

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

The Penn State Brandywine strategic plan is notable for involving numerous faculty and staff in the planning process, and the plan reflects these many voices with its unique approach and perspectives. The plan is organized not only around the formal planning guidelines but Provost Jones' "pillars," while also taking into consideration throughout President Barron's six major topics. The result is a highly textured plan that has the potential to move Brandywine forward in concert with the University's future goals.

This potential may be realized in the next iteration of planning, but in its current stage, there is room for improvement. For example, the plan does not report progress against goals and indicators specified in the 2010–15 Brandywine diversity plan, identify best practices/signature programs, complement past endeavors with outcomes data that demonstrate achievement, or consistently utilize concrete thresholds of success for future planning. The broad statements coupled with, at times, some enumerated actions, need to be translated into metrics that define desired results in order for the plan to attain its full promise. Further, the distinctive structure of the plan may have hindered a full response to the questions in the diversity planning section of the guidelines. While diversity and inclusion interests are well infused into the plan, the review team found it difficult to identify, and thus assess, information describing the progress made and efforts planned regarding each of the seven Challenges, as was requested in the strategic planning guidelines. Neither the *Framework to Foster Diversity* nor any of the *Framework* Challenges are explicitly mentioned in the plan, which made comment below on Challenges difficult. Better coordination with the formal guidelines would have strengthened the plan. The review team acknowledges that key leadership changes have occurred over the past few years so perhaps some of these weaknesses will be rectified as the new leadership team comes together. ***RESPONSE: Changes in key leadership positions (new Chancellor, DSA, DAA, DUR, Director of Development) have made reporting past accomplishments and challenges difficult.***

Finally, the review team sees great potential for the planned Institute for Social Justice, which could become a best practice if supportive outcomes data are gathered. At present, the contours of the Institute are somewhat sketchy and its articulation with diversity is unclear. If skillfully developed, the Institute could become a signature diversity program. ***RESPONSE: At Present, our donor-funded Civic and Community Engagement Lab has been significantly reinvigorated and serving as a building block for the Social Justice Institute.***

Campus Climate and Intergroup Relations

Challenge 1: Developing a Shared and Inclusive Understanding of Diversity

- Aspirations regarding diversity, inclusion, internationalism, equity, and so on occur throughout the plan, which underscores Brandywine's understanding of and commitment to this Challenge. The next step is to couple these aspirations with agile planning metrics. ***RESPONSE: We plan to develop better outcomes assessment metrics for all of our initiatives.***
- The plan does not refer to the LGBTQ, veterans, or adult learner communities. The review team assumes that these omissions were an oversight. A stronger focus on detailed planning may help to avoid these omissions in the future. ***RESPONSE: We approached the strategic plan with NEW initiatives. Therefore, many things are already in place, e.g., Diversity Task Force, LGBT Safe Zone Training, LGBT Library Resource Guide, gender neutral restrooms, Adult Learner coordinators on campus, Veteran support programs. More specific details on these areas are noted in the material that follows.***

Challenge 2: Creating a Welcoming Campus Climate

- Some planning exists for enhancing campus climate, such as land use for "cultural transition spaces," multicultural competency training for faculty and staff, and an assessment instrument for campus climate, but specific strategies, goals, and targets remain vague. ***RESPONSE: We will conduct a formal campus***

audit to inventory existing programs and identify new opportunities. We will offer a minimum of two professional development opportunities per semester for faculty and staff related to diversity and cultural competency issues. We will create a “social justice advisory committee” that will track and record progress.

- The proposal to create publications surrounding disability, mental and emotional health, and SES status is commendable assuming meaningful follow-up occurs.

Representation (Access and Success)

