

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

It is evident from the College's thorough answers to the *Framework* assessment questions that they have succeeded in continuing and expanding upon a number of diversity initiatives, most notably for students and faculty. Also, the update made extensive use of data that indicated substantial progress in key areas. In general, it is recommended that the College focus more on staff, the LGBT community, low-income students, and other *Framework* constituents.

Unfortunately, it was difficult to assess progress towards specific goals in the College's diversity strategic plan because the update did not link any of the College's accomplishments during the current diversity strategic planning cycle with specific points in their diversity strategic plan. Portions of the College's diversity strategic plan were simply inserted into the update with no comment on progress made on specific points since the plan was developed. Further, several portions of the update repeated items mentioned previously in the update (cf., pp. 56 and 65; 8, 23, and 67). The update also mentioned numerous College accomplishments from prior planning periods without necessarily distinguishing them from those in the current planning period. Some redundancy is inevitable, and going back to previous planning periods to provide context for current accomplishments can be useful. However, the review team thought the update was unnecessarily repetitive and did not keep enough focus on the current planning period. These factors may have obscured some of the significant accomplishments in the update that otherwise would have been more prominent.

Campus Climate and Intergroup Relations

Challenge 1: Developing a Shared and Inclusive Understanding of Diversity

- ❖ The diversity committee is actively involved in providing oversight, monitoring, and support to diversity initiatives. It is particularly notable that the committee was responsible for developing and giving final approval for the mid-term update.
- ❖ Data concerning the frequency, attendance, and outcomes of breakfasts with graduate students of color held by College deans are needed to assess the success of these efforts.
- ❖ The assistant dean for multicultural affairs has developed comprehensive initiatives and policies to increase the level of diversity programming within the College.
- ❖ It is unclear what gains have been made in increasing awareness of LGBT issues, though the review team noted that the College now includes sexual orientation in its definition of diversity. It is not apparent that the College is in a position to consciously address the needs of the LGBT population. Hiring an employee with expertise in LGBT issues who would regularly interact with administrators, staff, and faculty would provide opportunities for personnel to better understand these issues.

Challenge 2: Creating a Welcoming Campus Climate

- ❖ While the College has sponsored a wide variety of guest speakers, including various esteemed alumni, the subject matter of those listed did not seem to consistently focus on diversity or issues facing staff employees.
- ❖ It is very positive that the College has examined the 2004 faculty/staff survey and that the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications did an extensive study in 2006 that found the climate to be very favorable. The data presented regarding the 2004 survey would have been more useful if it was presented in context with data from previous College surveys, though the comparison to University-wide data was helpful.
- ❖ It is noted that the College monitors climate issues in its individual departments through an annual survey of the faculty. It is recommended that outcomes be articulated more comprehensively in the future and that surveys are expanded to include staff and students.
- ❖ It would be helpful to know how the diversity committee informally assesses the climate of the College and also how climate issues are identified during the annual review process.

- ❖ It is positive that the assistant dean for multicultural affairs is included in all faculty searches; it is suggested that there be appropriate representation in staff searches as well.
- ❖ The college has noted success in integrating students of color into mainstream student clubs. More information about how this was accomplished and data on the rates of participation would be useful in assessing success.

Representation (Access and Success)

Challenge 3: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Student Body

- ❖ A second multicultural merit scholar was recruited to the College in 2006.
- ❖ The College's peer mentor system has received campus-wide praise.
- ❖ The College has helped students of color to achieve acclaim in a number of prestigious national programs.
- ❖ The enrollment of students of color in the College has increased significantly since 1990. Within the last 10 years, the College had one of the largest enrollment increases for students of color among Colleges at University Park.
- ❖ Retention rates for students of color exceed campus-wide percentages.
- ❖ If data were presented to support its efficacy, the Academic Intervention Program could be considered a best practice.

Challenge 4: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Workforce

- ❖ It is suggested that search committees hiring staff employees consult with OHR for the specific purpose of augmenting their effectiveness in identifying and hiring diverse employees.
- ❖ The retention strategies for faculty are to be commended. It would be helpful to know what strategies are in place for staff in addition to awards and college-funded training. This absence was also noted in the 2004 review of the College's final report for the 1998-2003 *Framework* planning cycle.
- ❖ It would be helpful to know more about the mentoring process that department heads and senior employees participate in.
- ❖ At the 2004 review of its diversity strategic plan, the College was encouraged to "approach local demographic factors not as a barrier to recruiting and retaining a diverse staff but as an opportunity for creatively addressing this Challenge." This suggestion is worth repeating again.

Education and Scholarship

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

- ❖ Diversity modules are incorporated into nearly 100 course sections, and diversity and gender related research is undertaken by a number of faculty.
- ❖ There is evidence of increased research and course offerings that relate to international diversity issues.
- ❖ It remains unclear how many courses are tailored to the needs of the LGBT community.

Institutional Viability and Vitality

Challenge 6: Diversifying University Leadership and Management

- ❖ It would be helpful to know more about the "Knight Scholars" and also more specifics on how the dean creates a climate that is welcoming to everyone.
- ❖ It was not clear how unit leaders are actively involved in diversity efforts towards faculty and staff.

Challenge 7: Coordinating Organizational Change to Support Our Diversity Goals

- ❖ It is noted that faculty are financially rewarded for diversity-related scholarship. It is unclear what types of rewards are available for staff for exemplary service related to diversity.
- ❖ The College articulates a number of diversity strategies to effect long-term organizational change with the College.
- ❖ Annual expenditures for diversity are impressive and demonstrate a significant pattern of sustained growth.
- ❖ Partnering with HBCUs has enhanced the ability of the College to recruit top scholars.