

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

The Strategic Plan for 2014–15 through 2018–19 from Penn State Outreach and Online Education includes a focus on diversity, with a strong emphasis on students. Inclusiveness is one of five values within the mission statement and diversity is referred to throughout the plan. Outreach is commended for structuring Appendix F around the three diversity-related questions in the Provost’s planning guidelines. **RESPONSE: It is important to note that the feedback provided in this document was based upon the first draft of the Outreach and Online Education (OOE) Strategic Plan, which was 53 pages long when submitted in July 2014. The plan was since reconfigured to abide the guidelines provided for the April 2015 submission to the University—ten pages, more straightforward format. With the latest submission, objectives surrounding diversity were moved out of a separate silo and instead were woven into the very core of our strategic plan. The move was a positive one as our emphasis on diversity can be seen in our mission, vision, values, and six major organizational goals, which are reinforced daily through employee communications and activities. This more holistic approach makes very evident that very member of OOE has a stake in informing and helping us to achieve our diversity objectives. At the same time, in order to ensure we remain focused and accountable, individuals and teams will be made accountable for specific activities and outcomes.**

This plan offers many potential best practices; however metrics would be needed in order to assess these. The unit is encouraged to develop additional metrics to measure the impact of its efforts and to gauge Challenge level progress. **RESPONSE: Agreed. Performance indicators do exist and are being revisited as part of our work on further defining organizational key performance indicators (KPIs). As of the date of this response (July 2015), OOE is in the midst of aggressively refining KPIs for all of our core objectives. On a broad level, examples of our diversity-related metrics include the number of specific programs and initiatives that target certain populations/needs; specific improvements in faculty/staff climate surveys; demographic targets; number of courses meeting cultural requirements; etc.** Moving forward, it would be helpful to identify those offices or individuals responsible for implementing certain aspects of the plan. **RESPONSE: Agreed. The OOE Diversity Council—which is comprised of members from each of our major units and sponsored by the OOE HR office—is responsible for managing many diversity-related projects. In addition, even beyond the council, specific individuals and teams in OOE will be assigned in order to ensure visibility, tracking, achievement, and accountability.** The review team noted that a number of promising initiatives highlighted in the 2010–15 diversity strategic plan were not mentioned in this iteration. **RESPONSE: The 2010–15 plan was highly ambitious with numerous worthwhile initiatives slated. Many were unachievable due to staffing challenges and the realities of the draw upon resources. With the current plan, OOE’s goal is to have a realistic approach that can have true, meaningful, and achievable impact while we also remain good stewards of resources. This means we will put our energies on those initiatives that can yield the greatest impact, and we will regularly revisit our ability to expand activities as we engage in operational planning and focus throughout the organization.** Furthermore, the review team looked for and was unable to find mention of racial diversity or sexual identity anywhere within the plan. Outreach is urged to expand its definition of diversity and promulgate that widely throughout the unit. **RESPONSE: Agreed. This is a focus of the OOE Diversity Council and leadership, and we will look to University-wide definitions and the Penn State strategic plan for guidance and alignment.**

The review team acknowledges the effects that organizational restructuring and staff turnover may have had on implementation, tracking, and planning during this time period.

## **Campus Climate and Intergroup Relations**

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

- Outreach's plans to restructure the OOE Diversity Council are positive.

#### **RESPONSE:**

- *The OOE Diversity Council is thriving with representation from throughout OOE.*
- *Unit coordinators also exist, with 5 percent of their SRDP specifically dedicated to diversity.*
- *In addition, our HR office provides many professional development opportunities—sometimes through the Diversity Council—on a range of topics. Examples include training on Managing a Multigenerational Workforce, coordination of Penn State Values Town Hall, conducting an employee engagement survey, and working with units on specific concerns.*
- It will be interesting to see the results of the cost benefit analysis for the creation of a new position of multicultural officer within the unit.

#### **RESPONSE:**

- *Our Diversity Council leader and HR specialist, Scott Wong, has conducted research on the concept of having a multicultural officer. OOE will need to conduct further analysis and discussion in order to make a final determination on the value of creating this new position.*
- Updates on the status of defining diversity for the unit and establishing unit diversity coordinators, as mentioned in the 2010–15 plan, would be appreciated.

