

Feedback on the Diversity Strategic Plan
A Framework to Foster Diversity at Penn State: 2010-15
Division of Student Affairs
Spring 2010

The Division of Student Affairs (SA) is commendably realistic in putting forward a strong plan that takes into account current and anticipated economic challenges by expanding proven best practices to include other units across the University and by proposing strategic initiatives to generate collaboration among disparate groups. Creative stewardship of continuing initiatives and selective, strategic implementation of new efforts demonstrate SA's ability to be fiscally responsive to changed circumstances without shortchanging its commitment to diversity. New initiatives targeting first-generation and low-income students and veterans augment the proven best practices focus that provides the foundation of the plan.

The plan presents not only action strategies, but also assessment protocols and expected outcomes. While the strategic indicators are clear, more specificity in regards to the outcomes is recommended. For example, for programs, merely increasing the number of participants should not be the only goal; instead, how can the particular learning outcomes of different programs be articulated and assessed?

Note: Student Affairs' use of the word "marginalized" throughout the plan to describe students is problematic. The review team suggests that "underrepresented/underserved" would be preferable.

Campus Climate and Intergroup Relations

Challenge 1: Developing a Shared and Inclusive Understanding of Diversity

- Student Affairs has multiple mechanisms for communicating its understanding of diversity to staff as well as students, engaging diverse stakeholders (UE, EE, and AMCA) in furthering SA's efforts to meet this Challenge.
- Metrics exist or will be developed for each of the strategies identified, and responsibility is clearly apportioned.

Challenge 2: Creating a Welcoming Campus Climate

- Filling the position of Assistant Director who will advise NPHC and MGC fraternities, which was noted in the update but not in the plan, should be a priority in 2010-2015.
- Outreach efforts extending the Unit's resources and personnel to the campuses are a commendable strategy. The strategic indicator is "to consult with Student Affairs campus staff to assess effectiveness." This does not describe what metrics such an assessment might include.
- Services and financial aid education for low income students in partnership with Undergraduate Education and the Alumni Association are promising innovations that further the Division's overarching goal of expanding collaborative efforts in diversity planning.
- Student Affairs deserves accolades for a plan that presents an array of thoughtful intervention to address this Challenge for students. Efforts addressing the creation of a welcoming environment for SA staff are warranted as well.

Representation (Access and Success)

Challenge 3: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Student Body

- It is noted that the needs of international students are not addressed in this plan.
- Implementing staff education programs to improve services for underrepresented students, including veterans, is an important new initiative.
- Partnering with FTCAP staff to better incorporate both diversity and retention educational initiatives in orientation is a good strategy. Could such efforts be extended to include outreach to campus FTCAP staff and volunteers?
- Proven best practices provide the bedrock of the Division's efforts in this Challenge, augmented by strategically targeted new initiatives that address collaboration and target first-generation and low-income students. Action strategy 2G, regarding personal financial management programming for students, is noted for contributing to retention as well.

Challenge 4: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Workforce

- Does the Unit have any mechanisms such as a diversity advocate or other search-committee training measures to ensure that committees generate a diverse pool of candidates?
- In addition to focusing on recruitment, the Unit is encouraged to develop strategies to retain a diverse workforce.

Education and Scholarship

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

- Student Affairs' plan involves numerous partnerships that engage multiple stakeholders in shared efforts to enhance curricular and co-curricular diversity, including the Rock Ethics Institute, Global Programs, various academic units, and CERA. These collaborative efforts are commendable.
- The Division's attention to the value of service learning to further curricular diversity is commended.

Institutional Viability and Vitality

Challenge 6: Diversifying University Leadership and Management

- What plans does SA have to continue partnering with the College Student Affairs master's program?
- While supporting professional development opportunities for diverse staff within SA is noted in the plan, it is unclear what opportunities are available and what mechanisms are in place to identify staff most interested in administrative/leadership positions. How is leadership advancement supported within the Unit once staff members are identified?

Challenge 7: Coordinating Organizational Change to Support Our Diversity Goals

- More specific information about the planned renewed efforts at outreach to underserved communities across the Commonwealth would be of interest.
- Student Affairs' plan is unique in recognizing the Unit's potential to affect organizational change throughout the university and at the highest levels of the administration through collaborative efforts and by sharing data and resources. This vision of SA as an organizational change agent is commendable.