A Framework to Foster Diversity at Penn State 2010–15

Office of University Relations
December 2009
Planning for the Third Cycle

The Office of University Relations is a central strategic communications and public relations unit with University-wide responsibilities. Through our six departments—Public Information, University Marketing and Advertising, University Publications, Campus and Community Affairs, Research Communications, and Internet Communications—we are engaged in numerous activities to protect and manage the University’s reputation while strengthening its brand image. Some broad areas of responsibility include:

- Advertising standards
- Crisis management
- Institutional graphic identity
- Institutional market research
- Major campus events
- Marketing campaigns
- Media relations
- News and breaking events
- Promotion of science and research
- Recruitment marketing materials
- University Web presence
- Visual and editorial standards

During the past two years, University Relations has begun to use its fifty staff members in a more synergistic approach to institutional projects and initiatives. The old model of operating out of our separate department silos is giving way to creative teams that capitalize on our collective expertise. In addition, University Relations has begun to look more carefully at needs and priorities for piloting the 400+ communicators across our campuses, colleges, and administrative units. Both of these movements in University Relations have implications for our diversity planning. Internally, we are better poised to consider what we may do as a group to increase our knowledge and understanding of minority groups and diverse populations. Externally, we may have new opportunities to drive institutional diversity objectives as we strengthen our partnerships with communicators across the University.

This third cycle diversity plan presented two main issues for the committee.* The first issue was deciding what, if any, material from the two previous cycles of plans and updates could be used as a base for the third. After reviewing the existing material, we decided to start from scratch to prepare a plan that could continue to be developed in successive updates and cycles.

The second issue was how to think more creatively about ways to address the seven challenges set forth in A Framework to Foster Diversity at Penn State 2010–15. In particular, we noted the need to focus on internal goals for the unit, rather than just pointing out examples of diversity in our products and services. We also noted the need to stretch further, beyond facets of race, ethnicity, and gender, to broaden our vernacular of diversity at Penn State.

The committee hopes that the following plan provides a reasonable start to addressing both issues.

*Committee responsible for drafting the final update to the 2004–09 plan and the 2010–15 plan:

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Challenge 1: Developing a Shared and Inclusive Understanding of Diversity

The Office of University Relations at Penn State plays an influential role in defining the University in the eyes of others, and thus has a unique part in defining the University’s culture of diversity. Representing diversity in our news stories, promotional videos, message campaigns, and marketing materials is second nature in University Relations. Our staff have, perhaps, more awareness of diversity issues than do other units that don’t work with the image and perception of the University on a daily basis. However, there is room for improvement, especially with regard to our internal diversity IQ.

Our central goal in this cycle is to establish a standing diversity committee to provide an internal focus on diversity and establish continuity in our planning and assessment efforts. The committee will serve as our liaison to University commissions and other diversity-related groups, and will help to bridge our knowledge gaps and increase staff awareness of current diversity issues. The committee also will be instrumental in identifying ways of educating our staff and increasing our diversity IQ. As a result, we expect our materials and messages will project an even sharper focus on diversity with attention to lesser-represented groups and a greater degree of relevance with respect to diversity issues. The following are goals and action items in support of this challenge:

Create a standing University Relations diversity committee.

The Vice President and Assistant Vice President will work with the directors to appoint a standing diversity committee to provide a sustained focus on diversity. The committee will be responsible for setting diversity-related goals, documenting progress of diversity initiatives, and preparing the unit’s diversity reports and plans. Actions for the committee may include:

— Establish regular meeting schedules and agendas.
— Assess and account for all diversity-related activity in the unit.
— Maintain meeting notes and document progress on all diversity-related projects.
— Prepare unit diversity plans and updates.
— Provide committee updates during directors meetings and all-staff meetings.
— Schedule committee training with the Office of the Vice President for Educational Equity (OVPEE).
— Arrange for diversity speakers at University Communicators meetings.
— Meet with OVPEE commissions and student groups to learn more about their diversity issues and goals.

As we sharpen our focus on lesser-represented groups, we will look for ways to make them more visible in our promotional and marketing materials.
—Identify diversity-related meetings, events, or activities that would provide photo or video opportunities.
—Identify underrepresented groups that need more visibility in our marketing and promotional materials.
—Identify creative and sensitive ways to represent groups or organizations that are difficult to portray in our marketing and promotional materials.

