Feedback on the Diversity Strategic Plan
A Framework to Foster Diversity at Penn State: 2010-15
Research and the Graduate School
Spring 2010

The Office of the Senior Vice President for Research (OSVPR) and the Graduate School is a diverse and complex organization. This complexity is reflected in the various initiatives to be undertaken by the distinct research, service, and administrative units of which RGS is comprised. The review team recommends efforts toward integration and coordination of these initiatives. *RESPONSE: Effective January 1, 2010, our unit is The Office of the Vice President for Research (OVPR) and the Graduate School.*

The unit is commended for the descriptive introduction of the plan and in particular for its broad, comprehensive, and inclusive definition of diversity. Conversely, there is a measure of inconsistency that is evident throughout the document; specifically, the plan appears to be heavily influenced by the Applied Research Laboratory (ARL). Further, the strategic indicators identified with each Challenge should be refined. The initiatives reported show promise, but promise must be connected with clear outcomes in future reports. The team encourages RGS to take a proactive approach to establishing goals, as opposed to emphasizing tracking and monitoring. *RESPONSE: By creating one comprehensive report, we have gained visibility to what each unit is doing and have been able to encompass best practice amongst all groups. We have developed additional action items/projected outcomes for OVPR & the Graduate School in order to balance the expectations with ARL's. We have redefined the strategic indicators and have shifted our focus away from just monitoring and tracking.*

The plan contains mistakes throughout. For example, the phrase "Unit Strategic Indicators for this Research" appears following every Challenge in lieu of "Unit Strategic Indicators for this Challenge." In several instances, projected outcomes do not appear to be associated with the correct action items. The review team strongly urges RGS to use a more effective proofreading system to ensure quality in future reporting as these will be public documents. *RESPONSE: An additional review of the Framework has been completed. We have eliminated redundancy and ensured that all goals, action items, and projected outcomes are aligned. Additionally, all errors have been corrected.*

Campus Climate and Intergroup Relations
Challenge 1: Developing a Shared and Inclusive Understanding of Diversity
- Encouraging employees and supervisors to "address diversity developments" when reviewing SRDPs demonstrates commitment. How will this initiative be implemented and assessed? Which units will undertake this effort? *RESPONSE: It is our intent that we will provide opportunity for all of units to provide materials to supervisors during the annual performance evaluation process regarding the Diversity Core Factor Ratings. We will also monitor and track diversity activities when reviewing the SRDP's and HR 40's.*
- ARL's climate survey demonstrates leadership's commitment to diversity; the review team encourages RGS to extend this practice beyond ARL. *RESPONSE: OVPR and the Graduate School will look at extending ways to capture feedback from our broader group, as a follow-up to the 2009 Faculty/Staff survey.*
- Community outreach efforts are positive and could serve as models for broadly sharing the importance of diversity.
- The diversity award is intriguing, but more information is needed. For example, what does the award recognize? How is the winner chosen? Who is eligible? What are the criteria? Please share these specifics so that others may replicate this practice. *RESPONSE: A link has been provided to website that contains detailed information. Additionally, the action items was moved to challenge 7 in order to create a more defined focus on maintaining alignment of individual unit diversity goals with the university goals.*

Challenge 2: Creating a Welcoming Campus Climate

- It is commendable that unit materials are reviewed for inclusiveness; the process should seek to eliminate both cultural and physical barriers. ***RESPONSE: This has been clarified and included in the second challenge.***
- Involving international alumni in mentoring is a positive means of facilitating the entrée of incoming international students.
- Potential best practice: The planned annual audit of existing and new facilities to ensure proper accommodations.
- Potential best practice: Efforts to include customers and clients in diversity initiatives are notable, particularly contracting with diversity suppliers and women-owned businesses.

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

- Recruitment efforts are comprehensive; unit commitment is reinforced by the dedication of resources to "diversity fellowships." The team recommends, however, that care is taken to ensure that these fellowships are awarded in a manner consistent with the unit's definition of diversity. ***RESPONSE: This will be considered.***
- It is commendable that RGS plans to address Bunton-Waller attrition rates; this effort reflects a proactive approach to retaining a diverse student body.
- The plan states that RGS will "make Penn State more attractive to underrepresented groups." No goal, strategy, or means of assessment is associated with this action item. What is meant by "more attractive?" Is increased affordability the goal? If so, how will this be accomplished? ***RESPONSE: This has been further defined, through supplemental postdoctoral stipends and tuition scholarship programs.***
- Providing tours for high schools and vocational schools is effective community outreach, but it is unclear how these efforts relate to diversity. Please clarify. ***RESPONSE: We will look at developing a tracking instrument in ordered to measure recruitment sourcing, in order to determine if there is a correlation.***
- Improving the recruitment rate of McNair students is a worthy goal. How will this be accomplished? ***RESPONSE: This has been further defined in the framework.***
- Best practice: Cultivation of partnerships with Historically Black Colleges and Universities and other institutions that serve underrepresented students.

Challenge 4: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Workforce

- Encouraging faculty to develop opportunities to support the research of underrepresented candidates is an excellent tool for the recruitment and retention of underrepresented faculty.
- The review team notes that many of the action items, projected outcomes, and assessment activities reported for the goal of recruiting a diverse workforce are vague, and many of the goals are not strategic. How is improvement of the ARL resume database related to diversity? ***RESPONSE: We have further defined and made clarifications to the action items and projected outcomes.***
- Collaboration with HBCU deans and faculty (and presumably with other institutions serving underrepresented/underserved populations) to identify interns promises to develop a pipeline that could strengthen future recruitment efforts. Such efforts pay long-term dividends.
- Potential best practice: Incorporation of diversity as a core competency when evaluating candidates clearly demonstrates that diversity is one of the values that define "excellence" for the unit. This approach could serve as a model for other areas.

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

- Said to address contemporary diversity issues, the course "Ethics in the Life Sciences" is listed among RGS' action items for this Challenge. The course may prove to be a creative way to introduce diversity into the STEM disciplines, but it is not part of a curriculum that RGS owns.

- Similarly, the use of distance education offers an opportunity to solidify relationships with HBCUs and other institutions that serve underrepresented/underserved populations. However, since ARL does not offer courses, please explain their involvement. **RESPONSE: This has been further defined in the framework.**

Institutional Viability and Vitality
Challenge 6: Diversifying University Leadership and Management
- ARL's efforts to increase opportunities for graduate students to develop leadership skills could be conceptualized as a possible "grow your own" program that can augment efforts to recruit and retain a diverse workforce.

Challenge 7: Coordinating Organizational Change to Support Our Diversity Goals
- The strategic indicators listed for this Challenge are unclear. **RESPONSE: We have modified the Strategic Indicators for all of the Challenges in order to provide clarity and further definition.**
- Best Practice: Efforts to support interdisciplinary research by connecting scientists, students, and faculty from across the university represents an integrated approach to organizational change through challenging artificial barriers among disciplines.