

Feedback on Progress Implementing
A Framework to Foster Diversity at Penn State: 1998-2003
Commonwealth College
Final Report

The College presents a thorough, well-organized report of activities and results for the 1998-2003 *Framework* period. The Dean, Campus Executive Officers and staff are commended for providing the extensive information about each campus including a demographic profile and an overview of actions. Challenges are clearly identified and geographic demographics are presented not as barriers, but as challenges that can be addressed. The report also clearly expresses a sense of unity within the College while retaining the individuality of each location.

Noteworthy gains have been made in hiring women and underrepresented administrators and faculty throughout the College. Increases in minority students are also noted.

Challenge 1: Developing a Shared and Inclusive Understanding of Diversity

- ❖ The College employs a systematic approach to address diversity. Growth in this area since the midpoint evaluation is apparent. Development of a shared definition of diversity that is comprehensive and inclusive is commendable. More explanation of what is meant by “reasonable representation” in the context of the College’s service area demographics would be helpful.
RESPONSE: Given the existing demographics of local communities surrounding each campus, we believe that striving for a modest, but achievable, array of differences at most locations is preferable to setting unrealistically high goals for specific underrepresented groups.
- ❖ Diversity committees that include broad representation from all campus constituents are active at all but one campus.
RESPONSE: Eleven campuses currently have committees that focus on diversity issues. The College will encourage the twelfth campus to establish a committee as well.
- ❖ Using FTCAP, new student orientation and educational programming as forums for distribution and discussion of diversity information is positive. Additional opportunities should be explored.
RESPONSE: The 2004-2009 plan outlines four strategies to enable the distribution and discussion of diversity information with students: creating a new diversity component on the College website; establishing minimum expectations for type and frequency of diversity educational programming; setting a target for minimum percentage of intercultural and international course offerings; and continuing the development of College expectations for diversity and global components within FTCAP and new student orientation.
- ❖ Best practices include the College’s definition of diversity and its participation in the Northeast Pennsylvania Diversity Education Consortium (NEPDEC). More detail on the success of the initiatives listed would be helpful.
RESPONSE: We will provide this feedback, as described in the 2004-2009 plan.

Challenge 2: Creating a Welcoming Campus Climate

- ❖ More information on “periodic campus ‘walk-throughs’” would be helpful.
RESPONSE: The York Campus strategic plan indicates: "Approaches to enhancing climate include doing a periodic walk-through of campus to determine if all students/faculty/staff can see themselves through diversity displays in the bookstore, advertisements of diversity opportunities, books/magazines available in the library, food in the Lions Den, faces in the halls and on the sidewalks. Also, talking with students/faculty/staff to determine their comfort level." As an example, we know that students see themselves reflected in the flags on campus. Therefore, the campus continues to add flags to its collection and will be more vigilant about alternating them if space becomes limiting.
- ❖ The College is encouraged to review its terminology to consistently use terms such as “underrepresented,” “multicultural” “diversity enhancement” and “intercultural” rather than “minority.”

- ❖ An array of best practices, both College-wide and campus specific, are indicated by the College, including the Minority Affairs Advisory Board (Shenango), participation in NEPDEC (Hazleton, Wilkes-Barre, Worthington Scranton); “I’ll look out for you” campaign (New Kensington), and “Family Night” for adult learners.

Challenge 3: Recruiting and retaining a Diverse Student Body

- ❖ Retention rates for students of color are positive, and are often higher than those of white students.
- ❖ Certain constraints are inherent in the nature of the Commonwealth College that impact recruiting and retaining a diverse student body. The College acknowledges these challenges and remains committed to continued progress.
- ❖ Best practices include: the World of Diversity online community (Professor Deborah Gill, Dubois); Campus Environment Team sponsoring diversity related events (Fayette, Wilkes-Barre), K-12 programs; tutoring programs; and Online Progress Reporting System that facilitates early intervention. More information on the impact of the Online Progress Reporting System on retention would be helpful.
RESPONSE: The Online Progress Reporting System (OPR) has been fully operational at all 12 campuses since Fall 2003. We expect to include information about outcomes from OPR in the mid-point report for the 2004-2009 Framework.

