

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

The University Libraries diversity strategic plan exhibits a strong commitment to diversity, which is evident by the Libraries inclusion of diversity as one of its five major goals in its general strategic plan. However, the overall approach appears to focus on “more of the same,” which may be appropriate in areas where the Libraries are doing well but is not as useful in areas that need improvement (e.g., Challenge 4). In addition, the plan has little to say about libraries outside University Park, so the review team would appreciate attention to how the goals and methods articulated in the plan will be implemented system-wide. Structurally, the plan is well organized and targeted but tends to lack metrics that define success for its projected outcomes and strategic indicators. **RESPONSE: The plan will be reviewed with the new Dean of University Libraries and Scholarly Communications after she starts on August 1, 2010; and she will have an opportunity to make revisions to the plan. In addition, the newly formed Assessment Council will review the assessment goals and metrics.**

Campus Climate and Intergroup Relations

Challenge 1: Developing a Shared and Inclusive Understanding of Diversity

- The University Libraries Web page links to an array of diversity resources: committee membership; a strong statement of mission from the dean; links to various reports, publications, and services; downloadable colloquia presentations, and a blog. Notable is the use of social tagging and bookmarking of Internet resources to allow collaborative building of diversity materials by a wide group of participants. Methods and metrics should be developed to assess the penetration of the information provided by these tools in the Libraries’ target audiences.
- The “Religion and Culture Series” is a commendable effort to engage academic units with the Libraries in support of diversity. A strengthened plan could include several examples of other engagement activities planned or under consideration.
- That the Diversity Committee will continue to use social networking tools to create shared values is a fresh and promising approach. Has the Libraries taken steps to ensure that the Diversity Committee is a high-profile, respected enterprise that people should listen to and heed? **RESPONSE: The Diversity Committee has a long history of activity dating back fifteen years, is sponsored by the Dean, and puts on quality programming that is well attended.**

Challenge 2: Creating a Welcoming Campus Climate

- The formation of a Civility Team in spring 2009 demonstrates the commitment of the Libraries to establish a climate of civility and respect. Survey data about the perceptions of the climate for civility and respect certainly are helpful indicators of an accepting, tolerant environment for work and study. It is recognized that tracking the incidence of instances of civility or incivility certainly would prove difficult; remediating and eliminating such instances is equally challenging. Yet, some documentation of resolution of perceptible cases of incivility and disrespect might help define these concepts by example and demonstrate solutions.
- Whether or not the activity of the Civility Team extends beyond University Park is unclear. Description of tactics for extending the reach of the Team or for duplicating it at other campuses would strengthen the plan. **RESPONSE: The Civility Team provides leadership for all the libraries in the system. Campus staff can participate via MediaSiteLive to hear programs and speakers. We concur that it is difficult to report or track instances of incivility, as staff usually wish to remain anonymous; and remediation is often a confidential personnel action.**
- How development of a “Knowledge Commons” will promote diversity remains unclear in the plan. Strengthening the plan would include a description of the structure and processes of the Knowledge Commons that will promote a welcoming climate. Has the Libraries collected data to determine whether or not students from diverse racial/ethnic groups use the Libraries at the same rate as other students? **RESPONSE: The Knowledge Commons will have a much larger “Library Services for People with Disabilities” unit to assist students; and assistive technologies will be integrated into the Knowledge Commons equipment throughout this area.**

Representation (Access and Success)

Challenge 3: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Student Body

- Libraries and their services are important attributes useful in recruiting and retaining students. Libraries can support academic units in these efforts. Perhaps the plan would be enhanced by a description of specific activities proposed or planned to promote active collaboration or “co-production strategies” between academic units and the Libraries for recruitment and retention of diverse students. This point holds particularly for libraries at campuses other than University Park, where retention is a more serious challenge. Can the Libraries successfully promote the use of its facilities outside University Park among at-risk students early and often? Obviously, different strategies are needed for different populations, and the review team would like to see more creative thinking along these lines.
- This plan proposes a strategic indicator: “Positive student and faculty perceptions of the Libraries as welcoming, supportive for different populations and communities.” What evidence is anticipated that will link these perceptions with recruitment and retention? Would data on usage rates by members of various populations prove valuable? **RESPONSE: The newly formed Assessment Council will look at the types of data that are possible to collect as they pertain to assessment goals and measurement of outcomes.**

