Feedback on the Diversity Strategic Plan
A Framework to Foster Diversity at Penn State: 2010–15
University Outreach
Spring 2010

University Outreach's *Framework* diversity strategic plan is well structured and has some exemplary conventions, such as listings of action items for goals, projected outcomes, and planned completion dates. Some, though not all, of the projected outcomes have concrete thresholds that define success, which is an important assessment tool for reporting progress. It is noteworthy that Outreach will conduct a staff survey during this planning cycle. Conducting a student survey to assess climate issues for all underrepresented/ underserved students would also be worthwhile.

The review team also noted some points that could enhance the plan: inclusion of specific details on how diversity is fostered in different sub-units and levels of Outreach; enhanced focus on all underserved groups and consistent use of specific thresholds that define success under the projected outcomes; robust recruitment and retention initiatives for diversifying the student body; and stronger emphasis on diversity support for employees. **RESPONSE: As noted by the review team, Outreach has completed a great deal of work to continue to focus on its diversity planning efforts. Outreach acknowledges that an ongoing emphasis is needed, relative to implementation of the plan—and how the plan can enhance the business strategy that was outlined as a result of the Outreach RESET process.**

Campus Climate and Intergroup Relations
Challenge 1: Developing a Shared and Inclusive Understanding of Diversity
- The review team commends Outreach for expanding their discussion of diversity and for specifically identifying many underrepresented and underserved populations. Inclusion of a new, broader, clearly-stated definition of diversity would improve the plan. **RESPONSE: Outreach's definition of diversity resulted from an attempt to demonstrate inclusion based on input from a cross section of Outreach staff and results from past climate surveys. The Outreach definition of diversity, in concert with the Outreach Diversity Value Statement, helps to clarify this vision. We agree it would be appropriate to revisit the definition of diversity in response to the significant organizational restructuring that Outreach has undergone this past year, which will continue into 2012.**
- Given the complex and multifaceted dimensions, Outreach should view their organization, mission, and roles in a more nuanced manner so that more attention to and assessment of diversity initiatives can occur in some sub-units within Outreach. **RESPONSE: Outreach recognizes, as a result of the restructuring process, that a need exists to evaluate the Council's structure and revise it in order to focus attention and assess both Unit- and Outreach-wide diversity initiatives. A proposal is being developed to restructure the Outreach Diversity Council and establish unit diversity coordinators to enhance accountability for diversity initiatives on a unit level.**

Challenge 2: Creating a Welcoming Campus Climate
- The review team suggests developing a data-driven approach for assessing and improving climate for students, with an emphasis on understanding differences in experience based on diversity status. **RESPONSE: Our plan moving forward in the next two years is to implement a new engagement survey for World Campus learners. As part of that survey we will measure the differences in student experience/engagement based on diversity status**.
- As this plan notes in Challenge 1, sexual orientation and religious beliefs were the most frequently mentioned characteristics that occasioned negative experiences among employees. What planning will be implemented to address these climate issues? **RESPONSE: With the restructuring of the Outreach Diversity Council, a more targeted effort to address specific climate issues, such as sexual orientation and religious beliefs, is being planned through educational programming, focus groups, and the formation of a Diversity Safe Zone.**

Representation (Access and Success)
Challenge 3: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Student Body

- While the focus on adult learners and non-traditional students of all types is laudable, specific mention of recruitment and retention goals for students from diverse racial/ethnic groups should be added to the plan. *RESPONSE: Our plan moving forward in the next two years is to expand the creation of World Campus student activities to include student groups based on diversity status (e.g., LGBT, African American, military/veterans). In addition, we are in the early stages of establishing a World Campus Blue & White Society through the Alumni Association—now awaiting approval of our constitution. As part of this new chapter, we're required to have an executive board, and our strategy will be to fill the board with a diverse representation of WC students (e.g., race, ability, orientation, identity, faith, military/veteran, international). This group will serve as an advisory board for World Campus.*

  This year, the Commission for Adult Learners has received an EOPC Grant to "increase outreach and services to women, people of color/first-generation students, and the LGBT community." An outcome report will be provided to support the use of the grant dollars.

  Being aware of our admission counselors' homogeneous backgrounds, we have also hired a new counselor of color to further tap into the more diverse population around the Williamsport area, with plans to increase diversity enrollments at the local Penn State Learning Center.

