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

The College of Communications' strategic plan highlights diversity and inclusion interests throughout, and one of its major goals focuses on diversity while another addresses international communication themes. Diversity is clearly a central interest of the college, with data reported across key diversity indicators in time series. External reviews, including the 2012–13 accreditation review, of the college's diversity efforts are quite positive. The monetary increases in the expenditures of the Office of Multicultural Affairs in an era of budget cuts is noteworthy, and the review team hopes this level of commitment will continue in upcoming planning cycles.

Despite these strengths, the plan fails to follow the formal guidelines for diversity planning. While the *Framework* is acknowledged, and the objectives under the diversity section follow the *Framework* Challenges, no best practices/signature programs for diversity are reported, as called for in the guidelines. Also, the distinction between an outcome and a strategy isn't always evident. For example, a dedicated bulletin board in Carnegie Building, which is called an outcome, is really better thought of as a means to an end rather than an end in itself. Further, the plan seems to focus more on reporting past progress than future goals even though reporting and planning are not always readily distinguished. Though notable endeavors are reported and planned, they often appear without specific metrics. Words like "enhance," "improve," "increase," "retain," "maintain," "build" and so on, without concrete targets for improvement, do little to drive change. Another limitation regards the lack of stated follow-up on the college's 2010–15 *Framework* diversity strategic plan. The current plan alludes to the 2010–15 *Framework* feedback report, but the review team had to flesh out articulations between previous planning for climate assessment in the 2010–15 plan itself and the current plan, such as its references to informal climate assessments conducted by the assistant dean. Further, the current plan uses the results of the 2008 faculty/staff survey to monitor climate, which is also found in the 2010–15 plan (though not with the date of the survey). Unfortunately, these links are not identified in the current plan. Optimal plans draw out these connections explicitly, which places readers in a better position to understand the continuity between planning cycles.

One characteristic of the plan that was apparent to the team is its emphasis on positive external reviews. While positive reviews are useful, it sometimes seems like accreditation and awards are being overemphasized. These reviews are well and good but have some intrinsic limitations. For example, the team noticed that the demographics for full-time women and faculty members of color has remained stagnant over the past 15 years, especially for women, and the plan mentions low turnover rates as justification for focusing on retention as a key workforce strategy. However data from the plan indicate some turnover based on year-to-year changes among women and faculty of color, let alone for white males, which are not reported. Might it be that these reviews and awards don't emphasize faculty demographics adequately which, in turn, detracts from effective planning for this objective? Much the same could be said for women and staff of color. Strategic planning presents an opportunity to target areas of special need that may go beyond external reviews, and the team encourages close attention to the full array of planning tools such as targeted thresholds of success, robust action plans, and careful assessment of efforts as the college moves forward.

<u>**Campus Climate and Intergroup Relations**</u>

Challenge 1: Developing a Shared and Inclusive Understanding of Diversity
- The review team could not identify an unequivocal statement on the college's current definition of diversity. Many units have found this convention useful to help contextualize planning. ***RESPONSE: The College's Executive Committee will discuss, adapt as necessary, and adopt the University's Statement on Diversity at its retreat in August 2015. This will help us as we move forward with our strategic goals around the Framework.***

Challenge 2: Creating a Welcoming Campus Climate

- The college had plans during 2010–15 to use results of the Penn State's Faculty/Staff survey to maintain systemic climate assessment, but no University-wide survey was conducted during the planning period. Given that circumstances are always changing, the college should deploy a more nimble approach to planning where internal and external exigencies do not short-circuit important goals. ***RESPONSE: Agreed. Our relatively small size and centralized administrative functions can and should be seen as a strength in our ability to set and reach our Framework goals. The Executive Committee and Diversity Committee can and will interact with key programs and departments in the College on our priorities.***

- The student honor code's emphasis on respecting the dignity of everyone is constructive. Planning around this item would take it to the next level. ***RESPONSE: The College's Student Council is working with Academic Services and with our College-wide program in Ethical Leadership to more strongly weave the code into the fabric of life in the College. We recently introduced a pin to be worn by graduates at commencement who have pledged the code as students.***

