

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

The Eberly College of Science notes numerous initiatives directed towards the diversity goals of the College. The College sponsors or participates in several programs that seek to recruit students who are underrepresented in science into the College, especially students of color. Also, the dean takes an active role in the College's diversity initiatives and has established a College-wide climate and diversity committee, along with a climate and diversity committee within each department.

Although many of these programs show much potential and may be quite successful, the College's final progress report on its implementation of *A Framework to Foster Diversity at Penn State: 1998-2003* does not provide sufficient evidence of program success. For example, the College cites cluster classes, which employ smaller class sizes, as a strategy the College uses to help students succeed in introductory math, chemistry, and physics. The College is commended for its willingness to bear potential additional costs for these courses, but a thorough assessment of outcomes is needed to support the efficacy of this approach. Also, descriptions of programs in the report sometimes lack important details. For example, the final report notes that the College is an active member of the National Physical Sciences Consortium (NPSC), which targets underrepresented students of color for its programs. However, no information is provided on how many students in the College have been NPSC fellows or how many years the College has participated in the consortium. Additionally, little was found in the report that was specific to LGBT equity or disability issues.

Finally, the College could have strengthened the report by employing some procedural and methodological refinements. First, the College does not follow up on some items mentioned in the College's response within the mid-point feedback report, such as the annual "summary fact sheet" on diversity issues (cf., Challenge 1). Second, the College cites future initiatives (i.e., "we look to partner with," "we will look for ways," "we will initiate," and "we plan to work with") in the final report. Future directions for the College should be reserved for the diversity strategic plan. Third, demographic data on the number and percentage of underrepresented students and faculty are not provided in the report. Without this data, it is difficult to assess the overall success of many of the College's initiatives, especially the success of specific programs. Finally, the College appears to have used 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 the College's efforts.

RESPONSE: We have elected to focus on the future and not offer responses to this report. Suggestions made here will be taken into consideration in our responses and changes to our 2004-2009 Report.

Challenge 1: Developing a Shared and Inclusive Understanding of Diversity

- ❖ Communication about diversity within the College includes information about diversity on the College Web site, emails, and Web-based and departmental surveys. More specifics on these items would be helpful, along with the responses from the College community to these initiatives, including the major results from the surveys and any subsequent recommendations.
- ❖ The College-wide and departmental climate and diversity committee structure is an impressive organizational accomplishment. It would be useful to have more information on the potential collaborations and communication structures that exist between these committees. This structure is a potential best practice, although tangible outcomes that demonstrate success against clear and appropriate metrics are necessary before it can truly be considered as such.

Challenge 2: Creating a Welcoming Campus Climate

- ❖ The dean's efforts (College executive committee, annual presentations to departmental faculty meetings, annual new faculty workshop, lunches with female faculty, and dollars to support faculty hiring) demonstrate "visible leadership for diversity." Do department heads have any similar responsibilities?

- ❖ Several projects and initiatives designed to improve the climate focus on the physical environment, such as murals reflecting diversity, multicultural office displays, and a designated location with appropriate facilities for mothers who breastfeed. These projects are good initial steps at improving the physical climate. Additional steps are needed beyond these projects to insure a positive social climate.

Challenge 3: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Student Body

- ❖ The material on recruitment and retention contains numerous details on a variety of long-standing programs. Some data are provided on the Alcoa Pennypacker program, such as the number of participants, the percentage of participants who are women and students of color, and the number of students who made the Deans List. Other data would also be useful (e.g., the graduation rates of participants, especially as compared with non-participants with similar academic profiles).
- ❖ Most often, outcomes on initiatives are not included in the final progress report. Also, some important details, like the number of student participants and the years these programs were conducted, are often omitted. For example, the College describes in detail the activities associated with the Pennsylvania Junior Academy of Sciences (PJAS) but does not indicate how many students participated and whether or not any of these students eventually enrolled in the College or at Penn State.

Challenge 4: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Workforce

- ❖ The College details numerous efforts to recruit and retain underrepresented faculty. For example, one program brings potential new faculty of color into post-doctoral positions to groom them for tenure-track appointments although, thus far, no post-doctoral positions have been filled. More information is needed to fully describe the process used to fill these positions. Also, the dean is exploring opportunities for endowed chairs and professorships to be filled by women and faculty of color, and he is conducting regular meetings with women faculty and following up on concerns expressed at these meetings. Although the College notes some concrete goals and outcomes, the efficacy of the efforts could be supported if metrics were developed and outcomes were reported for all programs.
- ❖ The success of recruitment and retention efforts has been uneven among various departments. Progress towards overall College goals is slow at best. The College indicates that Chemistry has tripled its number of women faculty, largely due to the presence of senior women who are already in the department. Though specifics are not provided, the College mentions recruiting success in one department by contacting candidates early in their graduate training, establishing the department's interest, and making offers before individuals are on the job market. The College also notes presentations in both 2002 and 2003 to department heads and search committee chairs on how to diversify applicant pools, though no information is given on attendance at these meetings.
- ❖ Compared to faculty, initiatives for staff seem to almost be an afterthought. No concrete endeavors for staff were found to be in place, only plans for the future. The College is considering initiating two new strategies for staff positions: revealing the ethnicity of applicants earlier in the selection process and posting vacancies externally more often. Consultation with the Office of Human Resources is warranted to prevent violation of equal opportunity employment standards and to minimize the potential backlash of identifying the ethnicity of candidates without regard to job qualification.

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

- ❖ The College's narrative under this Challenge begins by pointing out that its subject matter doesn't include the academic study of cultural issues so that it is necessary to look for other ways to address multiculturalism, such as through instruction on multicultural "practitioners of science," which is primarily addressed in first-year seminars. This perspective appears to result in the lack of a consistent or cohesive approach throughout all College departments for integrating diversity into the core of the curriculum. Although pure science, per se, does not study culture, the College needs to utilize this fact as a challenge to be more creative. For example, the types of problems scientists decide to investigate are often laden with ethical and cultural implications, and a comprehensive and inclusive approach to science education could include discussion of these points throughout the curriculum.

- ❖ The College is developing constructive collaborations with other units (e.g., Liberal Arts and the Africana Research Center) to augment its curricular and co-curricular diversity endeavors. The review team agrees with the College's statement that "it is not enough to depend on other academic units to integrate diversity into the science curriculum." The College is encouraged to make its own unique contributions to these collaborations and to aggressively pursue its own diversity initiatives in the curriculum.

Challenge 6: Diversifying University Leadership and Management

- ❖ The College reports success in promoting women faculty into positions of leadership. The College is especially commended for its appointment of a woman as an assistant dean. On the other hand, as acknowledged in the report, progress for faculty and staff of color has been slower. This section of the report largely repeats the College's response to the mid-point feedback report and does not provide any evidence of effort in this area over the past few years. However, the College's goal of mentoring faculty of color to achieve tenure is an appropriate area to focus on in its initial efforts.

Challenge 7: Coordinating Organizational Change to Support Our Diversity Goals

- ❖ In response to the mid-point feedback report, the College acknowledged a failure to delineate how accountability is shared through the College organization, including the responsibilities and accountabilities of department heads and other members of the College. The College's response also indicated that every unit would have a mechanism for collecting and responding to feedback on issues and concerns relating to climate and diversity. In the final report, no progress towards this goal is provided but, rather, the report repeats the College's intent to develop a mechanism for collecting and responding to issues relating to climate and diversity. This lack of information about progress during the past five years provides no basis to assess the effort, coordination, or understanding about the importance of organizational change to support diversity.