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< <http://www.equity.psu.edu/framework/updates> >

**Feedback on Progress Implementing
A Framework to Foster Diversity at Penn State: 1998-2003
College of Agricultural Sciences**

RESPONSE: All responses to this feedback have been incorporated into the College of Agricultural Sciences final progress report.

The College of Agricultural Sciences is a large and diverse organization with extensive programs devoted to Cooperative Extension and Outreach in addition to the traditional array of academic and administrative units. The College's progress assessment report and strategic plan clearly indicate that diversity is a core value throughout the organization. The report develops an inclusive definition of diversity and presents evidence of strong leadership and a great variety of programmatic activity around diversity topics. Also, the format of the report is excellent. The report could be strengthened considerably by the consistent use of data (both raw numbers and percentages) to establish benchmarks and measure progress. Also, the report should clarify the exact reporting relationship between the College, Cooperative Extension, and Outreach.

Given the vast array of diversity programs and initiatives within the College, other Penn State colleges and units would be well served by benchmarking their efforts against the College. The College might translate its obvious commitment to diversity into better outcomes by benchmarking against other agricultural schools that have national prominence in the diversity arena (e.g., Iowa State). Comments on the report under each Challenge follow:

Challenge 1: Developing a shared and inclusive understanding of diversity

- ❖ The College has a simple but clear and inclusive definition of diversity that is integrated into its strategic plan. The definition is well publicized and embedded in many specific programs for faculty, staff, students, and other stakeholders. Diversity is one of the five major strategic goals of the College.
- ❖ The evolution and current status of the various diversity groups in the College (the Diversity Advisory Committee, Diversity Task Force, and Diversity Coordinating Council) is unclear to the review team. It would be helpful to clarify the current, specific role for each group. The report indicates that race/ethnicity, gender, and classification were factors in determining membership in the Diversity Coordinating Council. However, there is no specific reference to other key diversity constituents as members (e.g., LGBT people or those with disabilities). Clarification would be helpful.
- ❖ The College is to be commended for having two full-time staff members responsible for focusing on diversity efforts relating to students and employment; most colleges have one person.
- ❖ The review team notes the presence of a strong diversity component for first-year seminars, though no comparable method appears to exist for change-of-assignment, transfer, and graduate students.

Challenge 2: Creating a welcoming campus environment

- ❖ Support for diversity is evident in leadership from the dean and associate deans, the Academic, Regional and Administrative Unit Leadership team, provision of diversity training, financial support for diversity efforts, specific processes to include diversity as a criterion in administrative search procedures, and training of county extension directors.

- ❖ The College has conducted climate surveys for students and employees, and results of these surveys have been posted on the College Web site. Also, the College uses other means to assess climate, including focus groups and site visits. While the report cites the formation of the Diversity Coordinating Council as a specific outcome of the climate surveys, the report could be improved by providing a brief description of the survey results and identifying other outcomes.
- ❖ The College communicates diversity initiatives and assessment results using a variety of methods (e.g., Web sites, open forums, and advisory committees) to multiple constituents of the College, including those in the public arena. This approach to communication of diversity is a best practice.

Challenge 3: Recruiting and retaining a diverse student body

- ❖ The College has many programs and generous scholarship incentives focused on recruiting diverse students. Also, the College now has enrollment baselines for graduate students to measure progress. Are baselines also in place for undergraduate students?
- ❖ Retention efforts are less formal than recruiting approaches, and they appear to be focused on personal contact and scholarship/fellowship support. Amplification of the role of MANRA in retention could strengthen the report.
- ❖ More enrollment and retention data would be especially useful for this Challenge. Given the impressive efforts in this area, especially in recruiting, a more extensive use of data would help to evaluate the effectiveness of these efforts.

Challenge 4: Recruiting and retaining a diverse workforce

- ❖ The review team notes the important role of the EEO Coordinator.
- ❖ Comments for this Challenge are similar to those under Challenge 3: the College has extensive recruiting processes, more informal retention practices, and uses special funding to augment its efforts. Also, more data to evaluate efforts would be useful.

Challenge 5: Developing a Curriculum that supports the general education program

- ❖ The *Infusing Multicultural Perspectives into Higher Education* project is a best practice.
- ❖ Cooperative Extension has developed a number of programs and publications that focus on diversity.
- ❖ While a reasonable amount research has been done on diversity, this activity appears to result from the efforts of one faculty member.

Challenge 6: Diversifying University Leadership & Management

- ❖ The College has relied on traditional training programs such as Mastering Supervision and the National Extension Leadership Development program to develop leadership skills among its employees. The report indicates that 53% of those whom the College sponsored for these programs were women and employees from diverse racial/ethnic groups, but no outcomes regarding advancement among participants from these groups is reported. These data would be a useful way to evaluate program effectiveness.
- ❖ Efforts in this area could be strengthened by providing specialized training opportunities for all diversity constituents (e.g., LGBT and those with disabilities) to augment College-wide training initiatives.

Challenge 7: Coordinating organizational change to support diversity goals

- ❖ Some items in this section (e.g., diversity awards) have more of a program focus and could perhaps be better placed in other sections of the report. Diversity is embedded in the College's strategic planning process, which includes an expectation for departmental plans to have a diversity component. A director of International Agriculture has been added to enhance efforts in international opportunities for students, faculty, and staff.
- ❖ This section could be strengthened by focusing on explicit changes in the organizational infrastructure of the College that are specifically geared towards enhancing diversity and explaining how these changes have affected diversity outcomes.