

Feedback on the Diversity Strategic Plan
A Framework to Foster Diversity at Penn State: 2010-15
Penn State Erie, The Behrend College
Spring 2010

Penn State Behrend indicates a number of diversity initiatives that appear laudable and show potential for best practices. Progress in diversifying faculty with recent hires is noted; limited progress in diversifying administration and staff is also noted. Recruitment/retention plans/strategies in place to attract underrepresented students have shown slight percentage increase with the overall growth in student enrollments; these may merit review to bolster results. The professional development courses reported are particularly praiseworthy. A broader definition of diversity is encouraged to include less "visible" underrepresented/underserved groups; such as those with partial sight and/or hearing loss. The plan would also be strengthened by integrating measurable strategic indicators; there is no sense of how progress or success is being gauged. The review team suggests identifying calculative ways that reflect evidenced improvement.

Campus Climate and Intergroup Relations

Challenge 1: Developing a Shared and Inclusive Understanding of Diversity

- Goals and objectives identified are laudable and appear realistic; some are difficult to measure.
- It is unclear whether students or staff members will participate in the revised oversight group.
- Previous faculty/staff responses on climate surveys suggest the need for concerted efforts to be focused on these groups. Perhaps the revised Educational Equity and Campus Environment Committee (EECEC) could assume this task, informed by survey findings in areas where climate issues were revealed.
- Strategic indicators are identified for this Challenge; however, no measureable (or targeted) goals and objectives, or outcomes are provided. This will make progress during implementation difficult to appreciate. Revising the Plan accordingly will guide implementation and allow adjustments in strategy based on data. ***RESPONSE: The College has established a target of 60% of students responding "Strongly Agree/Agree" to each metric question.***
- The plan includes the creation of a "state-of-the-art" diversity resources Web site. This project -- <http://pserie.psu.edu/student/diversityindex.htm> -- was identified as "least successful" in the 2004-09 report, citing the time intensive requirements of the project. Further clarification would be helpful. ***RESPONSE: The project was delayed as the College converted its static Web site to a dynamic platform. Progress is currently underway on the "Institutional Equity Web site," which is managed by a subcommittee of EECEC. This site will provide users with swift access to Penn State policies, procedures, and definitions involving campus climate and diversity. It is divided into faculty and staff tabs in order to facilitate easy access to specific information. We anticipate that the Institutional Equity Web site will be live by the end of the 2010-2011 academic year.***

Challenge 2: Creating a Welcoming Campus Climate

- It is commendable that Behrend identified diversity issues to include the following groups: LGBT, veterans, low-income and first generation students, individuals with disabilities, adult learners, and international students.
- Focusing on programs that concentrate only on gender does not seem to support the planned increase of focus on LGBT issues. Incorporating opportunities to address sexuality and issues of relevance to the LGBT community, and supporting student organizations which address such opportunities would be helpful. Similar efforts to raise awareness and support for the additional targeted populations identified by Behrend may also be warranted. ***RESPONSE: We agree that "incorporating opportunities to address sexuality and issues of relevance to the LGBT community" is an important facet of programming, as exemplified by our sponsorship of LGBT-rights and equal-marriage activist Robyn Ochs in October 2009; a showing of Out of Silence, a documentary film chronicling the aftermath of Joe Wilson's same-sex marriage wedding announcement in the conservative town of Oil City, PA; and several student presentations at the Penn State Behrend Gender Conference. We plan to continue our efforts***

in this arena, including our support of the gay/straight alliance organization Behrend Trigon; SafeZone training in LGBT advocacy; and the fourth annual Gender Conference.

- EECEC recommendations are admirable yet it is not clear how initiatives will be implemented or measured. ***RESPONSE: Members of the campus community may petition EECEC to explore diversity-related ideas or the committee may self-charge itself to recommend initiatives and assessment measures that will enhance the campus climate. The Chancellor's Office will share assessment data with the committee and the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs will serve as an ex officio member of the committee.***
- Strategic indicators are limited in most cases to targeted questions on diversity surveys or other assessment instruments, without reference to measurable outcomes. As such, listed strategic indicators fall short of measuring goals or objectives. As stated above, the review team suggests that the plan will be strengthened with the inclusion, wherever possible, of measurable outcomes associated with indicators listed to assess progress and success. ***RESPONSE: The College has established a target range of 65% of faculty/staff members and students responding "Strongly Agree/Agree" (or its equivalent) to each metric question.***

