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COMMONWEALTH COLLEGE

Response to *A Framework Foster Diversity at Penn State: 1998-2003*

Commonwealth College faces a unique set of opportunities and challenges, as its twelve campuses are located in different parts of Pennsylvania, each with its own age racial, ethnic, linguistic, and religious profile. As a result, there is sometimes variety in implementation details across campus locations, though all remain firmly committed to enhancing diversity within the College, in every sense.

Challenge 1: Developing a shared and inclusive understanding of diversity

1. How does your college define or describe diversity? How is this understanding demonstrated in areas of emphasis within your college?

The College introduces its web page on diversity with the following: “The Commonwealth College considers people -- students, faculty, and staff -- to be our primary asset. We are committed to enhancing the diversity of each of these groups and to provide welcoming environments on each campus that support all individuals' best possible performance.”

Currently, each college location reports its own definition of diversity due to varying populations and service areas of the Commonwealth. However, each definition has common themes that match the descriptions of diversity in the “Framework.” The definitions from the college locations are broadly inclusive, extending not only to groups typically understood as under-represented groups but also to economic class, social differences, age, gender, disability, and sexual orientation. Definitions from college locations are listed in Appendix A.1.

2. How has your college distributed and discussed information to students about the University’s diversity initiatives?

Methods include course work; active diversity teams; First-Year Testing, Counseling, and Advising Program (FTCAP); beginning of semester convocations; orientation activities; student focus groups; First Year Seminars (FYS); club activities; electronic and paper communications; and Lion Ambassadors.

3. How has your college distributed and discussed information to faculty and staff about the University’s diversity initiatives?

Methods include electronic and paper communications, distribution of the “Framework,” diversity teams, instructions to search committees, and Faculty Senate communications. In addition, faculty and staff attend workshops such as the Staff Assistants Convocation (at which each participant attends a diversity-related program), search committee training, and periodically scheduled seminars from the Diversity Education Center.

4. What is the role of the multicultural coordinator?

For the college as a whole, diversity leadership is shared among four college officers: Associate Dean for Faculty and Research, who leads recruitment and retention of faculty members; Associate Dean for Academic Programs, who leads curriculum efforts; Associate Dean for Students and Academic Support, who leads co-curricular retention efforts for students; and Director of Human Resources, who leads recruitment and retention for staff.

Most college locations assign multicultural responsibilities to a number of staff who have roles in various aspects of campus life, such as admissions, retention, and programming. The teams work in tandem to fulfill the responsibilities. One college location has assigned someone expressly to this role. Appendix A.2 includes descriptions of these two different models.

5. Does your college have a diversity committee? What is its role?

The college does not have a single committee. The twelve college locations organize their diversity responses in varying ways. Most have diversity committees, with the role of the committee varying by college location. Some committees are solely involved in programming. Others are more comprehensive, also serving as a climate committee or response team. Although one location has no formal diversity committee, there are a number of other established committees and teams to provide programming and respond to climate issues. Appendix A.3 describes examples of committee structures that exist at college locations.

Challenge 2. Creating a welcoming campus climate

1. How does your college and department leadership demonstrate visible support for diversity?

The Dean's Office highlights diversity as a strategic priority through such diverse means as staff meetings, search committee training, and funding for diversity-related programming. College locations include diversity as an ongoing part of strategic planning. Campus Executive Officers and campus directors are actively involved in the diversity teams and Penn State diversity-related initiatives, and actively involved in diversity efforts within the local community. Any incident requiring response is taken seriously and managed immediately. Appendix A.4 outlines different examples of diversity leadership in the College.

2. How does your college identify climate issues?

Climate issues are identified through diversity teams, students' individual input, focus groups, faculty ombudsmen, the College's Human Resources staff, and exit interviews.

Additionally, because the college locations are relatively small, there is considerable opportunity for impromptu discussion groups and dialogue. Issues are often brought to the attention of Diversity Teams, response groups, and to the attention of campus leadership.

We have conducted the climate survey prepared by the Office of Educational Equity at three locations and have plans to do the same at the other nine locations within the next two years. Also useful are classroom discussions.

3. How does your college respond to climate issues?

This varies, depending on the location and the type of climate issue. Some locations have response teams or diversity teams that assume this role. Methods also include programming to avoid potential situations or address events that have occurred, list serve messages, CEO visibility as role model, immediate intervention, and investigating issues and working with University Park offices. One college location, for example, has created a multicultural council with representatives from the local community to work out issues concerning off-campus students.

Staff in the Dean's Office serve as consultants and ensure that all appropriate University offices are involved. In the wake of the September 11 incidents, campus locations took steps to provide security for students belonging to groups that might have become targets for retribution or anger. Each campus location provided public forums of various types for tolerance, healing, mutual respect, and comfort.

4. What college-wide and individualized approaches have you developed to enhance overall climate and individual's satisfaction with the environment?

Methods include programming throughout all aspects of campus life including the classroom, Fulbright scholars and Humphrey scholars visiting college locations, First-Year Seminars, establishing free speech zones, initiation of a college-wide climate survey for each location, student clubs, and involvement of Continuing Education. Members of the College serve on the various University Commissions (Commission for Racial and Ethnic Diversity; Commission for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Equity; Commission on Adult Learners; Commission for Women; and Equal Opportunity Planning Commission).