Challenge 4: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Workforce

- Recruitment, hiring, and retention processes that could promote a diverse workforce are vetted extensively at Penn State and at most universities. Outcomes of these processes are also tracked. What processes has the Libraries planned or implemented to react to these data to evaluate current recruitment and retention activities and to revise these processes when they are not achieving the outcomes desired?
- Recruitment of librarians is a challenge because relatively few people from diverse racial/ethnic groups seek careers in the field. Can the Libraries do anything to positively address this problem, such as encouraging their undergraduate student employees to pursue library science? The commitment is appreciated, but given the difficulties, might the Libraries think outside the box in its recruitment strategies? The goal of promoting library-related career paths is a good first step, but more development will be needed to make a strong impact. **RESPONSE: The Libraries’ administration, Libraries’ Office of Human Resources, and the Diversity Committee have had ongoing planning sessions with the Office of Educational Equity and the Office of Affirmative Action to address recruitment and retention, especially of professional librarians, since the field has only about four percent minority membership, all highly sought after. There is no easy solution; it requires perseverance and constant attention.**

Education and Scholarship

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

- The Libraries exhibits a strong, natural position through its specialized skills and unique and vast information resources for leveraging a University curriculum that fosters intercultural and international competencies. Strategic indicators that track instances of infusion of the Libraries’ expertise and information in curricula would document the Libraries’ impact on this aspect of diversity. **RESPONSE: The newly formed Assessment Council will review possible indicators. However, the teaching curriculum is the responsibility of faculty in the colleges. Therefore, the Libraries’ faculty work through the teaching faculty in making our resources relevant to the curriculum and teaching outcomes.**
- Suggestion: develop a strategy for fulfilling interest in promoting a curriculum that fosters intercultural and international competencies through the emerging Penn State fundraising campaign, “For the Future.” The challenge faced by the Libraries is matched well with the top priority of this campaign to focus on student learning outcomes and to keep “a Penn State education affordable for families of modest means.”

Institutional Viability and Vitality

Challenge 6: Diversifying University Leadership and Management

- The commitment of the Libraries to diversifying University leadership and management is clear through its investments in mentoring programs. Some consideration would be useful about how results from these efforts might be promoted or impeded by the Competencies Program emerging from the Office of Human Resources.
- The support of the Civility Team certainly is acknowledged in maintaining a climate that will help diversify the Libraries' leadership and management. However, the direct effect of the Civility Team on this aim will be difficult to demonstrate without more germane measures to define success. Additional support for this approach is called for in order to render it truly meaningful.
- Could Penn State campuses located near areas with favorable demographics serve as incubators for finding new employees from diverse racial/ethnic groups and developing them into leaders?

RESPONSE: The Libraries have had most success in recruitment to State College and campus libraries near Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, both because they are more urban areas and because there are graduate library and information science programs in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh to recruit from.

Challenge 7: Coordinating Organizational Change to Support Our Diversity Goals

- Efforts to coordinate organizational change to support the Libraries' diversity goals seem to be evolving positively. The diversity plan would be enhanced by further description of how efforts are linked within the existing general strategic plan and an organizational change strategy. Also, specification is needed about how diversity needs, opportunities, and issues are to be infused into the entire University Libraries system. ***RESPONSE: The new Dean of University Libraries and Scholarly Communications will review the plan upon her arrival on August 1, 2010 and will have a chance to make any changes to the plan. In addition, the Diversity Committee will work closely with the Associate Dean and Department Head for campus libraries to clarify expectations and reporting mechanisms.***