Develop a greater culture of diversity within University Relations.

University Relations always focuses on the inclusion of diversity in the materials we produce for other units. Perhaps for that reason, it has been less of an imperative to develop our own internal diversity culture. As a unit responsible for the University’s image and reputation, we should aspire to a higher standard for diversity training and education. To that end, we may consider the following actions:

—Opportunities for all-staff diversity training, workshops, or presentations from OVPEE staff
—Guest speakers at all-staff meetings
—Starting a diversity speaker series
—Greater staff participation in diversity-related HRDC courses
—Greater staff attendance in diversity-related events

Engage in more testing of our marketing and promotional materials for diverse audiences.

Staff in University Marketing and Advertising and University Publications will work together to develop appropriate and useful methods of evaluating representations of diversity in our materials. Actions may include:

—Developing surveys and/or follow-up review forms
—Using student focus groups for input
—Engaging the Multicultural Resource Center and diversity-related units for feedback

Develop and implement diversity “tags” for Penn State Live and Newswire.

With the development of a “tagging” system and RSS feeds on Penn State Live (the University’s official news Web site), the Diversity Newswire has been phased out in favor of featuring diversity stories in the regular, established Newswire. This ensures distribution to a wider audience, and tagged diversity stories can easily be accessed at http://live.psu.edu/tag/diversity. Newswire staff in Public Information may consider the following actions:

—Continue to tag every story that deals with diverse groups or diversity-related topics.
—Continue to distribute stories that reflect the broad diversity at Penn State.
—Consider developing more selective diversity tags.

Update and develop the University Editorial Style Manual’s section on diversity.

The University’s online editorial style manual covers information that is specific to the way this University communicates about itself. Included in the manual is a section called “Ethnic Group Designations,” that provides the approved terminology for ethnic groups. Editorial staff in University Publications who maintain and update the manual may consider the following actions:

—Work with the diversity committee to review the diversity section of the manual.
—Meet with the Commission on Racial/Ethnic Diversity and the Affirmative Action Office for updates.
—Expand information to include terminology for nonethnic underrepresented groups.

Sharpen efforts to portray broader facets of diversity at Penn State.

—Work with the diversity committee to identify groups in need of visibility.
—Meet with underrepresented groups for input on imagery.
—Develop more selective tags for Newswire and photo databases.

BEST PRACTICES

—Approximately 50 percent of the students appearing in Teen Campaign marketing materials are representative of diverse groups.
Challenge 2: Creating a Welcoming Campus Climate

Impressions about Penn State often are formed before people ever set foot on our campuses. Thousands of messages and images go out to audiences daily through our advertisements, brochures, videos, news stories, and a host of other communications. It goes without saying that our promotional and marketing materials are integral to the perceptions people form about our University. As such, diversity always is represented in our products and services.

Beyond the messages and images we include in our materials and communications, University Relations also contributes to a welcoming campus climate through our interactions with students, faculty, and staff, as well campus visitors and the community. We are mindful that our staff must strive to see the University as other people see it; to understand why, at times, it’s less than a welcoming place; and to put our expertise to work in ways that address real need. The following are goals and action items in support of this challenge:

**Improve communication regarding access guidelines for free-speech zones.**

Campus and Community Affairs is responsible for scheduling the campus free-speech zones, and providing the users with disability guidelines. Staff routinely monitor free-speech zones when they are in use to make sure there are clear passageways for wheelchairs.

— Update policies and access guidelines relevant to use of free-speech zones.
— Provide policy and access guidelines to users when zones are reserved.
— Establish better correspondence with student groups who use free-speech zones.

**Create a University Relations "climate report" to keep staff apprised of diversity issues.**

University Relations might consider putting together a quarterly briefing—a “climate report”—to use internally to inform the staff about current conditions on campus and issues that may need particular attention. This activity could be under the purview of the diversity committee.

— Engage Admissions and Student Affairs counselors for input.
— Establish contacts with student groups for input.
— Include feedback from OVPEE commissions.
Continue to offer and assess disability accommodations at campus events.

Campus and Community Affairs staff are on-site for many major events, including commencement, awards programs, and road scholars tours. They make sure that participants and guests have access to facilities, and often provide on-the-spot help when it is most needed.

