

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

The College of the Liberal Arts identifies diversity as a core value. The 2014–19 strategic plan articulates a vision that expands the traditional strengths of the liberal arts as they relate to diversity, and the plan’s strategies demonstrate that the college recognizes the imperative that today’s students be “able to live, work, and lead in a global environment where multicultural skills are at a premium.”¹ Strategies such as revising the global studies major, partnering to expand the number of international languages, and increasing financial support for global experiences underscore the college’s focus on global liberal arts.

The 2014–19 plan is clearly linked to previous plans, providing continuity with past efforts while describing steps planned for the future. It addresses the topics laid out in the provost’s planning guidelines memo and is well coordinated with the structure of *A Framework to Foster Diversity at Penn State*.

Campus Climate and Intergroup Relations

Challenge 1: Developing a Shared and Inclusive Understanding of Diversity

- Mission and vision statements do not specifically reference diversity, but the college notes that diversity is one of its core components.
- Increasing support to the World in Conversation and elevating its status to that of a Liberal Arts Center is laudable. It would be helpful to provide descriptors of the data that will be used to measure the success of the World in Conversation Center, as well as the various newsletters and workshops cited in the plan.
- The use of multiple communication formats to distribute diversity information is a good practice.

Challenge 2: Creating a Welcoming Campus Climate

- The college takes a proactive approach to dealing with possible acts of intolerance, which includes communication from the dean about responses and expectations for behavior.
- Including diversity-related materials in the orientations for new staff, faculty, and students is commendable.
- The college’s efforts to implement the recommendations of the College Climate Committee are notable.
- The 2010–15 diversity review team recommended the use of a climate survey to establish a baseline for diversity awareness, but the current plan stated that the follow-up survey did not produce much useful information and was too burdensome. Since the survey was seen as very promising by the previous review team, further explanation would be instructive. How does the college gauge its climate and how does it know if it is making progress?

Representation (Access and Success)

Challenge 3: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Student Body

- The college has made admirable inroads to increase scholarship support to underrepresented groups of graduate and undergraduate students.
- Data provided in the plan clearly demonstrate the success of the college’s efforts to increase the number of underserved and underrepresented graduate students.
- More information is needed to assess whether the support mechanisms used by advisors to identify, track, and support students most vulnerable to not being retained represent potential best practices.
- More details would help describe the “strategic, multifaceted” approach of the psychology and philosophy programs to retain and recruit underrepresented students.

¹ *A Framework to Diversity at Penn State 2010–15*, p. 1

Challenge 4: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Workforce

- The commitment to research areas, programs, and dual degree programs that promote the recruitment and retention of underserved and underrepresented faculty is notable.
- The decision to integrate the Africana Research Center’s Liberal Arts Postdoctoral Fellows Program with the Philosophy Department’s Alain Locke Postdoctoral Fellows Program seems well calculated to capitalize on synergies.
- Data on the year-long orientation program for first year untenured faculty members, as well as indications of progress in diversifying staff, would be appreciated.

Education and Scholarship

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

- The conversion of the Asian Studies Program into a department and the related investment of three faculty lines is laudable.
- The Center for Language Science’s interdisciplinary dual-degree graduate program is a testament to the college’s increased infrastructure support.
- The review team applauds the college’s efforts to increase study abroad participation and its ongoing investment in funding awards to support these experiences.

Institutional Viability and Vitality

Challenge 6: Diversifying University Leadership and Management

- The series of workshops for new heads and associate deans is positive. The college is encouraged to provide details on the specific content and frequency of diversity-related workshops.
- It is unclear how “dean level oversight for administrative positions” will diversify college leadership.

Challenge 7: Coordinating Organizational Change to Support Our Diversity Goals

- The hiring of a coordinator of global experiences is auspicious. The college is encouraged to track and report on the organizational changes that will result from this new position.
- The hiring of an international student advisor within the economics department is a potential best practice.
- The elevation of the multicultural coordinator to assistant to the dean was noted in the 2010–15 diversity strategic plan. The review team would be interested to learn how the new structure has translated to better support and coordination of diversity programs.