

Feedback on Progress Implementing
A Framework to Foster Diversity at Penn State: 1998-2003
Office of University Relations

Since the midpoint update, the Office of University Relations has implemented a number of new programs and initiatives aimed at better communicating its accomplishments in fostering diversity within the unit and on behalf of the University. As noted in the mid-point feedback, University Relations is generally “on-message” with the University’s diversity goals; however, it has not fully translated the message into the operational practices of the unit. A stronger emphasis on addressing the Challenges of the *Framework* within the unit would support and enhance the unit’s University-level activities. Measures and supporting data for each Challenge would strengthen the report.

Challenge 1: Developing a Shared and Inclusive Understanding of Diversity

- ❖ The definition of diversity remains broad, but strives to be inclusive. A more specific definition, consistent with the University’s concept of diversity, would help to inform the unit’s internal diversity initiatives as well as its University-level actions to “communicate the University’s commitment to diversity.”
Response: We are broadening our definition of diversity to include disabilities, adult learners and LBGT.
- ❖ Regularly emphasizing the importance of inclusiveness and diversity in staff meetings is positive. It is also positive that the unit has established a diversity committee to examine diversity issues within University Relations, as well as its communications across the University. More information on the membership, charge, function, and frequency of meetings would be helpful. Articulation of the roles of the diversity committee and unit administration in diversity planning, including development of the unit’s update and new diversity plan, would also be helpful.
Response: The committee will have representation from across the different areas of the unit. The committee will play a central role in the development of the next diversity plan for the unit.
- ❖ The small committee, including a representative from the Office of the Vice Provost for Educational Equity, to advise on content for the *Diversity Newswire* is positive.
- ❖ It is positive that the unit emphasized presenting diverse images in its many communications vehicles. It appears that emphasis is on African-American and gender representation within the student body. A broader range of visual representation would be helpful.
Response: We plan to have greater representation of the diverse communities of Penn State in future communications vehicles.

Challenge 2: Creating a Welcoming Campus Climate

- ❖ It is positive that University Relations is at the forefront of the University’s mechanisms for identification and first response to emerging climate issues. More proactive mechanisms for identifying and responding to climate issues within the unit would complement the unit’s University-level leadership in this area.
- ❖ Following diversity issues through outside media that target diverse groups (i.e., *Black Issues in Higher Education, Hispanic Outlook*) is positive. More information on the range of targeted publications received and how this benchmarking activity is applied within the unit would be helpful.
- ❖ The *Diversity Newswire* is a best practice.

Challenge 3: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Student Body

- ❖ Development of TV, radio and Web marketing tools that reflect and target diverse audiences, as well as outreach to African American newspapers is positive. The unit is encouraged to apply these approaches to University-wide materials to communicate the rich diversity of Penn State to all audiences.
- ❖ Creating projections of demographic trends within Pennsylvania to be used in presentations and mailings to higher education leaders, legislators, trustees and donors is positive.

- ❖ The teen marketing campaign's effort to "show diversity as an accepted and integral part of the Penn State experience" is positive. More information demonstrating the success of this campaign, including data on the impact of this campaign on recruitment, would be helpful.

Response: Follow-up survey work on the teen campaign shows that African American teens are the most likely to say that "students who go to Penn State are the type of people I want to be friends with." Black teens were, however, less likely than white teens to name Penn State as the "top university" in the state.

- ❖ It appears that there is no focus on activities to support the University's retention efforts.

Challenge 4: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Workforce

- ❖ Creating internships and wage-payroll openings to bring in women and people of color for semester assignments to help offset low turnover in permanent staff positions is a positive strategy.
- ❖ It is unclear whether any of the unit's University-level communication efforts support the University's focus on recruiting and retaining a diverse workforce.

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

- ❖ No response was given.

Challenge 6: Diversifying University Leadership and Management

- ❖ Unit support for professional development through degree programs, national and regional conferences, HRDC offerings, and programs such as Leadership Centre County is positive. Data about the demographic profile of those who attended these opportunities and the outcomes would be helpful.

Challenge 7: Coordinating Organizational Change to Support Our Diversity Goals

- ❖ Creation of two internal diversity committees (one for the unit's overall diversity goals and the other to advise on *Diversity Newswire* and *Intercom*) is positive. More information on how these committees function and the relationship between them would be helpful.

Response: In the past, the committees have met on an "as needed" basis, but in the coming year, we will have regularly scheduled meetings to engage more conversation and planning on diversity issues.

- ❖ Creation of internship and wage-payroll positions to create entry-level experience to underrepresented students is positive.