Representation (Access and Success)

Challenge 3: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Student Body

- It is auspiciously clear that Behrend has placed much effort in recruiting and retaining a diverse student body.
- While overall student enrollment increased during the period of 2004-09, percentages of underrepresented students showed slight increase. ***RESPONSE: Since the submission of the strategic plan, the College has launched several new initiatives to increase the number of underrepresented students on campus. In 2010-11 a working team of faculty and staff members will work to reengage with Erie's African-American population. The Office of Admissions will be actively recruiting more out-of-state students, especially in urban centers with a large proportion of students of color. The College will also be sending representatives to Puerto Rico and Toronto. We anticipate that we will be able to draw a number of underrepresented students through these measures when additional residential housing becomes available.***
- Additional strategic indicators are suggested to measure the plan's success, track data to identify needed changes, and adjust programs accordingly. Student recruitment/retention programs are becoming well established in terms of years of implementation and resources. The review team encourages regular disaggregation of data to identify intergroup disparities.

Challenge 4: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Workforce

- Behrend has seen an increase in the number of hires of underrepresented faculty members based on revisions to the search process and is committed to continuing these commendable efforts.
- While efforts to increase faculty diversity are laudable, notably absent are strategies for increasing diversity of staff. Mechanisms to increase the pool of underrepresented candidates in staff searches and efforts to support retention of diverse staff are recommended. ***RESPONSE: This is a point well-made, as the College has devoted most of its efforts to diversifying its faculty over the last few years. EECEC will start devoting more of its time to diversifying the staff.***
- Increased diversity among faculty is noteworthy.

Education and Scholarship

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

- Initiatives to increase the number of courses that contain intercultural and international components have been successful with a 50% increase; restructuring academic programs to ensure student participation in diversity-related courses is laudable.
- It is unclear how having different first-year seminars (FYS) for native- and non-native English speakers will increase international cultural competencies for all students. The College may wish to consider ways to promote intercultural emphasis in FYS courses for native English speakers as well.

- Opportunities for majors, minors, and certificates that emphasize intercultural and international diversity might be positive; numbers relative to how many matriculated undergraduates currently pursue certificates with a diversity focus would be helpful in the evaluative process. **RESPONSE: This is a good suggestion that we will be certain to adopt.**

Institutional Viability and Vitality

Challenge 6: Diversifying University Leadership and Management

- Diversifying the leadership and management remains a particular area of need; i.e., no diversity is evident among the senior administrative/executive group. Some evidence of diversification among academic and student affairs administration is noted, particularly among women administrators. **RESPONSE: The College will be more proactive than it has been in encouraging faculty and staff members to participate in the University Fellows program.**
- The involvement of Fellows from various diversity groups in external initiatives may allow the “face” of Behrend to reflect its embraced diversity initiatives to the broader community.
- It is unclear how the listed strategic indicators reflect targeted measurable goals and objectives.

Challenge 7: Coordinating Organizational Change to Support Our Diversity Goals

- Continuing the Educational Equity and Campus Environment Committee is an excellent decision; the College should consider adding students and staff to the composition of the committee.
- The commitment to hire an academic affairs administrator to oversee academic diversity initiatives and work in conjunction with the Director of Educational Equity and Diversity Programs is meritorious as are efforts to create a template for annual reporting of school-based diversity activities and initiatives. The College can achieve greater linkages across college-wide diversity and accountability, respectively. **RESPONSES: Unfortunately the latest round of University recycling has taken the funding we had set aside for this position. We are seeking other sources but are also hopeful the funds will be returned so we can move forward with this initiative more quickly.**
- There is no definition of what constitutes “evidence” and no sense of how progress or success is to be measured. (Refer to the last sentence in the opening paragraph). **RESPONSE: Two of the three initiatives referenced in the final sentence have attained measureable levels of success while the third (development of a diversity Web site) is in progress. Specifically, the Behrend Administrative Fellows program provided an opportunity for a female faculty member to work alongside the associate dean for academic affairs in 2009-10; this experience was so beneficial to both parties that a half-time position was created for her in the associate dean’s office for the 2010-11 academic year. The second successful initiative was the participation of EECEC in the strategic and diversity planning processes. Many of the committee’s recommended initiatives were adopted in these plans.**