Representation (Access and Success)

Challenge 3: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Student Body

- The scholarship growth earmarked for students of color is impressive. Do any disbursement strategies exist? Tracking of data outcomes can help optimize impact, and the best investment is not necessarily among the highest achievers. "Merit" should be considered broadly, looking not only at what students achieve but the distance they had to travel to get there. ***RESPONSE: The College has an impressive growth rate for scholarships, nearly doubling its earmarked scholarship funds since 2006. Our disbursement strategy involves input from faculty across the College and the balancing of a broad definition of merit with factors based on need.***

Challenge 4: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Workforce

- As alluded to in the opening paragraphs, during the last 10–15 years, the data show essentially no growth among women and faculty/staff of color. Including percentages with the raw numbers would illumine these data. Further, and again, the statement about "low turnover" certainly doesn't mean "no turnover," as minor up and down changes in the data demonstrate. It cannot be stated strongly enough that the college needs to make it an urgent priority to fully exploit every opening as an opportunity to realize a diverse hire. Robust planning would facilitate this undertaking. The current strategy doesn't appear to go much beyond "talking it up." Benchmarking with other successful institutions might lead to some best practice discoveries. That said, the current retention strategy should be continued, though details on this endeavor are sketchy. ***RESPONSE: In spring 2015, the College's Executive Committee renewed its commitment to "exploit every opening as an opportunity to realize a diverse hire." The plan involves robust planning to identify and cultivate potential staff and faculty through formal programs (such as through faculty exchange programs, which will widen our network of contacts; and through an internship program at the staff level) and through continual, informal networking by administrators and faculty at conferences.***

Education and Scholarship

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

- The plan describes several diversity courses in various places throughout the plan, and international courses appear to receive a stronger focus than domestic diversity. Tracking and reporting the number of diversity offerings with enrollments might shed light on important trends. Planning for this Challenge under Goal VII, Objective 5 is limited, with no targets for success. ***RESPONSE: A newly reconstituted Diversity Committee, made up of faculty members from departments across the College and staff members from key areas, will have in its charge tracking diversity offerings and enrollments across all***

majors. Diversity-focused learning objectives are embedded in every undergraduate major in the College and are part of our assessment and accreditation process; thus, this kind of tracking is critical.

- The increase in Education Abroad participation is commendable, but the unit is encouraged to assess whether students from underrepresented/underserved groups are included in this increase and to what degree. The plan states that "more affordable access" is an outcome for students who cannot afford an entire semester abroad, but it does not quantify this point with any data. ***RESPONSE: The College has launched several new embedded-travel courses to provide more affordable international learning experiences in each major. We have earmarked scholarship funds, provided by donors, for participation by students in these courses with particular attention to students from underserved or underrepresented groups. Tracking of the way these scholarship funds are allocated for such courses, and participation of students in these courses, would provide data that could guide our efforts for inclusivity and affordability for education-abroad experiences.***

Institutional Viability and Vitality

Challenge 6: Diversifying University Leadership and Management

- Outcomes for this Challenge demonstrate excellent progress. How did the college realize these results? Connecting dots is imperative to ensure that achievement is not due to happenstance. Such an approach might reveal a best practice that could be shared with other units seeking to achieve similar success. ***RESPONSE: Our "best practice" is simply this: We pay close and careful attention, from year-to-year, to cultivating talent and ensuring that our leadership and management is diverse…for the good of the College.***

Challenge 7: Coordinating Organizational Change to Support Our Diversity Goals

- The departmental strategic planning convention is exemplary, though it appears that only two departments engaged in any diversity planning. Driving diversity down to the departmental level is key to some facets of change, and greater attention to departmental diversity planning is encouraged. ***RESPONSE: We agree. We will "kickstart" this greater attention at the department level through reconstituting the College-wide Diversity Committee so that it has participation (and accountability) from all departments.***

RESPONSE: See attachment.

