

**Feedback on A Framework to Foster Diversity at Penn State: 2010–15 and
2014–15 through 2018–19 Diversity Initiatives**
Fall 2014
Office of the Senior Vice President for Research

The Office of the Senior Vice President for Research is an enterprise-wide unit whose reach extends across Penn State, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, other institutions of higher education, the federal government, and the world; its annual research expenditures have nearly tripled over the past 20 years. Accordingly, the Research strategic plan includes many large-scale initiatives, some of which target diverse constituents. The plan is organized around six goals, and Goal 5, Validating and Exploring Cultures, has clear diversity connections. Also, the first five goals are very similar to the “Pillars” that Provost Jones has shared across the University.

Associating its goals with the “Pillars” established by Provost Jones may help push the plan toward key themes for the future, and the plan states that its goals “align with goals established through the institutional planning process.” Nevertheless, for diversity planning, the formal guidelines pose several questions, per each *Framework* Challenge, that are largely ignored in the plan, and neither the *Framework* nor the *Framework* Challenges are mentioned. Also, while the plan contains at least one “signature objective” connected to diversity, no *Framework* best practices or signature programs from past undertakings are cited, as called for in the formal guidelines.

Due to this structure and the problems the review team faced in discerning the relationship of specific unit diversity planning projects to the *Framework* Challenges, the team had difficulty enumerating its comments by the Challenges. Some observations and recommendations were placed under specific Challenges, but the team was not able to identify specific planning or outcomes by each Challenge.

One of the most positive aspects of the plan is its articulation with the previous 2009–13 unit general strategic plan, which involves follow up on collaborative research with universities in Asia and Africa and the Diversity STEM Program. That said, the current plan’s connection to the 2010–15 unit diversity strategic plan could not be identified by the review team. For example, the 2010–15 plan referenced goals for a unit diversity committee and two sub-unit committees, but the current plan does not mention any diversity committees.

One of the most prominent unit diversity efforts centers upon “vulnerable populations,” which consists of diverse racial/ethnic groups, people with disabilities, those living in poverty, the elderly, LGBT individuals, female youth, and other groups. The goals for these populations focus on reducing social disparities in health and healthcare and conducting research on the best support strategies. The “vulnerable populations” initiative is a possible best practice if outcomes measures could be garnered for assessment purposes.

Campus Climate and Intergroup Relations

Challenge 1: Developing a Shared and Inclusive Understanding of Diversity

- The plan demonstrates a broad understanding of diversity by the inclusion of many underrepresented/underserved groups.
- The review team was not able to identify specific planning or outcomes for this Challenge.

Challenge 2: Creating a Welcoming Campus Climate

- The review team was not able to identify specific planning or outcomes for this Challenge.

Representation (Access and Success)

Challenge 3: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Student Body

- The unit has several programs that target the participation of diverse students, such as the Diversity STEM Program, the Engaged Research Scholars Program, ARL Diversity Outreach Opportunities Research, and the Postdoctoral Development Program. Collectively, these programs incorporate several diverse groups comprised of hundreds of students in a variety of research ventures, so their diversity potential is

enormous. Unfortunately, outcomes reporting, including counts and percentages of diverse student participation for these and other diversity endeavors, is absent in the plan. Some of the stated “Assessment Metrics” among these programs are “veterans and minority participation” and “numbers...applied, interviewed, hired, and retained,” which reveal another feature of the plan, a lack of explicit thresholds of success even when “metrics” are proffered. It has to be asked, when research expenditures are in view, would the unit report “amount of money” or, instead, a specific figure for the research dollars expended? With positive outcomes gathered and reported, all of these programs could be considered best practices.

- The review team was not able to identify specific planning or outcomes for this Challenge.

Challenge 4: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Workforce

- Given the growth of the unit, it is not surprising that many new faculty hires have occurred (35 alone in one sub-unit), but no planning was found in support of utilizing this growth to increase workforce diversity. Planning for employee diversity occurred in the 2010–15 unit diversity plan, but no strategic efforts or outcomes were reported, which suggests a lost opportunity for the unit and the University.
- The review team was not able to identify specific planning or outcomes for this Challenge.

Education and Scholarship

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

- Projects surrounding the Navy Yard have the potential for engaged scholarship for underrepresented/underserved scholars interested in urban redevelopment, sustainability, business and industry, health and welfare, housing, education, and crime and justice. The review team could not identify any diversity planning surrounding Navy Yard projects, and the unit is encouraged to consider possible synergies in doing so. Activities surrounding the Navy Yard and other unit partnerships also hold the promise of best practices with supporting data.
- The review team was not able to identify specific planning or outcomes for this Challenge.

Institutional Viability and Vitality

Challenge 6: Diversifying University Leadership and Management

- The review team was not able to identify specific planning or outcomes for this Challenge.

Challenge 7: Coordinating Organizational Change to Support Our Diversity Goals

- The review team considered the greatest structural drawback of the plan to be Research’s purview of its diversity role at the University. Obviously, diverse student participation in research and the discovery of new knowledge and methods on diversity topics are part of the plan, and they are greatly appreciated by the team. But Research doesn’t seem to consider how its footprint can be used to leverage diversity across the institution and its other spheres of influence, including within its own infrastructure. Its collaborations with various institutes, industry, other universities, and so on are perhaps broader than any other unit at Penn State. For example, the team doesn’t know who is ultimately responsible for hiring at the Huck Institutes for Life Sciences since it is a multi-unit endeavor, but even if Research doesn’t make this call, what are they saying to others about the importance of diversity considerations? Do its agreements with other entities contain robust diversity language? When the plan reports 35 faculty hires in one unit with no mention of diversity, it communicates that Research doesn’t consider itself a change agent for diversity. The team encourages the unit to take a look inward and examine how a new approach might transform the vision of its potential diversity impact for Penn State.
- The review team was not able to identify specific planning or outcomes for this Challenge.

RESPONSE: The September 2015 update of the OVPR Strategic Plan for Research (now posted at <http://www.opia.psu.edu/plans> and <http://equity.psu.edu/updates-10-15/>) contains the new “Supporting Strategy” text provided on Page 3 of the document attached below. This new “Supporting Strategy” text also has been inserted at the beginning of the corresponding section of the detailed OVPR plan posted at the OVPR website (<http://www.research.psu.edu/about/mission>). Within this strategy, Table 10 (which is the same as the table on page 12 of the updated extracted Strategic Plan document found at the OPIA and Equity websites) is intended to serve as a cross-walk from the objectives within the OVPR Strategic Plan to the 7 Challenges of the Framework to Foster Diversity at Penn State. (Note that page ii of the attached document is an updated summary table of the OVPR Goals and Objectives; please refer to this figure for objective numbers referenced in Table 10.)