—Establish quarterly meetings with the Office of Disability Services to review accommodation guidelines and campus disability services.
—Update and maintain a list of all disability services offered by the University.

Maintain and develop iHear Penn State.

In June 2009, University Relations developed and launched the University’s self-guided cell phone tour which provides information about key campus landmarks. The tour may be accessed at any time through personal cell phones, and users have the option of hearing it in Spanish or English.

—Continue to maintain the current tour.
—Monitor usage data from the service provider.
—Prepare tour expansion materials for campuses.
—Design and implement permanent location signs.

BEST PRACTICES

—Staff in the Department of Campus and Community Affairs work especially hard at commencement ceremonies to accommodate students and guests who are disabled. They personally shepherd students with disabilities through the ceremony; direct guests with disabilities to appropriate seating; and make arrangements for real-time captioning for hearing-impaired students and guests.

—University Relations is represented on several University boards and commissions that contribute to the quality of life on campus, including:
  - Campus Environment Team
  - Commission for Women Mentoring Program
  - Committee on International Travel Policy for Students and Faculty
  - Equal Opportunity Planning Committee Program Review Teams
  - FastStart Mentoring Program
  - Global Connections (formerly the International Hospitality Council)
  - Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transsexual Support Network
  - Vocational Mentoring Day
Challenge 3: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Student Body

Student recruitment continues to be one of the highest priorities in University Relations and every department in the unit makes a contribution to this effort. University Marketing and Advertising is heavily involved in the Teen Campaign, now in its seventh year, and the majority of projects produced in University Publications are directly related to student recruitment. Public Information provides spotlights on students and campus life through its news bureau, and Internet Communications supports the University’s Web presence. Campus and Community Affairs works daily with student groups, and Science Research writes the stories about the stellar faculty and cutting-edge research that attract students to this university.

To improve on our efforts under this challenge, we might look for opportunities to focus more on at-risk diverse student groups who shoulder special burdens in addition to negotiating the academic rigors of a college life. Groups such as low-income, first-generation students, along with international, disabled, and adult learners, are in particular need of support to sustain their success. Special attention to these groups may be taken into consideration as part of the following goals:

**Broaden representations of diversity in the University Publications photo/image library and expand the search function.**

The University Publications photo library contains almost 11,000 images, with more than 2,600 tagged for diversity. Photos are used by the department in a wide variety of marketing materials.

—Work with the diversity committee to identify groups that need more representation.
—Focus on photo assignments for lesser-represented groups.
—Investigate creative ways to provide photographic imagery for diverse groups that are hard to represent.
—Investigate using more specific labels for search tags.

**Develop a procedure for identifying high-achieving diverse students and faculty to use in recruitment materials.**

University Publications depends on our clients in the colleges and at the campuses to come up with the students and faculty who will be featured in their publications. Sometimes, these efforts come up short with regard to diversity.

—Investigate ways to work proactively with our University representatives to identify noteworthy diverse students and faculty.
—Look for additional ways to feature noteworthy students and faculty.
Reach a diverse population of the target audience for the Teen Campaign.

This ongoing marketing campaign, conducted by University Marketing and Advertising, uses research, surveys, and focus group testing to guide the development of commercials, videos, advertisement, and print materials aimed at high school students. These recruitment materials are used by the Admissions offices at twenty undergraduate campuses.

— Continue to include diversity in the student “cast” that is featured in Teen Campaign materials.
— Include diverse faculty and staff in Teen Campaign materials.
— Utilize focus groups with a diverse cross-sample of our target audience.

Incorporate a broader scope of diversity in the content of the campus microsites.

University Marketing and Advertising is developing campus-specific microsites that incorporate photos and videos of the campus and provide potential students with a real look of what life is like on that campus.

— Cast for participants at each campus to provide the broadest possible diversity.
— Feature diverse students, faculty, and staff in the photos and videos produced for the microsites.

Continue to prioritize workloads in University Publications to support student recruitment, particularly projects that highlight multicultural programs or focus on attracting minority students.

Since the services of University Publications are provided free of charge, the publications and other marketing materials produced by this department translate into exceptional values for our clients. Units that are strapped by increasingly tight budgets and allocations continue to receive high-quality materials that otherwise might be out of reach. With the loss of two positions in University Publications, it is becoming increasingly necessary to evaluate where the department’s services are most needed, and how best to support University-wide initiatives.

