

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

The Penn State Wilkes-Barre 2010-15 diversity strategic plan states that its 2004-09 plan “lacked definition of actions and measurement.” The new plan makes useful strides in rectifying these problems. For example, the structure of the new plan is crisp and clearly lays out objectives, tactics, and measurable outcomes for each Challenge. Particularly noteworthy is that the Measurable Outcomes section sometimes sets out explicit metrics that define success on diversity achievement that is well related to its objective. For example, for Challenge 3, the plan identifies specific enrollment targets on an annual basis for both women and students from diverse racial/ethnic groups. Wilkes-Barre is strongly commended for this approach, which could also be utilized for other Challenges. Unfortunately, at other places the plan was not as robust as it was for Challenge 3. In some cases, such as for Challenges 4 and 6, the outcomes measure was simply to document the number of diverse candidates in the applicant pool without setting a clear target for success. In other cases, the tactics are well developed with numerous bullet points that outline explicit actions, whereas other tactics are more generally stated. Some tactics might be better located as outcomes measures rather than tactics, and some objectives are less than ambitious.

The review team noted that Wilkes-Barre has experienced major changes in leadership and, undoubtedly, the Oversight Team has a substantial job just keeping strategic planning in front of the campus community. Despite these constraints, the team believes the current plan falls short of the Campus’ best effort. While the 2010-15 *Framework* calls for streamlined plans, this plan may not be comprehensive enough or provide enough detail throughout. For example, data tables to establish baselines from which to set outcomes measures would be useful. If the plan were more “strategic,” that is, if it stated that certain areas would be emphasized that were more important to the Campus so that other areas would have to, for the moment, receive less attention, fewer details in some places could be appropriate. However, this type of approach is not mentioned in the plan. Also, the review team noted that the plan does not articulate well with the update. Obviously, the plan represents a new direction for the Campus for this new planning cycle, but the team thought the plan could have done a better job building upon past accomplishments at certain points.

Campus Climate and Intergroup Relations

Challenge 1: Developing a Shared and Inclusive Understanding of Diversity

- While the Campus is complimented for its new vision, mission and value statements, no definition of diversity is included in the plan. While a definition of diversity is not a requirement for the plan, such a definition sets a tone, without which, it will be more difficult for the Campus to build a foundation for its mission, vision and value statements that cohere with diversity. ***RESPONSE: The plan clearly indicated the integration of diversity concepts throughout its recently created mission, vision, value statements, and strategic plan. However, upon the above recommendation, the campus will create a supportive statement that focuses specifically on diversity of values, thought, culture, race, sexual orientation, etc., and will publish the statement in the appropriate venues.***

Challenge 2: Creating a Welcoming Campus Climate

- The two stated objectives for this Challenge are not well targeted. Both pertain only to students whereas much of the campus climate has to do with employee or student-employee interactions. One objective addresses co- and/or extra-curricular programming, but this point focuses more on the trees than the forest. The other objective could be just as easily or perhaps could be better included under Challenge 3. A simple objective of improving the overall climate could have been developed instead, with numerous tactics prescribed, whereas the co- and/or extra-curricular program offerings are simply one part of an overall strategy for improving climate. Focusing on student climate alone might be an apt approach if factors were present in the campus environment that demanded such a focus. In this case, the plan should state what these factors are at the outset and indicate that the Challenge would be handled more strategically. ***RESPONSE: The history of the Wilkes-Barre campus indeed does demand a very high focus on students. It is a campus that has lost enrollment almost continuously for the past 20 years. It is in this context that both objectives for the welcoming***

campus climate focused on students and the enrollment and retention of students in particular. The history of the campus also was the strategic reason for creating the new mission, vision and values previously cited. The diversity plan objectives were lifted in a big way from the campus's Strategic Plan. Thus, the focus to recruit and retain females and members of under represented groups is critical to the success of the campus. Further, while there is always room for improvement, there does exist a level of diversity among the administration, faculty, and staff in terms of gender, sexual orientation, and ethnic diversity.

- Assuming the 2003 and 2004 campus surveys, as reported in the update, are the last surveys that the Campus has conducted (not including the 2008 University Faculty/Staff Survey), it may be time to repeat these surveys to reassess the overall climate. Baseline data can then be established to ascertain areas of concern, probe more deeply using other means, such as focus groups, and interventions can then be directed at these issues. When sufficient time has run its course to allow the interventions to work, further data can be collected to determine if improvement has occurred. These outcomes can then be reported in the mid-term update. If other surveys have occurred since 2004, it might be appropriate to use these surveys to build baseline data upon. ***RESPONSE: The campus will conduct surveys to assess the overall climate of the campus not later than 2011-12 and report the results in its midterm feedback on the Diversity Plan implementation.***

Representation (Access and Success)