#### **RESPONSE:**

- *The OOE Diversity Council is leading the effort with our strategic leadership team on developing a sound diversity definition for OOE, although we expect to fully adopt the pending University diversity.*
- *In addition, the Diversity Council is working on several other fronts worth mentioning here:*
  - *Redeveloping its mission statement.*
  - *Exploring specific strategies and tactics to help OOE achieve strategic planning goals*
  - *Hosting events/programs/trainings on a range of diversity topics for all OOE staff. A few examples include:*
    - *Native American Pow Wow documentary and discussion*
    - *Send Silence Packing — promotion of campus event*
    - *Tour of Paul Robeson Cultural Center*
    - *Going Blind: A Documentary (Employees saw firsthand the assistive technology used by individuals with vision impairment. Demonstrations were done by OOE accessibility experts.)*
  - *Participating in campus/community events (e.g. international fairs)*
  - *Hosting chats on current events/society climate issues so staff members can talk together about concerns, fears, etc. The Diversity Council is developing a list of subject matter experts whom they can call upon to help with conversations. They are first conducting chats among the council to navigate the subject matter and better anticipate pain points — then will launch the chat to OOE at large. They recently conducted a chat about lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender equity. An upcoming chat will be a PhD student (and OOE employee) talking about what it's like to be Muslim in America and dealing with stereotypes and emotions fueled by the news.*

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

- Outreach will leverage the expertise of the World Campus Military Team to accommodate students with unseen disabilities, and continue to provide resources for veterans and military students. The unit will work with the Council on Engaged Scholarship and the Penn State Joint Diversity Awareness Task Force to promote diversity. These are commendable endeavors.

**RESPONSE:**

- *OOE has dedicated staff that focus on the military audience. We have this in all facets of online delivery (admissions, advising, program planning and management, marketing.) This includes a dedicated military disability contact.*
- *The OOE military support team provides information, support, webinars, etc. <http://www.worldcampus.psu.edu/military-information-for-education-center-staff>.*
- *World Campus offers scholarships specifically for military and veteran students.*
- *OOE was instrumental in the development of <http://military.psu.edu/>.*
- *OOE has agreed on an administrative structure in collaboration with Student Affairs to hire a World Campus director of student affairs who will build a strategy for student engagement that is broad and inclusive. We plan to include emphasis on student engagement initiatives and counseling and psychological resources.*
- There are no references to sexual orientation, gender, or racial identity in the current plan.

**RESPONSE:**

- *A primary goal of the work of the OOE Diversity Council, under executive sponsorship, is to reexamine how we are defining diversity and "working" that definition in all that we do. This will include references to sexual orientation, gender, and racial identity. Our strategic plan will continue to be refined and concrete, measurable diversity-related activities will be expanded as appropriate.*

**Representation (Access and Success)**

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

- Outreach provides well-articulated plans to address this Challenge. Some notable efforts include a mechanism to identify at risk students, plans for student-faculty engagement, and implementation of accessibility standards for students with visual/auditory disabilities.

**RESPONSE:**

- *Our academic affairs unit is piloting tutoring services with the vendor Tutor.com. The feedback and level of engagement from students has been so positive that we have already expanded the pilot to include all English and Math courses starting this summer. This is an initiative that will benefit all students—particularly adults, underrepresented students and military students—who may have had frequent starts and stop outs through their academic career. Through Tutor.com we are now offering just-in-time help and review of essential course topics that will help us better support and retain those students.*
- *The World Camus website provides a repository of resources for students with disabilities. <http://student.worldcampus.psu.edu/student-services/students-with-disabilities>.*
- *OOE makes significant contributions to supporting the adult learner audience institution-wide with oversight and governance for the Commission for Adult Learners.*
- *The World Campus faculty development unit has developed online courses that specifically address adult learners, military students, and accessibility. <http://wcfp.psu.edu/programs/courses/>.*
- *OOE launched the Predictive Analytics Reporting initiative with the Gates Foundation to inform planning and support for at-risk students.*
- Updates on the status of student groups based on diversity status and LGBTQ student focused recruiting efforts, as mentioned in the 2010–15 plan, would be appreciated.

**RESPONSE:**

- *In 2015–16, our division of Academic Affairs and Advising will be creating a student advisory group focused on underrepresented, underserved students.*
- *The OOE market research team conducts on specific populations to better determine strategies*

*for recruitment and support.*

- *As noted and related to this effort, OOE has agreed on an administrative structure in collaboration with Student Affairs to hire a director of student affairs who will build a strategy for student engagement that is broad and inclusive, with emphasis on student engagement initiatives and counseling and psychological resources for students. Student engagement initiatives will likely advance the identification and formation of various student groups.*
- It is unclear what conclusions one is to draw from the student ethnicity tables on page 49. While Outreach proposes to make data collection more efficient and accurate in the future, they do not propose doing anything with this data. What is going to be addressed and how will this move the unit forward in relation to this Challenge?

