

Feedback on the Diversity Strategic Plan
A Framework to Foster Diversity at Penn State: 2010-15
College of Information Sciences and Technology
Spring 2010

The College of Information Sciences and Technology (IST) 2010-15 plan provides a well-developed, noteworthy, and improved Challenge 5; however, the remainder of the plan does not fully address outlined concerns of IST's 2004-09 *Framework* update. The University's *Framework 2010-15* calls for "cutting-edge technologies to share diversity information, goals and accomplishments throughout the unit and across constituencies"; the review team believes IST has the potential to meet this challenge.

This plan falls short on previous recommendations to accomplish a more diverse student population and increase diversity within the workforce. Building strong relationships with partnering institutions and HBCU's may assist in recruiting underrepresented graduate students; yet, deficient are methods for recruiting underrepresented undergraduate students (the population that lacks representation the most, based upon prior data). IST invested a great deal of time and effort in building a foundation for diversity initiatives, yet this plan does not appear to bring IST to the next level. Noted by IST in the 2004-09 *Framework* update, "we need metrics; we have not done a satisfactory job of developing metrics or measurables." To strengthen reporting, integrate measurable strategic indicators. IST has a new Director of Multicultural Affairs. It is suggested that the director revisit the plan to identify additional goals and measurements; forward momentum with new leadership is promising.

Campus Climate and Intergroup Relations

Challenge 1: Developing a Shared and Inclusive Understanding of Diversity

- Inclusion of the College diversity definition on course syllabi and embedding the definition in class discussion is commendable. The plan language indicates that faculty and instructors have a choice; to encourage buy-in consider requesting 100% compliance of above initiatives. **RESPONSE:** *Suggestion is noted. The Office of Learning Initiatives has been spearheading an effort to standardize all course syllabi to include issues that go beyond race and gender.*
- As the Disability Services statement is not explicitly mentioned, it is unclear if it is used on all syllabi; usage is recommended as it could lead to a more welcoming environment to individuals with disabilities. http://www.equity.psu.edu/ods/faculty/syllabus_statement.asp **RESPONSE:** *This may have been an oversight. In the past, the recommended statement to include on course syllabi has included information about disability services. We will correct this situation.*
- Activities and programs listed in objective 3-6 are admirable, but could be more inclusive of the entire IST community including faculty/staff and students. **RESPONSE:** *There may be misinterpretation on the part of the readers. Objective 3 is aimed at faculty and students. Objective 4 is aimed at staff and faculty. Objective 5 is aimed at students and parents. Objective 6 is aimed at corporations that hire our students for internships and jobs.*
- Objective 3 disappointingly lacks potential cutting edge technology - to share diversity information in the "Targeted Areas for Improvement" mentioned in Challenge 1 of the *Framework*. **RESPONSE:** *While not stated in the plan, the college currently utilizes technology such as social media, e.g. Facebook, Twitter, blogs, and virtual worlds. Additionally, the Director of Multicultural Affairs has been working with our IT group to identify, plan for, and implement cutting edge technologies. As these technologies evolve, we will continue to explore their utilization.*

Challenge 2: Creating a Welcoming Campus Climate

- Continuation of the Diversity Climate Survey every three years is commendable; this is a change from previous plans. **RESPONSE:** *Due to the hiring of a new director, climate survey will be delayed until the 2010-11 academic year.*
- This section of the plan also lacks potential revolutionary technology (i.e., a suggestion box); expected from IST. Consider innovative strategies to embed a welcoming environment for tech savvy students, faculty and staff. **RESPONSE:** *The committee is aware that there are more technology related*

strategies that can and should be implemented and are working towards making these more available to the IST community

The committee now includes the Director of Information, Communication and Technology (ITC) for the college. With his expertise, we are exploring ways to improve these strategies. An example would be the Web based platform offered by the Staff Advisory committee for climate related issues or suggestions.

LCD displays throughout the IST building and social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter are utilized for promotion of activities within the college, and will be explored for use publicizing diversity related services and programs in the future.

Blogs from students that were participating in Education Abroad and international internships were published and carried by Penn State Newswire and on the IST website.

