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**Feedback on Progress Implementing
A Framework to Foster Diversity at Penn State: 1998-2003
Berks-Lehigh Valley College**

Berks-Lehigh Valley College has undergone tremendous change since 1998 with a change in leadership and the challenges faced by a new organization. The 1998 diversity plan offered a clear set of goals and actions; the college had an ambitious plan for enhancing diversity. The college's thoughtful definition of diversity includes specific attention to nineteen different groups of people.

The college has clearly been successful in recruiting, retaining, and graduating students from underrepresented groups. Progress also was made in recruiting female faculty members, although the hiring occurred at the assistant and instructor levels.

In general, more contextual information and more detail about specific initiatives are needed for a fuller understanding of the progress in implementing the *Framework*. In other words, while the goals of 1998 are well articulated, progress toward their attainment is less so.

Observations and suggestions relating to each challenge are listed below.

Challenge 1: Developing a Shared and Inclusive Understanding of Diversity

- ❖ The definition of diversity is very complete and inclusive—one that sets a laudable standard:

The vision for a Berks-Lehigh Valley College in which each faculty, staff, and student community member has been introduced to the people and traditions of a culture other than their own. The culture could be in this country, surrounding communities adjacent to the College, and/or in some other part of the world. The introduction to another culture and the ability to compare with one's own stimulates analytical thinking and learning at both a cognitive and affective level. The "experience" of another culture is a critically important dimension of education for global citizenship in the 21st century. Understanding and respecting the diverse characteristics of human beings allows us to add a new dimension to learning.

The operational definition of diversity, agreed upon and utilized throughout the Diversity Strategic Plan, is based on the Penn State non-discrimination statement and focuses on the multitudinal components listed below.

Adult/returning students	Handicapped/disabled
Veterans	International students
Learning impairment	English as a second language
Sensory impairment	Socio-economic background
Physically challenged	Race
Religious practices	Sexual orientation
Family structures (single parent, adoptive parent)	Gender
Urban vs. rural vs. suburban	Citizenship
geographic location	Ethnicity
Composition of college faculty and staff	Age

- ❖ While information is disseminated about diversity initiatives, it is not clear in what forms or through which types of efforts.

RESPONSE: Our Campus Life Department advertises the Cultural Events programs (University Block Booking) and the Arts and Lecture Series via an academic year brochure (Appendix 1), posters and College listserv. Student clubs and organizations utilize posters, flyers and electronic message board. The Diversity Committee announces initiatives and programming via the college listserv and posters. Residence Life diversity initiatives are disseminated via posters, telephone calling and resident hall monthly meetings. Human Resources and administration both utilize the college list serve and search committee meetings in disseminating diversity initiatives.

Challenge 2: Creating a Welcoming Campus Climate

- ❖ Having a diversity component in FTCAP programming, freshman seminars, and new student and residence life programs sends a clear signal of the commitment of the college to these issues and of the expectations regarding student behavior from the beginning.
- ❖ Innovative initiatives, such as involvement with community groups that emphasize diversity and provision of support for off campus programming are mentioned, but more detail is needed.
- ❖ It might be useful to identify additional ways to identify and respond to climate issues.

RESPONSE: Several staff, faculty and administrators have become involved with the community as board members such as Police Athlete League (PAL), Olivet Boys and Girl Club and Hispanic Community Center. Others have contributed financially to organizations such as Women's Leadership Foundation, NAACP and Berks Women in Crisis. Student groups have performed and attended functions, i.e. banquets, seminars and reading workshops at many community centers and other locales.

Another response to climates issues is conducting Town Meetings periodically throughout the year highlighting the various issues of diversity in today's society.

Challenge 3: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Student Body

- ❖ Berks-Lehigh Valley College has been successful in recruitment and retention efforts targeted at students from underrepresented groups.
- ❖ A number of the initiatives described do not appear to be specific to diversity, such as programs for adolescents and high school students. Some linkage would be helpful.
- ❖ Residence Life diversity programs are provided for both residence hall staff and students. Clarification about the use of residence hall space to retain underrepresented students is needed.
- ❖ The most successful strategies include WISE programming; an early, intensive orientation program for students from underrepresented groups; and "intrusive" tracking and mentoring. However, a definition of "intrusive" would help in the understanding of the programs' effectiveness.

RESPONSE: As stated above the Penn State/Career Link Academic Enrichment and Employment Training Program at the Lehigh Valley Campus is a recruitment tool for high school students. The population consists of young Hispanic students receiving academic preparation to become better prepared for college. The Preparation for Adult Life Program trains adults with special needs in the computer skill areas. In both of these programs we are providing an introduction to the college experience for a population that we have identified in our definition of diversity.

It is important to note that Allentown and Reading have the two highest populations of Hispanics in PA. By recruiting in the schools in those areas, we hope to increase the diversity of our student population.

At the Berks Campus the residence halls fill by December prior to the Fall semester. Many of our underrepresented populations have not been accepted as of yet. We reserve approximately 11% of the spaces for EOP, Students of Color, International and Administrative (Appendix)2. Reserving spaces has helped in increasing our minority student population.

The Berks Lehigh Valley College WISE program is affiliated with the WISE program at University Park which affords the students even more opportunities.

Our definition of 'intrusive' pertains to the retention of the minority students at the Berks Campus. This includes inviting minority student to the early freshmen orientation (BAPFTS, Appendix 3) a week prior to classes. During this time the students get an opportunity to bond with each other and also become oriented to the barriers that need addressing on a predominately white campus. Early in the semester we meet weekly with the BAPFTS students trying to keep abreast with any concerns. After the first semester grades, students with gpa's less than 2.0 (Appendix 4) are contacted by the multicultural counselor and directed to academic assisting areas on campus (learning center, tutor, individual assistance by faculty member or any other support service).

