

Feedback on Progress Implementing
A Framework to Foster Diversity at Penn State: 1998-2003
Penn State Erie, The Behrend College
Final Report

Penn State Erie, The Behrend College promotes an appreciation and celebration of diversity through numerous programs and services. Many Behrend offices and committees focus on different components of the College's diversity programming, including Student Affairs, the Dean's Committee on Diversity (DCD), the Diversity and Educational Equity Committee (DEEC), the Multi-Cultural Council (MCC), and the Women's Commission Liaison Committee (WCLC).

In the final report on the implementation of *A Framework to Foster Diversity at Penn State: 1998-2003*, Behrend cites economic and demographic constraints as factors that have limited the effectiveness of its efforts. The report indicates that these factors have contributed to the decline of new African American baccalaureate students. Retaining underrepresented faculty is difficult because of a relatively small population of diverse professionals in the Erie area. These demographic realities are important to understand; however, the review team has concerns that faculty, staff, and administrators may be so mindful of these constraints that only nominal advances in the diversity profile of Behrend are now expected. This tone permeates throughout the entire report. Behrend is encouraged to view these constraints as challenges to be overcome through aggressive planning, assessment, and the implementation of creative diversity initiatives.

Despite the numerous programs mentioned in the final report, Behrend does not consistently report performance indicators to assess program outcomes. Enrollment data are provided for MAPP/WISE that indicate program success, but graduation data would also be helpful. Though "great strides" are reported on the recruitment of students of color into leadership positions for student organizations, no data support this point. Concrete goals, measurable objectives, metrics to gauge success, and outcomes reported against these metrics for as many programs as possible would have strengthened the report considerably.

Finally, the report does not follow the question-and-answer format provided by Educational Equity for *Framework* reporting, thereby making it difficult for the review team to identify and evaluate the College's diversity progress since the mid-point report. Also, little information is noted on LGBT equity in the report.

Challenge 1: Developing a Shared and Inclusive Understanding of Diversity

- ❖ Behrend defines diversity as "a community of students, faculty, and staff that reflects the diversity of the region in which we are located and serve." This definition seems to restrict the College's diversity aspirations to what it currently *is* instead of what it ultimately could *become*.
- ❖ Behrend reports the absence of a University-wide climate assessment as a barrier to identifying best practices within its community. A College-wide assessment is recommended as a better measure than a University-wide assessment because it could be tailored to Behrend's needs.
- ❖ Behrend identifies as a best practice, "weaving diversity related processes, programs and procedures into the fabric of the College." The processes and outcomes associated with this best practice are not clearly defined. How is success measured? What methods of assessment are used?

Challenge 2: Creating a Welcoming Campus Climate

- ❖ The structures in place for handling climate issues have good potential. Some guidelines are under revision, and further development along these lines could enhance the entire process.
- ❖ The climate problems that have surfaced, such as the defacement of posters for diversity-related events, are cause for concern. These actions send a chilling if not threatening message. Replacing posters and monitoring areas where they are defaced are important, but what actions have been taken to address the underlying issues? Consultation with appropriate University bodies (i.e., diversity-related commissions) might be helpful.
- ❖ The recent ADA improvements are commendable. It is unclear how Behrend interacts with the overall University plan for ADA compliance. Does the College provide sole support for projects? Does Behrend

contribute supplemental funding to enhance University-sponsored projects that are designated for Behrend? Does Behrend exert influence to move projects up in the queue?

- ❖ The roles and responsibilities of the new part-time coordinator of disability services are not clear.
- ❖ The review team interprets the focus-group questions for women students as more of an assessment of student satisfaction than of climate. Only a few of the twelve questions focus on gender. It might be more useful to first conduct a climate survey that gathers responses from all students and then use focus groups as a follow-up method to seek further information on issues that emerge from the survey.

Challenge 3: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Student Body

- ❖ Challenge 3 is clearly an area of strength for Behrend, which notes an impressive array of programs. The College shows evidence that new ideas frequently emerge to overcome barriers to success. The most critical point is the need to continuously assess programs, both new and ongoing, and reallocate resources to those that prove most successful.
- ❖ The 60 percent increase in the distribution of student activity fees for diversity programming is noteworthy. Between what years did this increase occur? Also, as the responsibility for the distribution of funds from student activity fees ultimately resides with students, what role did the College play in this increase or in the budget pilot project with the Multi-Cultural Council?
- ❖ Behrend identifies MAPP/WISE as a best practice, and the enrollment outcomes presented in the report confirm this evaluation. Gathering data on outcomes for other endeavors, such as the Student of Color Outreach Program and the evening programs for adult learners, could substantiate other best practices.

Challenge 4: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Workforce

- ❖ Behrend reports modest success in the overall representation of women faculty, including increases in the associate and full professor ranks. Chemistry has done particularly well, with half of its faculty now comprised of women. It is not clear whether all promotions to associate rank are accompanied by tenure.
- ❖ Faculty representation among diverse racial/ethnic groups remains flat. Successes in recruiting have been offset by retirements and attrition. Though retention of faculty of color seems to be a major concern, few concrete endeavors seem to be in place to help remedy this problem.
- ❖ Assessment of current initiatives might reveal important information, but such assessment seems to be lacking. For example, Behrend indicates that the most successful efforts have come from personal contact through recruitment by peers and through professional organizations. However, no data are provided to substantiate this evaluation.
- ❖ Some recruitment and retention programs show good potential, such as training for those who chair faculty searches. Behrend indicates it has “identified principles of good practice for recruiting,” but no details are provided on these practices. The new initiative by the CEO/dean for spousal/partner hiring with other local colleges and universities could become a best practice. Again, assessment of these efforts will be critical.

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

- ❖ The listing of GI courses indicates that few focus on race/ethnicity and none focus on LGBT or disability issues.
- ❖ International education appears to be a strong component of the curriculum with over 350 students participating in education abroad over the past four years. Has Behrend done any benchmarking against peer institutions to put these data into context? Also, the College sponsored or organized 10 education abroad programs during this period. More details would be helpful, particularly comments from students on how these experiences affected their overall educational experience at Behrend.

Challenge 6: Diversifying University Leadership and Management

- ❖ Behrend supports employee involvement in Penn State leadership training programs, such as Mastering Supervision, which was offered at Behrend to facilitate participation. Also, two staff members of color were given new job responsibilities to augment their skills and increase their advancement potential. These efforts are notable, but no data are provided to demonstrate actual advancement of diverse faculty and staff into leadership positions.
- ❖ The initiatives to assist faculty of color by providing them with support to finish their Ph.D.s and with additional salaries to stay competitive in the market are innovative and potential best practices, though they might fit better under Challenge 4.

Challenge 7: Coordinating Organizational Change to Support Our Diversity Goals

- ❖ Several organizational realignments and budget reallocations have been put in place to support Behrend's diversity goals, including a reorganized structure for the College's diversity committees, the new part-time disability coordinator, movement of international student functions into Admissions, and new targets for Affirmative Action in the College's schools. More details, particularly on the Affirmative Action targets, would be useful.
- ❖ One innovative program, the Minority Dissertation Fellowship, may not be continued in the future due to budget constraints. The review team hopes that every effort will be made to maintain this innovative program.