- Technology could be utilized to continuously gauge the climate and establish a welcoming environment, but is lackluster in this plan. **RESPONSE: The Director of ITC has been brought onboard to help the framework committee create web based forms that will capture its qualitative and quantitative data related to experiences, activities and programs. The Office of Learning Initiatives utilizes technologies, i.e. online surveys, YouTube, etc. in the first year courses to better understand and measure the learning outcomes and climate.**
- Enhanced matrixes are suggested. **Response: For future reports, a narrative to accompany the matrix will be included.**

Representation (Access and Success)

Challenge 3: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Student Body

- Hiring a recruiting coordinator is commendable; the definition of this position would be helpful. **RESPONSE: Criteria and scope for this position are currently being developed by administration of the college, as they assess the need and fit within the current college structure. Guiding this scope will be the use of demographic data from the Challenge Three strategic indicators.**
- The 2008 Diversity Task Force Report provides a road map to improve recruitment initiatives, yet these suggestions are not mentioned; incorporation and follow through is recommended. **RESPONSE: Agreed; incorporation and follow through will be noted.**
- It is admirable that measurements for student tracking will be implemented.
- Building strong relationships with partnering institutions and HBCU's has merit as it may assist recruiting underrepresented graduate students to IST. **RESPONSE: We have a special program with the Applied Research Lab and the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA) that provides summer opportunities for HBCU graduate students to conduct research at Penn State. In the past several years this program has supported over 30 students in this capacity.**

Challenge 4: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Workforce

- Overall, the plan is deficient of new or aggressive strategies to increase recruitment and retention of a diverse workforce. Benchmarking against other successful colleges may be helpful. **RESPONSE: The diversity committee has identified a few additional strategies to help with this. A subcommittee will be named of the diversity committee to be responsible for recruitment of diversity from within the surrounding communities. This will not only diversify the candidate pools but also focus on actively recruiting individuals for specific positions. This subcommittee will make use of networks to get jobs advertised to a wider radius (e.g. to utilize the Commonwealth Campus network). This subcommittee will be responsible for benchmarking best practices across the university. Additionally, the college will seek to allocate funds to support travel when appropriate and will be managed by the Office of Human Resources. Advice on which colleges to benchmark has been solicited from the OVPEE.**

- Objectives for retaining a diverse workforce appear to be very similar to previous plan efforts. **RESPONSE: A new strategy would be to expand the potential pool of candidates by utilizing the Dean's funds for travel expenses for the interview so that we can expand the geographic area of consideration. In addition, a second strategy would be to collaborate with local banking/rental/housing agencies to create an employment incentives program/packet of life sustaining access to partners such as realtors, school district representatives, local businesses, faith-based organizations, etc. to provide affordable housing opportunities in the areas surrounding the university and other relevant information to attract and retain diverse staff from other geographic areas. As a guide for creating this program we will look at the strategies currently in place for professional personnel and create a scaled model as it fits the needs of our college.**

Education and Scholarship

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

- This section of the IST plan is well-developed.
- Adding evaluation of inclusiveness to SRTE questions will assist positively in measuring diversity competencies. **RESPONSE: We are currently benchmarking what other colleges ask regarding diversity on SRTE's. It appears that only one other unit may ask directly about diversity on SRTE's. We plan to propose items for use in Fall 2010.**
- Initiatives included in Goal 3 are strong and begin to address concerns from the previous report; diversity topics seem to be included only in elective courses. **RESPONSE: We have two proposals on the table for adding courses to the sophomore year that would address diversity. At least one of these would be a required course**
- Making courses such as IST 341 mandatory for juniors and adding a 200 level requirement course is laudable. Including more diversity topics in first year courses is suggested. **RESPONSE: We agree.**
- The collection of baseline measures, quantitative metrics, and strategic indicators described in Goal 4, objective 1 are praiseworthy. **RESPONSE: These measures will provide to the whole IST community strong evidence of what we need to do.**
- Utilizing baseline data to reduce intergroup disparities and raising diversity awareness through service learning and travel experiences are positive steps.
- Encouraging and innovative concepts are: providing seed money for diversity scholarship research on innovative teaching approaches; awarding innovative teaching; and supporting faculty participation in teaching academies and fellowships. **RESPONSE: Celebration and recognition of these accomplishments in places such as iConnect, Advisory Board meetings, Newswire, Town Hall meetings, etc. will reward those currently participating and encourage increased participation in these types of activities.**

Institutional Viability and Vitality

Challenge 6: Diversifying University Leadership and Management

- Development of a succession plan of individuals from diverse groups within the College is a positive step to increasing leadership and management diversity.
- It is unclear how utilizing external Penn State resources such as those mentioned in objective 2 will provide diversity within leadership or management. Further explanation would be helpful. **RESPONSE: It will be noted in the 2012 mid-point report.**

Challenge 7: Coordinating Organizational Change to Support Our Diversity Goals

- A database of information for external funding of underrepresented groups is a good practice.
- Continuing to expand diversity initiatives with corporate partners is valued. **RESPONSE: Our Career Solutions team works closely with over 550 corporate partners to identify diverse students for internship and career opportunities. The team coordinates events to connect diverse students with potential employers.**
- The review team's impression is that Challenge Seven requires further exploration. Think about reviewing Challenge 7's Framework targeted areas for improvement. This might provide additional

insight into developing goals and objections to better meet this Challenge for IST. ***RESPONSE: We acknowledge the need to further explore this challenge.***