Both the Berks and Lehigh Valley Campuses have experienced increases in our minority student populations since the Fall of 1998. Minority enrollment increased from 10% (192) to 13.25% (297) students at the Berks Campus and from 13.50% (80) to 15% (99) students at the Lehigh Valley Campus, Appendix 5.

Challenge 4: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Workforce

- ❖ Additional recruitment and retention strategies might help in diversifying the workforce.
- ❖ Including the Multi-cultural Coordinator on search committees might be useful.

RESPONSE: Each search committee receives a statement from Human Resources and administration regarding affirmative action regulations. Also there is a member of each search committee will have received affirmative action training. We utilize faculty, staff and administrators networks in advertising positions within the college.

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

- ❖ Three interesting faculty research initiatives that focus on diversity were described (contemporary American literature by women of color, Cuban writers in exile, and the lives of Jews in Europe during the last century); these may be examples of a fuller campus research agenda.
- ❖ The 1998 plan indicated that a cadre of faculty was to be developed to act as consultants regarding incorporating diversity into the curriculum, but it is not clear if this occurred.
- ❖ Recognizing that there are fourteen diversity-focused courses, it would be interesting to learn the ways in which a diversity focus has been embedded in Biology 20.

RESPONSE: The initiative to incorporate diversity in the curriculum that was indicated in the 1998 plan from the Lehigh Valley Campus was never developed because the folks who initiated the idea all have since left the PSU system. We believe that we have a better structure in the design phase at this point.

The course description for Biology 20 as listed in the PSU blue book is as follows:

Biology 20 (GN; DF). Plants, People, and Places (3 credits). Useful and dangerous plants, historical (archaeological), cultural (ethnological), and economic (anthropocentric) aspects, including structural and chemical characteristics of botanical importance.

The course satisfies a general education requirement in the natural sciences, and also counts as a diversity focus course.

In the course, I hope students learn that food does not originate from the grocery store shelf, but that the food we buy is produced, processed, and has a historical and economic importance. This spring semester marks the third time I have taught the course. So far, none of the students (this semester I have 62) come from a farm background. So, I try to emphasize the economic and social/cultural importance of food crops. I also include the use of various food crops from the past (i.e., Greeks, Romans, Middle Ages) and those crops used in today's modern society in the U.S. as well as third world countries.

Here are a few examples of the topics covered in this course:

Origins of Agriculture. Discuss how agriculture helped shape civilizations, with a focus on the Middle East, Europe, Africa, and Asia. We also compare modern agriculture practices in developed versus third world countries, and we discuss how the land-grant colleges helped shape agriculture in the U.S.

Starchy Staples. The primary focus here is with the potato, where we cover this important crop from its origins in the Andes Mountains of Peru to their processing into McDonald's french fries. We also discuss the Irish potato famine of 1845-49 and the impact on the society and culture in Europe and the U.S.

Stimulating Beverages. We cover topics relating to coffee and tea, from its origins in Africa, Southeast Asia and the Middle East, to its importance to the economy of South America. We also cover one of my favorite topics - chocolate. We discuss the use of chocolate by the ancient Aztek society, and today's use and consumption of chocolate.

Herbs and Spices. We discuss the use of plants to produce herbs and spices for cooking, and compare food preparation in developed versus third world cultures.

Cotton. We discuss the cotton industry in the Southern U.S., and how cotton played a major role with slavery in the south.

Medicinal Plants. We discuss herbal healing remedies from Greek and Roman times, to the Middle Ages, and into today's modern times. We talk about the people of the Terra Nova Rain Forest in Belize who rely on plants for their medical care.

Challenge 6: Diversifying University Leadership and Management

- ❖ Approaches specific to underrepresented groups are not described.
- ❖ Offering a mentoring program is a positive step; a fuller description would be helpful.
- ❖ Describing the ways in which access to the campus executive officer contributes to diversifying University leadership and management also would be helpful.

RESPONSE: In the last two years the leadership of the college has changed from the CEO/Dean of the College and Lehigh Valley Campus Director from white males to females.

The CEO/Dean came to Penn State University, Berks-Lehigh Valley from Fresno, CA, a community with more than 105 primary languages spoken. Dr. Speece's commitment to

diversity has been evident from her first weeks on campus. Prior to even arriving, she arranged for support of the Reading Women's Leadership Conference, sending several tables of students and staff to this meeting designed for minority women. This support continues.

Dr. Speece serves on the Diversity Committee and the PAW committee (for gays, lesbian, transsexual and bisexual individuals.) For more than two decades she has served as a straight advocate of gay rights. She participates in the WISE programs and has served as a positive role model for young women interested in the sciences.

Under Dr. Speece's direction, there have been monthly diversity celebrations on the two campuses and she is in the process of instituting stronger affirmative action measures for all search committees.

Dr. Speece spends time with students, invites students to attend leadership programs with her and works with faculty and staff members who are working to encourage under-represented groups.

Dr. Speece has participated in PAL functions, serving dinners for hundreds of minority, inner city children, helping to raise funds to expand programming for these children and their families. She also serves on the Board of Directors for Berks AIDS Network.

Dr. Speece also provides opportunities for faculty, staff and students to attend the Hispanic Banquet, NAACP banquet, PAL banquet and other community events to support minority groups.

Challenge 7: Coordinating Organizational Change to Support Our Diversity Goals

- ❖ The intention to diversify Berks-Lehigh Valley College employees is clear; mechanisms for attracting diverse pools of applicants could be expanded.
- ❖ A planned approach for organizational change beyond hiring is not evident.

RESPONSE: Challenge #4 discusses the mechanisms utilized to attract diverse pools of applicants for positions within the college.