Challenge 4: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Workforce

- ❖ The College has made progress diversifying faculty, administrative, and upper level staff positions, including the hiring of four women, two African-Americans, one Hispanic/Latino, and two persons with disabilities. Less progress has been made in hiring underrepresented staff members and technical service workers, especially where area demographics are a significant factor.
RESPONSE: The College intends to maintain its success in the areas noted. We anticipate slower progress in the staff and technical service areas because we rely on local markets which are often minimally diverse and because those positions have limited turnover. However, we have identified actions in the 2004-2009 plan that should prove helpful.
- ❖ Recognizing diversity-related activities and efforts in staff and administrator performance reviews is positive. It is unclear whether such activities are similarly valued in faculty evaluations and in the tenure and promotion process.
RESPONSE: Diversity-related activities are reported in the annual Faculty Activity Reports (FAR) for teaching, research, and service. In particular, there is a specific category “Record of contributions to the University’s program to enhance equal opportunity and cultural diversity” included in the section on Service. Significant contributions to diversity and multiculturalism are highlighted in the Dean’s letter of support for promotion and tenure decisions.
- ❖ Best practices include contacting HBCUs and the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities; Faculty Mentoring Guidelines; including a diversity advocate on search committees for faculty and director of academic affairs positions; recognizing diversity-related activities in staff and administrator performance reviews; and an annual convocation for staff assistants from all locations.

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

- ❖ The new College Director of International Programs has brought attention to studying abroad and is exploring a variety of avenues to increase student awareness and participation. The College is encouraged to maintain a balance between international and U.S. diversity efforts and to develop ways to help students apply their international experience within the context of U.S. diversity. The College may also consider funding support to facilitate student participation in international opportunities.
RESPONSE: The College Director of International Programs position was created 18 months ago, so there has been an unusually high level of international activity during a short time as the Director has worked to heighten interest in an international agenda for the College. We recognize the important balance needed with U.S. diversity effort and will seek this balance during the 2004-2009 period.

Providing College funding for student participation in international opportunities is a major challenge at this time. However, in prior years the College has assisted campuses with some subsidies and directed faculty to resources available through the Office of International Programs. We will continue to do so.

- ❖ Course offerings at many of the College locations are positive, including increases in number of courses offered, incorporation of diversity in general education classes, and other actions listed in the appendices for campuses.

Challenge 6: Diversifying University Leadership and Management

- ❖ The College's efforts have been met with notable success.
- ❖ Active efforts to identify potential candidates, inclusion of a "diversity advocate" on each search team, and attention to diversity throughout the search process are positive, especially in administrative searches. A second review of known underrepresented candidates to insure that a fair screening has occurred is a best practice.
- ❖ Additional best practices are noted by the College, include 360-degree review of all "director and above" positions; and opportunities for members of underrepresented groups to serve in interim senior administrative positions.

Challenge 7: Coordinating Organizational Change to Support Our Diversity Goals

- ❖ Organizational realignment for enhancing diversity including the clarification of duties of the associate deans and director of human resources is positive.
- ❖ Creation of a part-time position to coordinate international programs is positive.
- ❖ More information on how diversity is incorporated into FTCAP activities would be helpful.
RESPONSE: The College assessment notes that campuses incorporated diversity training into FTCAP. See response for Challenge #1 (above) for discussion of integrating diversity into FTCAP activities.
- ❖ The College has shown significant progress with numerous diversity initiatives. Best practices include: challenging students to develop diversity programs and activities (York); establishing new diversity specialist positions (Worthington Scranton, York); establishing Advisory Boards to the Dean to help keep diversity issues at the forefront of administration at College and campus locations, and the inclusion of a diversity component in all performance reviews.