**Strategic Indicator #3: World Campus Graduate Student Enrollment by Budget Academic Year (BAY); results inconclusive but an improvement in identifying "unknown" race/ethnicity as indicated by decrease in percentage.**

GR Ethnicity	BAY 2010-11	BAY 2011-12	BAY 2012-13
American Indian/ Alaska Native	<1%	<1%	<1%
Asian	4%	4%	5%
Black or African American	5%	6%	5%
Hispanic/Latino	5%	5%	6%
International	2%	5%	4%
Multiple Race/Ethnicity	1%	1%	2%
Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	<1%	<1%	<1%
Race/Ethnicity Unknown	7%	4%	4%
White	76%	75%	74%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

**RESPONSE:**

- *As reference, the above is the data noted from the draft OOE Strategic Plan submitted in July 2014.*
- *The information helps us to better understand our current population and therefore influences our thinking and services. But, fully defining what we—and the University—envision for a true "diverse student body" is critical to making the data more actionable.*

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

- Progress in this area has been hindered by turnover and understaffing in the human resources department.
- The 2010–15 feedback report mentioned that sexual orientation and religious beliefs were the most frequently mentioned characteristics that lead to negative experiences among employees. It was unclear what follow up on these workplace climate issues has occurred in the interim.

**RESPONSE:**

- *The OOE HR office takes very seriously the importance of infusing diversity goals into their efforts.*
- *Much of their work occurs in one-to-one conversations with employees, guidance to search committees, programs/training (as mentioned earlier), and oversight of the OOE Diversity Council. The council has conducted specific conversations about sexual orientation and religious beliefs.*

- *The HR office also conducted an analysis comparing OOE employee data provided by the Office of Affirmative Action to available census data. Their goal is to understand how OOE measures up to the region in order to guide action.*

## **Education and Scholarship**

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

- The Philadelphia and Pittsburgh centers provide an opportunity for students to develop U.S. cultural competencies. More information and metrics on the first year student orientation program “Urban Service Experience” would be appreciated.

#### **RESPONSE:**

- *The urban centers are vital in supporting OOE and University diversity goals, providing numerous opportunities for learning, research, and service in urban environments.*
- *The Urban Service Experience (URSA) is orchestrated by the Shaver's Creek Environmental Center staff in conjunction with Extension. It is part of their AURORA program, which includes five programs aimed at first-year Penn State students.*
- *URSA participants spend five days and four nights in Philadelphia, lending a hand at a number of different service projects during the day — and embracing the culture of Philadelphia life in the evenings.*
- *40-48 students per year; approx. 300 since 2000*
- *Students say the program teaches not only personal lessons, but also illuminates the reward of service*
- *Examples of revitalization projects include:*
  - *Working to clean up and revitalize areas of the city's Fairmount Park District*
  - *Volunteering time with the senior citizens at the Rosemont Retirement Community to facilitate games, activities, and art experiences*
  - *Collaborating with Penn State Extension to volunteer with their local organizations and chapters*
- While Outreach isn't in a position to make curricular decisions, they might consider ways in which they can partner with academic units in an attempt to offer a wider array of U.S. and International courses.

#### **RESPONSE:**

- *Agreed. This is part of our focus on expanding our domestic strategy, as well as building and implementing a rich international strategy. These strategies include understanding audiences, increasing enrollments, aligning service/support with needs, working with academic partners on appropriate programs and courses, and more.*
- *OOE's centers in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh serve as major opportunities for enhanced learning, research, and service.*

## **Institutional Viability and Vitality**

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

- Outreach is commended for sponsoring three administrative fellows.
- Outreach's leadership teams will emphasize the importance of diversity considerations in the hiring and planning process, and sub-units will be required to identify diversity efforts in their operational plans. The unit is encouraged to think about ways to gauge progress that results from these efforts.

#### **RESPONSE:**

- *Agreed. This is a critical part of the work of key performance indicator (KPI) development and ongoing strategy development, implementation, and tracking by HR, our leadership team, sub-unit leaders, and those who are designated to champion specific diversity efforts.*

- Ongoing information about the G.R.E.A.T. initiative, particularly regarding the impact it has had on this Challenge, would be appreciated.

**RESPONSE:**

- *G.R.E.A.T. = Giving Respect to Everyone All of the Time*
- *Much of the infusion of "GREAT" was orchestrated throughout HR Office and Diversity Council. Efforts included educational outreach, programs, training, centralized resources on our intranet (pointing to diversity awareness websites, support groups, diversity council activities, etc.)*
- *OOE is making progress as we see increases in participation of our events and committees, as well as some positive headway as evidenced via our recent engagement survey*
- *OOE is revisiting the moniker "GREAT" as we work through strategic planning at large*

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

- The proposed actions to improve measurement and accountability for this Challenge are commendable.
- It is unclear how the initiatives mentioned here lead to organizational change. More explanation is necessary, so that this is not left up to interpretation.

**RESPONSE:** *Agreed. Additional clarification of desired outcomes will define how these initiatives will lead to organizational change. This will occur as we continue to refine our strategic plan and operational plans. In addition, core to ensuring a positive impact will be how initiatives are explained, tracked, and celebrated with staff. Internal communications will be a key component.*