College of Communications
Dean Marie Hardin

Response to "Feedback on *A Framework to Foster Diversity at Penn State: 2010-15 and 2014/15 through 2018/19 Diversity Initiatives*" (Fall 2014)
May, 2015

We very much appreciate the work of the committee that reviewed our strategic plan for its alignment with the *Framework*. We also appreciate the candor of the committee in its feedback. Although the feedback points out our weaknesses in relationship to diversity planning, it is very helpful as a **"call to action"** and a motivator for the College to shore up intentional, outcomes-driven planning with concrete targets for improvement.

The College is one of the most diverse at University Park. For instance, about one-fifth of students in the College are non-Caucasian. These students are supported through our Office for Multicultural Affairs, which we are moving into a larger, dedicated space in the Student Services area. The College has made an intentional investment in making the office "front and center," off of a major lobby and student lounge area in the Carnegie area. The new office will open in August 2015.

We were grateful that the committee recognized the College's strengths on diversity and inclusion. Among others, they are:
- *A student honor code that emphasizes "respecting the dignity of everyone."* The code, approved by a panel of students and publicized each year by the Student Council with a signing ceremony, is prominently displayed in our student services area.
- *"Excellent progress" on diversifying leadership and management in the College.* The College's Executive Committee, with a total of 16 members, includes three people of color and four women. This diversity has not been the result of happenstance but of intentional mentoring and planning.
- *Impressive growth in scholarships for students from underrepresented groups.* Since 2006, the College has more than doubled its earmarked scholarship funds. This has been driven much by our growth in the number of students from underrepresented groups in the College.
- *Increased emphasis on Education Abroad for students.* The College is developing strong embedded-travel courses for each major and has made raising private dollars to support participation by underrepresented and underserved groups a priority.

It is true, as the College's first draft of the strategic plan noted, that we have been recognized by our national accrediting body and by our institutional peers as exemplary in our demonstrated commitment to diversity. In 2013, for instance, the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, in recognizing

the College, noted, "We commend Penn State's College of Communications for achieving the gold standard in building a truly diverse, inclusive, and equitable learning environment." However, the feedback committee pointed out key areas for improvement by the College, and we are dedicated to focusing on those areas.

In the Fall 2015, the College will launch a newly reconstituted Diversity Committee with a charge to focus on key issues outlined by the committee feedback, including:

- *Commitment to an unequivocal statement on the College's definition of diversity.* We anticipate adaption/adoption of the University's new Diversity Statement.
- *Planning to elevate and emphasize the Student Honor Code.*
- *An examination of our disbursement strategies for scholarships* for students with the goal of improving our processes and outcomes.
- **Commitment** *and an* **action plan** *to "fully exploit every opening as an opportunity to realize a diverse hire."*
- *Tracking diversity content in courses and in our curricula.* This, of course, is tied to a robust assessment plan that focuses on learning outcomes.
- *Closely monitoring participation by underrepresented groups in our growing Study Abroad and embedded travel programming* and allocating support as needed to provide opportunity to these students.
- *Involving all departments and programs in the College in our efforts around diversity and inclusion.* This will happen, at least in part, through reconfiguration of our Diversity Committee.

The College has already launched several initiatives to move forward on diversifying our faculty and staff ranks. This includes a partnership with an HBCU and a program, starting in the fall, that will involve interns from the South Hills Business School. We will aggressively seek "opportunity hires" as they arise. Furthermore, our newly revised assessment plan measures diversity as a learning outcome for every undergraduate major. The College is also pleased to support and participate in the re-initiated Indian Powwow in State College, an annual event that draws participants from across the United States and is organized by John Sanchez, an associate professor in the College and nationally recognized expert on media portrayals of American Indians.

Our newly abbreviated section on diversity in our current strategic plan, along with key metrics, is attached to this response.

The College of Communications is fully committed to the principles in Penn State's Framework to Foster Diversity. Furthermore, we are fully committed to contributing to the University's imperatives around diversity and demographics.