Challenge 3: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Student Body

- As mentioned in the introductory paragraphs above, the inclusion of performance thresholds for both gender and race/ethnicity for FA08 through FA12 is a model for how to approach all other Challenges. Are the FA08 and FA09 data actual enrollment data? The Affirmative Action Office recommends not including raw number data since they can be more readily misinterpreted as “quotas” or “set asides” than percentages. Also, the raw numbers associated with their respective percentages for FA10 through FA12 will probably change based on overall enrollments during these upcoming semesters. ***RESPONSE: The enrollment issues of the campus are the reason for the numbers attached along with the percentages. It is to keep the goal in front of the whole campus as well as the Enrollment Management staff, not as quotas, but goals.***
- The statement, “Focused recruiting,” is an example of a tactic that needs more detail. Identifying target high schools, the number of visits planned, and so on are just a few points that would clarify what is in view here. ***RESPONSE: The term “Focused Recruiting” is used because most all of the high schools in the campus recruiting area are very specific in terms of how frequently and under what conditions recruiting visits can be conducted. Therefore, the specificity desired by the review team is not controlled by the campus. The campus does try to involve the campus in “Focused Recruiting” by holding specific events on campus that bring the students to the campus for academic related recruiting – eg: Engineering Open House, etc. – as well as utilize school visits by faculty (for academic purposes) and athletic recruiting as alternative ways of recruiting. Again, these are difficult to plan and are regularly carried out on an ad hoc basis.***
- Strategic planning should be conceptualized as a tool that can cross pollinate one strategic planning area with other areas. Given the demographics of the Wilkes-Barre region, is there a way to frame diversifying the student population as a way to enhance viability, including economic viability? Since Penn State faces serious fiscal constraints, success in recruitment and retention could be powerful economic drivers, especially for smaller campuses. Eastern Pennsylvania is undoubtedly on the cusp of major shifts, and those institutions that look upon these shifts as opportunities rather than liabilities may be able to shape the culture of their schools in such a way that they thrive while others languish. ***RESPONSE: Penn State Wilkes-Barre is already working toward preparing for the shifts that are under way. We are participating members in Northeastern Pennsylvania Diversity Educational Consortium (NEPDEC) and already have a 3 hour campus wide training session on Hispanic Culture scheduled for the Fall. The Chancellor also serves on the Luzerne County Diversity Council.***

Challenge 4: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Workforce

- The objectives listed under this Challenge continue some strategies from prior planning periods, such as an emphasis on training. However, if anything, planning during this cycle is less robust. For example, some language in the prior plan can be taken to mean that objectives were in place to hire and move diverse faculty through the P&T process. Here, the objective is simply to diversify the applicant pool. Why the retreat? As alluded to in the introductory paragraphs above, this objective is one of those that is less than ambitious. Further, what is the explicit relationship between “creat[ing] a campus awareness of diversity” to Challenge 4? This objective could be just as easily applied to some of the other Challenges and is so broad as to be almost meaningless. Even the outcomes measures of “increasing attendance” by 5% pertain to improving processes or tactics, not outcomes that directly measure a more diverse workforce. **RESPONSE: The plan associated with this challenge is not a retreat from the previous level. The fact is that the campus currently has no Tenure Track faculty members. The last Tenure Track faculty received tenure this year and he added diversity being of Chinese heritage. We will recruit for a Tenure Track position in the fall in Administration of Justice. For this recruiting, the Plan will be followed. We will seek out a minority register of candidates and work to gain qualified minority applicants into the pool for the position. The campus will then select the best possible candidate. Additionally, the second objective will be modified to be more proactive than just creating “awareness.” It will focus on creating a sensitivity to and understanding of diversity issues.**

Education and Scholarship

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

- Planning for this Challenge completely omits U.S. diversity competencies. **RESPONSE: There was an oversight in this area, and the campus will revise the plan to include U.S. diversity competencies as well. The campus already reflects this in many courses as well as campus activities, but will correct this oversight and make it explicit in the Diversity Plan.**

Institutional Viability and Vitality

Challenge 6: Diversifying University Leadership and Management

- Planning for this Challenge virtually replicates the first objective for Challenge 4 and simply applies it to leadership and management. This approach virtually begs readers to conclude that little interest is taken for this Challenge or, perhaps, for both Challenges. Again, why aren't actual hires in view here? Planning here (and for Challenge 4) is such that this objective and, indeed, the entire Challenge can be “met” without one diverse candidate being hired. **RESPONSE: Again the campus will do its best to seek out minority candidates and will hire the most qualified applicants for the positions. The campus administration is diversified by gender and sexual orientation. In recent years the campus has added minority representation on its Advisory Board by adding African-American and Asians as members.**

Challenge 7: Coordinating Organizational Change to Support Our Diversity Goals

- As is true also for Challenge 6, planning for this Challenge is slight. Which “University Commission” is in view, as several commissions exist? The review team suggests that as information is circulated regarding diversity on Campus, a mechanism be put in place to monitor and update information on a regular basis or as otherwise needed. **RESPONSE: The campus already has several mechanisms for circulating information and reporting to the campus at large with its Campus Environmental Team (CET) and its Strategic Plan Oversight Team (SPOT). Additionally, the campus will employ the services of a post-doctoral internship this academic year where one of his assignments will be to review and assist with the SPOT analysis. He will also be given partial responsibility to help establish the baseline assessments for the Diversity Plan.**