- Again, the review team suggests developing a data-driven approach to assessing and improving recruitment and retention outcomes for all Outreach students, with an emphasis on understanding differences in experience based on diversity status. *RESPONSE: As noted in Challenge 2, an engagement survey is in the process of development, to be implemented within two years. This survey will enable the World Campus to understand the differences in student experiences, which will include diversity status. In addition, the Commission for Adult Learners outcome report will include measurable data to indicate our progress on the recruitment/retention of diverse racial/ethnic groups.*

  We will be provided with summary data reports on our ethnic/racial enrollments for all Continuing Education and World Campus students.

Challenge 4: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Workforce

- The review team commends Outreach for developing a data-driven approach to the recruitment and retention of diverse individuals for their workforce.
- As was noted in the 2004-09 final update feedback, increased emphasis on retention initiatives are needed. *RESPONSE: We agree that we have much farther to go in our retention efforts. Outreach's Talent Management initiative has been instrumental in addressing retention efforts that include leadership development, workforce planning, and identifying practices to create opportunities for staff to thrive in the new Outreach environment.*
- Metrics proposed in the Projected Outcomes section should directly align with the stated goals. For example, in 4.3, the goal is to increase the retention of diverse staff within Outreach. A metric regarding retention and turnover rates are listed under 4.5. The review team notes that this metric would also work under 4.3. More detail on the implementation under this Challenge along with associated metrics would be helpful. *RESPONSE: We concur with the change suggested by the review committee and will continue to develop and monitor our goals related to this challenge.*

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

- A greater emphasis needs to be placed on U.S. multicultural competency education and awareness within the Outreach portfolio. The emphasis on international competencies is strong.
- The plan would be strengthened by inclusion of metrics to assess the extent to which the general education goals of multicultural competency are addressed in course offerings. Simply counting courses does not address the need. *RESPONSE: The Penn State World Campus and Continuing*

Education at University Park are the credit-bearing units that comprise Academic Outreach. Although the World Campus and Continuing Education State College Office are not academic units per se, they do extend the credit-based courses and programs that originate in Penn State colleges and campuses. As credit-bearing delivery units, World Campus and Continuing Education at University Park continually review their portfolios to insure a diverse array of courses are offered that will enable students to meet Undergraduate General Education requirements, specifically, the 3-credit requirement in United States Cultures (US) and the 3-credit requirement in International Cultures (IL).

Although World Campus and Continuing Education and University Park programs are generally targeting a location-bound, part-time adult student, more degree programs are encouraging a study abroad, internship, or plenary experience.

At the undergraduate level, the new bachelor of arts in energy and sustainability policy degree programs, offered through the World Campus, encourages students to also participate in our study abroad, program that provides EGEE 299 Foreign Studies as an elective course option.

We also recognize the important role that Penn State Public Broadcasting (PSPB) plays in developing and offering diverse programming and will encourage more projects with a diverse focus. For example, PSPB has been working with the Office of Educational Equity to create the African American Chronicles Website, that highlights the history and accomplishments of Penn State's African American alumni, faculty and staff.

Institutional Viability and Vitality
Challenge 6: Diversifying University Leadership and Management
- The review team commends Outreach for its goal of diversifying its upper leadership and overall approach for implementing this goal.
- The GREAT initiative is positive. More specifics on how the initiative will be implemented and assessed would be helpful. *RESPONSE: As Outreach continues its progress in its RESET initiative,an important piece of the strategy is focusing on talent management, which includes workforce planning. Outreach leadership is committed to continuing to develop and retain diverse talent in the organization.*

  The G.R.E.A.T initiative, which focuses on creation of a work climate that promotes the development of a diverse and respectful culture, continues to be a focus for the Outreach Diversity Council. This initiative includes an education component to provide Outreach staff with the skills they need to help create this culture. A retreat has been planned for September 2010, focusing on building the business case for diversity. The retreat provides the opportunity for Outreach senior leadership to interact with the Outreach Diversity Council (ODC) and continue to develop both business strategies and talent management strategies for the future.

Challenge 7: Coordinating Organizational Change to Support Our Diversity Goals
- The strong ties between this *Framework* plan and the Unit's strategic plan are excellent. Continued alignment of both plans is encouraged and will strengthen Outreach's overall diversity effort.
- The plan for a broad representation of staff on the Outreach Diversity Council from across Outreach sub-units is exemplary.