

Feedback on the Diversity Strategic Plan
A Framework to Foster Diversity at Penn State: 2010-15
Schreyer Honors College
Spring 2010

The Schreyer Honors College (SHC) is commended for moving its diversity strategies forward, anticipating remaining areas for improvement from the last cycle even before receiving feedback on its final update for the 2004-09 *Framework* plan. The new plan's multipronged approach of supporting the University's diversity emphasis is noteworthy, even though, in places, the plan appears somewhat thin. Further, several 2010-15 *Framework* targeted areas for improvement are not referenced in the plan, including efforts to increase the responsibilities and influence of the Diversity Committee and to align initiatives targeting diverse groups among a wider range of those identified in the College's definition of diversity (e.g., veterans, low-SES, those with disabilities, and the LGBT community, none of which appear to be mentioned in the plan outside its definition of diversity). Obviously, all Challenges should not necessarily receive the same emphasis in a "strategic" plan, and no plan will address all targeted areas for improvement, as the 2010-15 *Framework* itself implies by calling for units to develop more streamlined plans. But the plan could be more explicit in identifying its priorities so that it is clear what is being emphasized and what will be less critical in the upcoming planning period.

SHC might strengthen its efforts by shifting emphasis from increasing activities to assessing the impact—intended and unintended—of efforts already underway and for new planning initiatives. Accordingly, the strategic planning tools recommended in the feedback report for the final update are also endorsed here as SHC moves forward. More specifically, many of the "2010-2015 Targets" in the new plan, even those with metrics, are actually more action items than outcomes measures. For example, it is well and good to increase the number of diversity training hours among staff from 4 to 8, as called for in the new plan, but it is quite another thing to assess the impact of training on diversity goals. In other places, outcomes are actually in view, such as the acceptance rate of students from diverse racial/ethnic groups, but no metrics are in place to define success. Some outcomes can be difficult to assess and may call for more indirect measures, and perhaps measuring outcomes can be looked at more "strategically," that is, on only those initiatives that are most important. However, planning should move towards this approach rather than to simply settle for completing action items without assessing their actual impact on diversity goals.

Campus Climate and Intergroup Relations

Challenge 1: Developing a Shared and Inclusive Understanding of Diversity

- Does the College have a multicultural officer? The position Director of Diversity Outreach and Engagement (reported as a position enhancement in the final update) is not referenced as responsible for any efforts in the plan, whereas the 2010-15 *Framework* targets increased responsibilities and influence for this position. Also, the position does not appear in the organizational chart.

Challenge 2: Creating a Welcoming Campus Climate

- The plan to survey honors advisors and instructors is positive.
- Implementing periodic climate surveys is commendable, but it is uncertain who will be asked to participate (staff, resident students, non-resident students, other stakeholders?). SHC should consider benchmarking its survey results against data from available surveys like the 2008 Faculty/Staff Survey and NSSE to aid in climate assessment. Also, follow-up plans for probing into issues identified in climate surveys and guiding related targeted improvements are unclear.
- The review team acknowledges the value of garnering feedback on the application process, but are process improvements also envisioned to overcome roadblocks that might hinder diverse students from applying and enrolling as Scholars?
- Expanding partnerships to promote existing diversity programs is laudable. However, attention should be paid to reaching consciously beyond race/ethnicity and gender to include other groups, such as LGBT, veterans, low-income, first-generation students, and so on. How involved will SHC be in these programs beyond promotion and publicity?
- The College is applauded for anticipating the need to secure information from students who did not accept offers, a need that was apparent in the final update. A good place to start would be to

disaggregate responses among diverse and mainstream students to determine whether or not disparities exist that impact lower yields for diverse students.

Representation (Access and Success)

Challenge 3: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Student Body

- Recruiting activities are systematically outlined but still appear to be somewhat modest given the needs under this Challenge. What about a more-aggressive approach to recruiting existing students into the College? Most important, the focus of the plan appears to remain on activity rather than achievement. What outcomes constitute success for SHC under this Challenge?
- Will efforts continue to focus on race/ethnicity and gender, or will they expand to include other groups, such as adult students, students with disabilities, etc.? The College could take advantage of undergraduate enrollment and student aid data to begin moving beyond race/ethnicity and gender in defining progress.
- No mention is made in the plan on retention outcomes.
- It is beyond the purview of the review team to make suggestions about SHC admission policies. However, in the spirit of collegial conversation, the team wonders aloud whether the College might consider revisiting applications of students not selected in the first round of admission reviews. Given the potential benefits of diversifying the student body, we wonder about the potential success of underrepresented/underserved students, including first-generation and low-income students, who fall a bit below the SHC threshold, given potential partnerships with such other units, such as the TRIO programs, Student Support Services Program, and others.

Challenge 4: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Workforce

- Increased efforts to recruit diverse staff, instructors, advisors, and student employees are positive. However, again, the focus remains on activity rather than achievement. How will progress be measured?

Education and Scholarship

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

- SHC's efforts to support and launch interdisciplinary and creative international and intercultural courses are exemplary. However, further planning is called for to assess course impacts upon curricular goals, including student diversity competencies, which do not appear in the current plan.
- The College should develop processes that optimize sustaining its curricular innovations and explore whether or not SHC international and intercultural courses can be replicated throughout the University to benefit a much wider pool of students.

Institutional Viability and Vitality

Challenge 6: Diversifying University Leadership and Management

- Support for the Administrative Fellows Program and other staff development endeavors is noted by the review team, but the focus remains on activity rather than achievement.

Challenge 7: Coordinating Organizational Change to Support Our Diversity Goals

- Efforts to promote engagement in diversity planning and to support related University Faculty Senate efforts are constructive, but as is mentioned throughout the report, the focus of the plan remains on activity rather than achievement.