— Continue to prioritize workloads to accommodate multicultural programs and diversity-related recruitment materials.
— Work with the diversity committee to identify diversity-related programs in need of recruitment publications or other marketing materials.

BEST PRACTICES

— Four staff members in the Department of University Marketing and Advertising mentor first-year students in the University’s FastStart program.

— Education is valued and supported in University Relations. Staff are encouraged to further their education, and flexibility is provided to staff who take classes or serve as instructors at the University. The value added is a deeper understanding of our students and the classroom experience. In the last two years, University Relations staff have served as instructors in the following areas:
  - Art and Illustration
  - English
  - Graphic Design
  - Integrated Arts
  - Journalism
  - Photography
  - Public Relations
Challenge 4: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Workforce

The Office of University Relations is a small administrative unit (two administrators, forty-eight staff) with a stable workforce and little staff turnover. Within the last five years, some departments in University Relations have been impacted by vacated positions that remain frozen due to budget contraints. University Relations also reorganized existing staff with no additional hires when it formed the Department of Research Communications in 2009.

Given our limited hiring opportunities, our support of this challenge may be addressed in other ways. First, with an eye toward succession planning and possible new positions in the future, we might evaluate our current hiring practices and routines to identify additional measures that could be taken to attract diverse candidates when we do have positions available. Second, with support of diversity as a performance criterion in the Faculty/Staff Survey, we can look for opportunities to provide diversity-related education and training to the staff. Third, we can continue to work on high-profile institutional initiatives that maximize visibility of our stellar diverse/international faculty and researchers, who in turn, attract a more diverse workforce. With these objectives in mind, we offer the following goals:

Review current hiring practices to establish a diversity protocol.

The unit administrators will work with the department directors to establish measures that can be taken during a search process to attract qualified diverse candidates.

— Assign task leader and working group.
— Ascertain hiring practices and procedures used in the unit.
— Solicit input from Human Resources and OVPEE.
— Create a list of best advertising outlets.
— Develop a list of search actions appropriate for University Relations.

Identify Future Mentoring/Internship Opportunities.

Due to position cutbacks and increased workloads, it may be unrealistic to take on new mentoring or internship prospects at this time. However, as a shorter-range goal, directors may work with staff to investigate the opportunities.
Continue the Penn State Impact video series.
This video series, developed by University Marketing and Advertising, showcases some of the most consequential and unique research taking place at Penn State. These videos often provide visibility for our international faculty and researchers, and are powerful tools for attracting high-caliber students and faculty.

—Develop two programming concepts per year as funding permits.
—Develop a list of diverse/international faculty targeted for Impact videos.

Develop a unit-wide imperative for diversity training.
The University Relations diversity committee could be instrumental in planning or developing education or training programs relative to diversity.

—Identify programs available through HR.
—Engage OVPEE faculty to address staff.
—Develop staff retreats, workshops, and seminars.

BEST PRACTICES
—University Relations staff volunteer in many local civic and community organizations that impact the quality of life of our faculty, staff, and students. Collectively, their experiences help to shape a better understanding of diversity and the needs of diverse groups who live in our community. Local organizations served by University Relations staff include:
  American Red Cross
  Boy Scouts of America
  Central Pennsylvania Convention and Visitors Bureau
  The Central Pennsylvania Festival of the Arts
  Chamber of Business and Industry of Centre County
  Leadership Centre County
  Patton Township Planning Commission
  Penn State and Centre County United Way
  Special Olympics
  State College Area Food Bank
  State College Arthritis Foundation
Challenge 5: Developing a Curriculum that Fosters United States and International Cultural Competencies

As a nonacademic unit, University Relations has little to do with the development of curricula, and the measure of input that we can provide under this rubric is slim. The best connection we have to curricular affairs is through the editorial manager in University Publications who serves as a liaison to the Faculty Senate and oversees production of the University’s two academic bulletins. Through her, staff in University Relations may have opportunities to learn more about the University’s diversity curriculum imperative and issues that are affecting the development of our diversity curriculum. As we are better informed about diversity course requirements and offerings, we will be better positioned to carry through supportive messages in our news stories and recruitment materials, and to other University communicators.

