measuring the effectiveness of programming.
- ❖ The faculty/staff/student composition of the School’s Diversity Committee is admirable. Do the faculty/staff members have ample opportunity to be fully engaged regardless of their campus? Are students who are appointed by the Student Bar Association located at both campuses?
- ❖ Events, such as discussions/forums/debates, the Minority Alumni Banquet, multicultural dinners, and MLK events are good examples of fostering inclusivity. In this particular Challenge, mention of involving persons with disabilities and the LGBT community, for example, also displays a broad understanding of diversity.

Challenge 2: Creating a Welcoming Campus Climate

- ❖ Funding for the Center for Immigrants’ Rights and the Civil Rights Appellate Clinic are excellent examples of avenues that address a broad range of civil rights concerns. Results of activities conducted within these centers, including examples, are encouraged during the next review cycle.
- ❖ Data indicate notable success in hiring diverse faculty and staff, also appropriate to Challenge 4.
- ❖ The Black Law Students Association, drawing on participants from both of the School’s campuses as well as two other law schools, the University of Pittsburgh and Widener, are good examples of gaining additional perspectives of climate beyond Penn State.
- ❖ Students from diverse racial/ethnic groups comprised 16% of the most recent first-year class which, along with the recent hiring of faculty from underrepresented/underserved populations and women of international origin, are important accomplishments. These outcomes suggest that processes and procedures that led to these outcomes could be best practices, and information about these approaches may be valuable to other academic units and are also applicable under Challenge 3.

Representation (Access and Success)

Challenge 3: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Student Body

- ❖ It may be challenging to maintain all previous recruiting programs that the new dean of admissions has implemented that have led to success in recruiting a diverse student body for the J.D. and LL.M. programs; the review team encourages sustaining the endeavors that are working best.
- ❖ The review team is particularly impressed with the international outreach to attract law students from across the globe.

- ❖ Quantifying undergraduate retention and graduation rates among all law students and students from diverse racial/ethnic groups is suggested to gain further insight about potential disparities.
- ❖ For the Black Law Student Association academic retreat, please indicate the types of retention programs that are shared with students. This type of information, if clarified, may be useful for other units.
- ❖ Documenting the types of extensive personal contacts with prospective candidates and their families is listed as a successful initiative. Further elaboration about the processes involved in this endeavor may be helpful to other academic units. A best practice designation will include reporting on the details of this practice as well as collecting data to determine its impact.

Challenge 4: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Workforce

- ❖ Reviewing the “Diversity Talent Bank” is an apt ongoing tactic along with encouraging referrals from current employees.
- ❖ Utilizing “Hire Power: Strategies for Hiring Key Employee Talent” may be considered a best practice for recruiting should data be collected to demonstrate program success.
- ❖ The Law School has achieved major success in hiring diverse faculty and staff, and recent results are worthy of commending the effort as a “best practice.” Strong growth among diverse racial/ethnic, international, and women faculty is encouraging. For future updates, tracking progress for this Challenge on an annual basis would be revealing.

Education and Scholarship

Challenge 5: Developing a Curriculum That Fosters U.S. and International Cultural Competencies

- ❖ “Equal justice under law” as a central tenet of a law school curriculum is evident in the examples cited in the update. The Law and Aging Policy Seminar, Law and Sexuality Seminar, and Asylum and Refugee Law programs are particularly notable for fostering cultural competencies.
- ❖ Team teaching in the School of International Affairs (SIA) is an appropriate way to broaden the curriculum given the divergent views that two professors may bring to particular topics and courses, and this practice mirrors the increased global perspective seen across the University.
- ❖ Identifying the number of students who have dual enrollment in the J.D. and Master of International Affairs programs will provide some understanding of how these curricula may intersect throughout the combination of the Law School and SIA communities.

Institutional Viability and Vitality

Challenge 6: Diversifying University Leadership and Management

- ❖ The dean’s statement that notes, “[m]eaningful diversity is a core value of Penn State law” and further statements indicating “diversity and academic excellence go hand in hand” and “one doesn’t occur without the other” are particularly strong messages for the Law School community to emulate.
- ❖ Budget support for diversity-oriented programs and hiring decisions are all very strong examples of setting the tone for a law school that has quickly transformed itself and is on course for being a world-class institution.

Challenge 7: Coordinating Organizational Change to Support Our Diversity Goals

- ❖ Although diversity goals are largely the responsibility of the Diversity Committee’s strong leadership, beginning with the dean and the dean’s staff, organizational change to support these initiatives permeates throughout faculty, staff, and students. The primary concern is sustaining this level of organizational change and dealing with any disparities between campuses so as to not impede all of the fine results that have been achieved during this review period.