

**Feedback on A Framework to Foster Diversity at Penn State: 2010–15 and  
2014–15 through 2018–19 Diversity Initiatives**

Fall 2014

**The Graduate School**

The Graduate School strategic plan followed the planning guidelines well, which facilitated ample responses to the questions related to diversity and inclusion. Diversity is well represented in the plan, though it could be better integrated into the respective domains throughout. The plan is rich in data; however, at times, the strategic indicators and data supporting positive outcomes for programs are not robust. Terms like “anecdotal data” and “observations of positive staff behavior” are not effective metrics. The plan sometimes identifies specific thresholds for success but, more characteristically, words like “increase” and “frequency” are not tied to concrete measures. Such vagueness makes it difficult to assess the success of past activities and the exact aspirations for future accomplishment. The standard data snapshots provided could be augmented with data employed more strategically to illumine strategic foci.

The review team recognizes that the Graduate School shares responsibility with the colleges for progress along many fronts. At the same time, the unit is an enterprise-wide organization that can leverage its interests across the University. Accordingly, the team encourages targeted collaborations that will move the needle on some of the more persistent problems, such as the recruitment of domestic students from diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds that are underrepresented/underserved in the Graduate School, even though the unit does not make final admission decisions. Finally, it appears that the reporting components of the diversity planning section of the current plan did not utilize the 2010–15 unit diversity strategic plan nor were any best practices reported.

**Campus Climate and Intergroup Relations**

***Challenge 1: Developing a Shared and Inclusive Understanding of Diversity***

- The plan’s inclusivity is commendable and developed across many diversity axes such as first-generation, LGBTQ, low-income, women, veterans, race/ethnicity, religious affiliation, disability, and international.
- Citing progress for activities that are or should be typical practices, such as inculcating a shared understanding of diversity in New Employee Orientation, support for professional development, and accommodations for individuals with disabilities, diverts attention away from the unit’s more significant strategies and accomplishments.

***Challenge 2: Creating a Welcoming Campus Climate***

- The initiatives focused on LGBTQ students and those with disabilities, along with the shadowing program, are notable. Some planning activities associated with these items, such as “open the dialogue,” are vague. ***RESPONSE: The feedback cited the comment “open the dialogue” as an example of the ambiguity of the new initiatives. However within the plan and included in a subsequent sentence we indicate, “[s]pecifically, the new OGEEP Senior Director will work with the Assistant Dean for Graduate Student Affairs to identify offices across the University that provide support to these populations, in order to begin developing collaborative working relationships with them so that we can better meet the needs of these communities. A preliminary discussion will be held with the Vice Provost of Educational Equity and the Vice President of Student Affairs to discuss such possible collaboration prior to any discussions taking place with the various individual offices within their units which serve these populations.” Additionally, we include in this section measures by which we plan to “determine the effectiveness of any new collaborative efforts. Aligned with the aforementioned initiative, units responsible for planning and implementing programs/activities will also seek to diversify the types of invited speakers/presenters. Lastly, in an effort to improve overall communication within the unit, the diversity plan cites evaluating and tracking revisions to documents so that they are 100% accessibility compliant and relevant for diverse populations.***

