

**Feedback on Progress Implementing  
A Framework to Foster Diversity at Penn State: 1998-2003  
Information Technology Services  
Final Report**

Information Technology Services (ITS) makes a significant contribution to Penn State's diversity goals by providing technology support for diversity programs across the University and through its own diversity initiatives. One ITS signature program, Academic Computing Fellows, is designed to provide IT-related research opportunities for graduate students who are women or from diverse racial/ethnic groups. ITS has also initiated steps to develop a welcoming climate for all its employees. For example, several years ago, the vice provost began a series of monthly luncheons with staff to discuss climate and diversity issues, and this practice is now replicated at the senior director level within some sub-units.

As noted in the mid-point feedback report, a significant portion of ITS' diversity work occurs through augmenting the diversity efforts of other units through assistive and other technology support. This support is laudable, but it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between activities that are part of ITS' core responsibilities of providing technology assistance and those that go "above and beyond," such as Academic Computing Fellows. ITS could have strengthened its final report by making this separation clearer. Reporting would also be improved by the consistent use of data showing progress towards concrete goals that include measurable objectives, benchmarks, metrics to gauge success, and outcomes reported against these metrics. For example, although the Professional Development Program seeks out African Americans for inclusion in the program, no data are provided on the number or percentage of African Americans participants, though data on women's participation (35%) are reported. The section of the report on Academic Computing Fellows indicates that half of program participants have been women and 31 percent have been students of color, but no graduation data are included.

Finally, ITS appears to have used the questions from the mid-point assessment instead of those for the final assessment, as provided by the Office of the Vice Provost for Educational Equity. While the mid-point questions are similar to the questions for the final assessment, this change altered some of the information expected, potentially impeding an accurate assessment of ITS' efforts.

***Challenge 1: Developing a Shared and Inclusive Understanding of Diversity***

- ❖ ITS has a broad definition of diversity, which includes the phrase, "empowering variety within people," which is particularly cogent in expressing a core philosophy of diversity work.
- ❖ The development of assistive technology for ITS computer labs at University Park and at the Pattee/Paterno Library is laudable. It is not clear whether this technological support is provided at locations other than University Park.
- ❖ More details would be useful for some points included in the final report under this Challenge: (1) how many Web-based tutorials focus on diversity among the many other tutorials offered, (2) how is the use of these tutorials promoted by ITS, (3) how many hits have the tutorials received, (4) what strategies have been employed by the diversity committee for improving the work climate in ITS, and (5) have any management changes occurred that impact diversity as a result of extensive management training for ITS managers?

***Challenge 2: Creating a Welcoming Campus Climate***

- ❖ Though some recommendations following the climate survey are provided, no actual survey results are reported. The merits of ITS' follow-up activities cannot be adequately assessed without a summary of these results.
- ❖ At present, the primary method of identifying climate concerns and responding to them appears to be through the climate luncheons and follow-up activities. ITS is commended for this innovative approach. However, relying solely on informal methods may compromise the validity of the findings, as the information, although treated confidentially, is not collected anonymously. ITS may want to consider another climate survey or other anonymous methods of identifying climate issues.
- ❖ ITS' climate initiatives seem to be geared towards assessment and response to individual problems rather than the development and implementation of a proactive, systemic approach. Although the proposed seminar

series with Affirmative Action seems to be a *planning* item, not a *reporting* item, initiatives such as this suggest a more positive direction.

- ❖ ITS is commended for utilizing benchmarks for women and African Americans in evaluating its employee demographic profile. The Penn State student population may be a better benchmark for ITS than the Centre County workforce. This benchmark would urge aggressive initiatives to prepare and recruit underrepresented Penn State students for careers at ITS, such as now occurs for new Penn State graduates in the Professional Development Program. ITS may want to consider expanding this program to meet this critical need. No benchmark information is provided for other diverse groups.

### ***Challenge 3: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Student Body***

- ❖ Some programs mentioned under this Challenge illustrate ITS' need to distinguish between diversity endeavors that are necessary components of its core responsibilities from programs that go "above and beyond." For example, ITS indicates that it contributes to recruiting diverse students by providing help-desk consultation and that this service especially benefits women and students of color because they may have more difficulty accessing information technology. Also, ITS mentions its work in compliance with section 508 of the ADA. While these endeavors may make a salutary contribution to diversity, it is difficult to envision help-desk services as a "diversity" initiative, and ADA compliance is mandated by law.
- ❖ Academic Computing Fellows is ITS' signature program. Now that 29 students have gone through the program since 1987, ITS should consider examining data that evaluate the effectiveness of this program (i.e., graduation data about participants compared to non-participants). Positive outcomes would identify the program as a best practice.

### ***Challenge 4: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Workforce***

- ❖ ITS has developed numerous initiatives to diversify its workforce, including a spousal recruitment program and a program for ITS staff in lower grades (16-18, which are often filled by women) to provide skills that would assist in advancement to higher grades. The "2003 Final Update" sections under this Challenge indicate that these programs are a continuation of initiatives that have existed for several years now. It is constructive to continue programs that have a demonstrated impact on unit demographics. However, no data to support this conclusion are provided, so an accurate assessment of ITS' efforts in this area is not possible.

### ***Challenge 5: Developing a Curriculum That Supports the Goals of Our New General Education Plan***

- ❖ Challenge 5 naturally complements the ITS mission. ITS appears to understand its role in diversifying the curriculum and is commended for its numerous collaborations, which extend its impact across the University. ITS should be mindful of striking a balance between supporting the diversity efforts of other units and focusing on diversity within its unit, although, at present, ITS appears to be balancing its priorities well.

### ***Challenge 6: Diversifying University Leadership and Management***

- ❖ ITS appears to be looking for ways to diversify its leadership. A few ongoing programs are mentioned, and one commendable program (the program for advancing staff in grades 16-18 into higher grades) is also mentioned under Challenge 4. ITS is encouraged to expand its efforts to address this Challenge, including the development of diversity leaders from the Academic Computing Fellows program.

### ***Challenge 7: Coordinating Organizational Change to Support Our Diversity Goals***

- ❖ Most of the items mentioned under this Challenge also apply to Challenges 4 and 6. Organizational change cuts across numerous *Framework* Challenges, not only areas of staffing and promotion, and maximizes the influence of those who have less power, such as women, staff of color, members of the LGBT community, and people with disabilities. ITS may want to consider innovative approaches (e.g., less hierarchical and more inclusive decision-making processes) that can create organizational change without relying only on a shift in the ITS workforce and leadership demographics.