In addition, we must continue to work closely with our colleges and campuses to develop effective positioning plans, marketing strategies, and recruitment materials that deliver the message about diversity in our academic programs. Goals and activities related to this challenge may include:

- Use the editorial manager in University Publications for information and updates about the diversity curriculum.
- Provide reports about curricular issues during all-staff meetings.
- Provide updates about curricular issues to directors meetings.

Best Practices

University Publications designed and developed the lead recruitment materials and visual identity for the new School of International Affairs. The school, which admitted its first class in fall 2008, prepares exceptional students for international careers and leadership positions.

---In 2009, the Department of Public Information produced a video titled Global Connections, that sheds light on issues confronting many international students who come to Penn State, and what can be done to ease their transition into the community.
Challenge 6: Diversifying University Leadership Management

Diversifying leadership across the University encompasses both commitments in hiring and promotion practices and commitments by leaders and administrators to practice diversity in visible, actionable ways. A measure of both conditions exists in University Relations where we have more gender parity with our administrators and directors than many other units, and all our departments demonstrate a commitment to diversity through our products and services. It also is notable with respect to this challenge that educational excellence is valued and supported. We have staff in University Relations who have completed master’s and doctoral-level programs while working full-time, and many who belong to and participate in higher education professional organizations. We recognize and appreciate that this would not happen without support from our administrators and directors.

Still, we can aspire to do more with this challenge. The appointment of a standing diversity committee in University Relations (stated as a goal under Challenge 1) would certainly make a major statement in this regard, but only if it is truly valued and plays a major advisory role in the unit. Other goals and activities in support of this challenge may include:

- Continue to encourage participation of staff in administrative training, academic degree advancement, diversity training, professional development, and diversity committees and commissions.

- Establish an internal University Relations diversity memo to keep staff apprised of diversity-related activities, such as speakers, lectures, programs, seminars, events, etc., taking place on campus.

- Invite diversity leaders and heads of commissions to speak at all-staff meetings and communicators meetings.

- Continue to use our news stories, videos, photos, and marketing materials to cite and promote diversity leadership at Penn State.

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University Relations staff are encouraged to take advantage of professional development opportunities and maximize their leadership potential. In addition to programs and course work available through the University, many staff hone their professional, managerial, and leadership skills in external higher education professional organizations, including:

- Association of Film Commissioners International (AFCI)
- Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities (APLU, formerly NASULGC)
- College and University Public Relations Association of Pennsylvania (CUPRAP)
- Council for the Advancement and Support of Education (CASE)
- National Association of Science Writers
- North American Association of Commencement Officers (NAACO)
- University and College Designers Association (UCDA)
- University Research Magazine Association
Challenge 7: Coordinating Organizational Change to Support Our Diversity Goals

This third cycle of diversity planning provides tremendous opportunities for University Relations—opportunities to work collaboratively across department lines to reach our diversity goals; opportunities to engage campus diversity professionals and gain deeper insights about our diverse communities; opportunities to establish a unit-wide diversity ideology that transcends individual department efforts and makes an impact in the larger context of the University.

Participation of our administrators and directors will be crucial to the success of this plan. The appointment of, and support for, a standing diversity committee in the unit will be integral to the unit’s ongoing diversity strategic planning and sustained momentum in tackling our goals. But on a more basic level, there must be a philosophical movement that permeates from the leadership to all staff in University Relations. To that end, we may consider the following:

- Involving our standing diversity committee in our diversity planning; regular assessment and analysis of diversity initiatives; diversity plan updates; development of goals, activities, and best practices; reviewing and assessing the 2012 Faculty/Staff survey for unit strategic indicators.
- Involving our standing diversity committee in the development of our unit strategic plans.
- Involving our standing diversity committee in OVPEE diversity strategic planning training.
- Developing a University Relations diversity ideology statement and including it in our mission statement and planning documents.
- Understanding and articulating the University’s newly adopted definition of diversity (implemented fall 2009).
- Ongoing discussion about diversity in directors meetings, all-staff meetings, and communicators meetings.
- Ongoing diversity education and training for all staff.
- Meaningful linkages with our commissions, centers, and student organizations to gain deeper insights into the diversity conditions at Penn State.

BEST PRACTICES

—The Department of University Publications maintains the University’s Editorial Style Manual, including a section titled “Ethnic Group Designations.” This section, developed in collaboration with the Office of the Vice President for Educational Equity, provides approved terminology so communicators throughout the University are accurate and consistent with references to ethnic groups.