## **Representation (Access and Success)**

### **Challenge 3: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Student Body**

- The commitment to numerous programs, such as Sloan, McNair, Bunton-Waller, NSF, SROP, and Ford, is outstanding, and it is just as important that the plan acknowledges that much work remains.
- The plan reports that no improvement has occurred over the past decade in the residential enrollment of domestic graduate students from diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds. The unit should benchmark with peer institutions to develop more innovative recruiting strategies, such as can be found at <https://www.rackham.umich.edu/downloads/cpp-qt-recruiting-for-diversity-phd.pdf>. **RESPONSE: The attached document is one that we plan to examine for “best practices” that are not currently implemented within our unit. Furthermore, the document will be made available to members of the College Council of Multicultural Directors in an effort to share the information with each individual college.**
- Because the effort to attract more women to World Campus through programs in healthcare and education reinforces disadvantageous gender stereotyping, the unit is encouraged to think more broadly in developing strategies to attract more women.
- The collaborative graduate programs between Penn State and institutions abroad holds promise, but the specific mechanisms for fulfilling the goal of recruiting diverse students are unclear. **RESPONSE: The initiative is the actual recruiting mechanism. See the cited information below. As a result of the collaboration certain applicants would be specifically attracted to this cooperative model. “The two collaborative graduate models developed are Collaborative International - Concurrent Graduate Degree programs (CI-CGDP) and Collaborative International - Integrated Undergraduate-Graduate Degree Programs (CI-IUGDP). The CI-CGDP model allows for students to be concurrently enrolled in a master’s degree program at Penn State and a master’s degree program at the collaborating institution; or in a Penn State doctoral program and collaborating master’s degree program; or in a Penn State master’s program and collaborating doctoral degree program. The CI-IUGDP model allows for students to be enrolled in a baccalaureate degree program at the collaborating institution and a master’s program at Penn State.”**
- Some of the plan’s language about international students can be read as mainly emphasizing their positive impact on revenue streams. A more balanced approach would place greater weight on their contribution to increasing Penn State’s presence as a world university with a vital international culture. **RESPONSE: On page 79 we discuss supporting the acclimation of international students only. We acknowledge how this could have been interpreted as only looking at their contribution as having a positive impact on revenue streams, and we have revised to reflect their contribution to diversifying the graduate student body as well.**
- The Fall STEM Open House and SROP recruiting goals might become best practices if outcomes data are gathered that demonstrate success.

### **Challenge 4: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Workforce**

- Unit accomplishments on increasing staff diversity are laudable, and efforts are underway to diversify applicant pools. Tracking the outcomes of these endeavors will be critical to success in strategic planning.
- Better articulation with the colleges on recruiting diverse faculty, with demonstrated outcomes, would take progress on this Challenge to the next level. **RESPONSE: On page 88 under New Initiatives for Challenge 4: we discuss the CIC URM Postdoc grant and cite that it is specifically designed to recruit a more diverse faculty. Moreover, while this initiative does not include increasing URM postdocs in the social sciences we do state, “...we are optimistic that participating in this grant might help increase that number, and therefore positively impact the number of URM faculty hired into STEM positions at Penn State.”**

## Education and Scholarship

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

- Although the Graduate School is not responsible for curriculum development, initiatives in support of diversifying the curriculum would be salutary. **RESPONSE: We acknowledge our lack of participation in this endeavor and plan to review new programs and courses for the inclusion of diverse curriculum as a follow-up to feedback from this challenge.**

## Institutional Viability and Vitality

### **Challenge 6: Diversifying University Leadership and Management**

- Outcomes on diversifying unit leadership have been exemplary, particularly among women. The unit indicates that it has “consistently focused on diversifying its leadership.” What does this “focus” look like, and why has it resulted in these outcomes? As indicated under Challenge 4, tracking outcomes against specific planning activities will ensure that positive outcomes are not serendipitous and can be sustained.

### **Challenge 7: Coordinating Organizational Change to Support Our Diversity Goals**

- Given the organizational structure of the Graduate School, collaborations with other units as outlined in the plan have the potential to leverage the unit’s impact across the University. Untapped opportunities exist at many levels, such as the Advancing Strategies in Support of Graduate Education Quality and Pre-Doctoral Training Grant Development Incentive Award programs. For example, how might current signature programs, such as Millennium, Sloan, McNair, and SROP, be integrated into these programs? Also, how might the Fall STEM Open House be augmented through integration of best practices at other CIC institutions? **RESPONSE: Signature programs housed within the Graduate School (Sloan, McNair, and SROP) are an integral part of our recruitment efforts. Sloan is a scholarship primarily used to recruit URM students into STEM graduate programs. Additionally, in support of advancing graduate education quality, the OGEEP is working in collaboration with institutes and centers on campus (using the Sloan Scholarship as leverage) to recruit top candidates into our graduate programs. Faculty/ departments that show promise in working to recruit URM students by including diversity as part of any grant proposal or by illustrating increased numbers of URM students who matriculate into STEM graduate programs are given priority if they submit an eligible scholar for Sloan.**

**Regarding the STEM Open House, an invitation to apply to the STEM Open House is extended to all of our current students (McNair and Millennium) and the previous year’s SROP scholars (Penn State and other CIC institutions). Given that 2014 was the Graduate School’s first year hosting the STEM Open House, data collection is in its preliminary stage. As we continue hosting this initiative our plan is to examine the number of applications and enrollments of students from our initiatives within each academic unit as a one measure of program quality. Furthermore, extensive efforts to benchmark the program against similar initiatives at other institutions are also part of our plan to improve our recruitment efforts through this endeavor.**