Challenge 3: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Student Body

- Brandywine has one of the most diverse student profiles at Penn State, and the 2010–15 unit diversity strategic plan suggested that increased student diversity was the goal, but that goal isn’t evident in the current plan. Also, the 2010–15 plan cited a lack of progress in enrolling Hispanic/Latino students, but this issue was not addressed in this planning cycle. *RESPONSE: We have hired a “Multi-cultural Student Program Coordinator,” hosted a CORED meeting, created a student multicultural club as well as a Muslim student club. We also hired an Admissions Counselor/Retention Specialist focusing on recruitment and retention of underrepresented students and have added one member of an underrepresented group to our Advisory Board with others in the pipeline. In an effort to have our faculty and staff better reflect our diverse student body, we have completed two opportunity faculty hires in the last 15 months as well as hired several staff members from under represented populations. We are actively part of the PASSS pilot program and we already have in place a Summer Launch program serving low income but high achieving students who may not otherwise attend college.*
- The plan to formalize the concept of a food pantry for students in need is an innovative idea that might, with solid development and tangible results, become a best practice. Some other initiatives, such as the “Intentional Learning Structures” and “Productive Persistence,” hold similar promise. *RESPONSE: We have charged an ad hoc committee to help us design a scaffolded learning framework that integrates curricular and co-curricular student experiences culminating in the “Brandywine Experience,” enabling our students to become engaged citizens who will in turn make a significant impact on larger communities, both local and global. We have also established an emergency fund through development and student aid for students who might need short-term resources.*
- Brandywine might consider ways to leverage its proximity to Philadelphia to cultivate partnerships with regional businesses for internships, job shadowing, and so on for underrepresented/underserved students. *RESPONSE: We are promoting internships with Philadelphia community-based organizations; we are finalizing formal agreements with Philadelphia area for-profit companies and have created a pilot co-op program with a major engineering firm; our Advisory Board members from industry conduct mock interviews for our students on campus; we hold an “etiquette dinner” once per year to give students the skills they need to know for dinners with potential employers. Our Continuing Education Director is developing relationships with companies in the Navy Yard and other Philadelphia organizations.*

Challenge 4: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Workforce

- The plan expresses intentions to increase faculty diversity, but again, they are quite undefined. No planning appears to exist for recruiting diverse staff, and targeted efforts to retain diverse faculty and staff were not found. *RESPONSE: See response to Challenge 3 above. In addition, all of our hiring practices require a diverse pool of candidates. If such diversity does not exist, we will continue the searches until we have a candidate pool that includes diversity.*

Education and Scholarship

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

- “Infuse diversity and internationalism into the curriculum” is perhaps the most comprehensive statement regarding this Challenge in the plan. The statement, more or less, is simply a reiteration of the Challenge and does not constitute planning, though the proposal to identify courses with diversity, equity, and inclusion is a good first step. **RESPONSE: Our attention to creating the “Brandywine Experience” includes specific attention to including diversity and internationalism into the curriculum. Our proposed campus audit will help us identify courses already meeting this challenge and identify other opportunities to do so. We will increase our travel budget for faculty to establish more international programs for students (and faculty); we will add 1 – new scholarships for student international travel. Our orientation program for new students includes significant components on diversity training.**
- Creating or augmenting minors and certificates for several diversity-related domains, such as the minor in gender and sexuality studies and certificates in diversity studies and global awareness, are excellent goals. To the degree that these plans generate vigorous programs, this Challenge will be substantially advanced.
- Plans to use a First Year Experience program to encourage students to enroll in courses with a diversity focus and develop cultural competence are practical strategies. As always, robust assessment of outcomes is critical.

Institutional Viability and Vitality

Challenge 6: Diversifying University Leadership and Management

- The review team did not identify any planning for this Challenge. **RESPONSE: We are actively working to create more diversity among all faculty and staff. Currently our leadership and senior management includes African Americans and LGBTQ personnel; we are seeking to increase the number of men in leadership positions.**

Challenge 7: Coordinating Organizational Change to Support Our Diversity Goals

- Powerful synergies might result from the proposed cross-pollination of diversity and sustainability. Bringing all parties to the table to shape the dimensions of the initiative and highlighting it as a key component of the “Brandywine experience” will be crucial to its success. **RESPONSE: We plan to initiate a feasibility study to determine the best use of our land and facilities for academic, recreational, and community purposes. With the opening of student housing and a student union on campus, we are planning learning and living environments to enhance the Brandywine Experience. We will task the Sustainability Committee with conducting an inventory of sustainable practices on campus and report back to the Strategic Planning Committee and Faculty Senate on results and future steps. We hope to add a minor in Sustainability Leadership in the next three years.**
- The performance indicator to “revise faculty evaluations to acknowledge faculty efforts to support cultural competency” is laudable. The metrics established to define success will be informative. **RESPONSE: We have begun discussions with the Campus Faculty Senate leadership and the Director of Academic Affairs to determine the best way to create metric(s) for this initiative.**