Reflect and promote an appreciation of diversity in our classrooms and among our students, faculty and staff.

Objective 1: **Promote an inclusive understanding and appreciation of diversity.**

Strategy: With the help of an active Diversity Committee, communicate our diversity-related values, objectives and initiatives across the College and to our alumni and friends.

Strategy: Sponsor and promote efforts to enhance awareness and understanding among faculty, staff, and students.

Strategy: Use our assessment process to ensure that learning objectives around valuing and exploring our cultures (U.S. and international cultural competencies) are met across our programs.

Objective 2: **Maintain a welcoming campus climate.**

Strategy: Help students from underrepresented populations thrive through advising, mentoring, student organizations, and events.

Strategy: Improve our service to University commissions promoting diversity.

Objective 3: **Support and graduate a diverse student body.**

Strategy: Recruit a diverse student body using means such as campus visits and events, summer institutes, and programs such as SROP.

Strategy: Retain a student body among the most diverse among UP Colleges.

Strategy: Use College- and University-based funds to recruit top-tier students.

Strategy: Attain and maintain retention and graduation rates for minority students equivalent to the average for all students in the College.

Objective 4: **Recruit and retain a diverse workforce.**

Strategy: Improve racial and ethnic diversity among the faculty and staff.

Strategy: Improve the representation of women on the full-time faculty.

Strategy: Ensure that our leadership team is diverse and prioritizes our diversity-related goals.

TABLES

Table 1. Undergraduate Enrollment: Students from Underrepresented Groups

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Total Minority	365	387	386	391	414	443	469	496	534	502
Total College	2,715	2,763	2,785	2,898	2,897	2,720	2,672	2,618	2,691	2,609
% of Total College	13%	14%	14%	13%	14%	16%	18%	19%	20%	19%

Source: EIS and iTwo

Table 2. Retention Rates for Students from Underrepresented Groups

	Starting Cohort UP						
	Fall 2007	Fall 2008	Fall 2009	Fall 2010	Fall 2011	Fall 2012	Fall 2013
Initially enrolled	59	47	55	52	50	54	51
Retention to Semester 2	93.2%	95.7%	90.9%	100%	96%	92.6%	94.1%
Retention to Semester 3	84.7%	91.5%	80.0%	96.2%	92%	87%	92.2%

Source: Enrollment Management

Table 3. Students from Underrepresented Groups Earning Baccalaureate Degrees

	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07
# graduates	83	78	103	109	113	118	119
% change	9%	-6%	32%	6%	4%	4%	1%

	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
# graduates	99	127	121	135	140	145
% change	-17%	28%	-5%	12%	4%	4%

Source: EIS

Table 4. Faculty and staff diversity

YEAR	FACULTY			STAFF		
	TOTAL FULL-TIME FACULTY	FACULTY from URGs (%)	FEMALE FACULTY (%)	TOTAL FULL-TIME STAFF	STAFF from URGs (%)	FEMALE STAFF (%)
1998	55	11%	38%	33	12%	58%
1999	56	14%	36%	37	11%	49%
2000	56	16%	38%	40	10%	53%
2001	56	20%	36%	39	8%	56%
2002	63	17%	32%	42	7%	55%
2003	55	20%	35%	41	7%	56%
2004	65	18%	37%	39	8%	49%
2005	62	19%	31%	37	8%	57%
2006	62	18%	31%	38	8%	58%
2007	74	15%	32%	37	8%	57%
2008	75	13%	32%	37	8%	65%
2009	72	14%	31%	40	13%	63%
2010	71	14%	31%	42	12%	60%
2011	69	14%	33%	43.5	11%	57%
2012	68	15%	32%	43.5	11%	55%
2013	68	15%	31%	41.5	10%	51%
2014	68	13%	31%	42.5	9%	52%

Source: CoC Office of Human Resources

*Underrepresented groups include: *American Indian/Alaska Native; Asian; Black/African American; Hispanic/Latino; Native Hawaiian/Pacific Island; Two or more races.*