Each college location has a disability coordinator whose role is to ensure that faculty, staff and students with special needs receive the support that they require. The disability coordinator works closely with campus and University offices and serves as a central point of contact for the disabled individual. Campuses also have specialists to work with students with learning disabilities; Kurtzweil readers for students with sight disabilities, and sign language interpreters, as required. Locations offer regular workshops on disability issues for faculty and staff.

College locations conduct ADA facility audits and acquire resources to make facility renovations and upgrades, such as curb cuts, parking lot improvements, installation of visual alarms, repositioned drinking fountains, and library space. TTY telephones also are

purchased as required. One location sponsored a “Disability Awareness Week” and the Student Government Association has added a senator for students with disabilities to ensure that the SGA is knowledgeable of issues.

5. On a scale of 1 to 10 how do you rate the climate for diversity in your college at present?

In the absence of defined criteria, it is inappropriate to provide a rating here. Nonetheless, Commonwealth College remains committed to diversity and to efforts to improve the climate to permit diversity to flourish.

Challenge 3: Recruiting and retaining a diverse student body

1. Does your college contribute to locating and recruiting undergraduate students from under-represented groups? If so, how?

In Fall Semester 2000, minority enrollment in the college was nine percent, an increase of one percentage point from Fall Semester 1997. Individually, college minority enrollment ranges from one percent minority enrollment at one location to a high of twenty percent at another, reflecting in great part the demographic variety of the many catchment areas in which our campuses are located. The college has maintained roughly an equal representation of male (52%) and female (48%) students since 1997. Appendix A.5 provides a comparison of College enrollment by gender and ethnicity between 1997 and 2000. In 2000, approximately one-third of our students were adult learners (age 24 and older); this also was the case in Fall Semester 1997. [Note: The Office of the Vice Provost for Educational Equity provided the data for this report and advised the Commonwealth College to use the 1997 through 2000 years as the reporting data points.]

Many Commonwealth College locations, particularly those with residence halls, have ongoing and successful relationships with the Penn State Recruitment Centers located in Harrisburg, Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh. Locations without residence halls have limitations because students are recruited primarily from the campus service areas, which sometimes have an extremely limited number of under-represented groups. Some locations report success due to connections with the Equal Opportunity Program, recruiting in community churches and other organizations with a population of under-represented groups, establishing clubs for women in non-traditional majors, and word-of-mouth advertising from satisfied students.

Overall the College is committed to expanding the share of traditionally under-represented groups in the student body and to enhancing student diversity by campus locations.

2. How has your college contributed to locating and recruiting graduate students from under-represented groups?

Commonwealth College focuses on undergraduate education. However, a number of College locations serve as sites for master's degrees in Education (Capital College program) and Business (Behrend College program). Students in these programs are recruited from the local service areas where the degrees are offered. As shown in Appendix A.5, eighty-five percent of graduate students are women, and two percent are from under-represented groups.

3. What strategies have you implemented to retain undergraduate students from under-represented groups?

Prior to the creation of the Commonwealth College four years ago, many location-bound students attended a campus with no intention of finishing a degree at Penn State. Rather, these students transferred to an institution closer to home. For this reason, retention and graduation rates for College locations have been, and will continue to be, lower than rates for locations that enroll relatively few location-bound students. As the numbers of baccalaureate programs that can be completed in the College increase, we expect to see a concomitant increase in retention and graduation rates. This observation applies to all students, including those from under-represented groups. With that background, retention and graduation rates for multicultural students at College locations have been relatively stable over time with the exception of a decline in 1997 from 53 percent to 45 percent for the baccalaureate cohort. Reasons for this decline are not evident and may be due to the small cohort size. Associate degree retention and graduation rates for multicultural students are less than those for White students across the represented years. While these rates are of concern, they need to be understood within the limitations of small enrollment numbers. Appendix A.6 displays retention and graduate rates, 1992-1999.

As College academic programs grow, the number of degree-seeking students will also grow. The College has established a goal to increase the retention and graduation rates for multicultural students through targeted enrollment management strategies. Once such strategy has been the formation of standardized and heightened criteria for the review and acceptance of traditional-aged provisional students, including multicultural students

Retention efforts include enhanced academic advising, tutoring, learning resource centers, coordinated services for students with disabilities, clubs for students in under-represented groups, orientation programs that educate students about multiculturalism and the concerns of under-represented groups, mentoring for leadership opportunities, clubs and organizations, involvement of faculty and staff with students one-on-one, staff identified to work with students of color, and ensuring that facilities are accessible to students with disabilities. A number of these strategies are funded through grants. One campus has a new program in the residence halls that identifies and focuses attention on high-risk students. Some locations with a significant population of students of color offer focused orientation programming for those students. Appendix A.7 describes initiatives from various college locations.

4. What strategies have you implemented to retain graduate students from under-represented groups?

No specific strategies have been implemented to retain graduate students from under-represented groups.

5. What recruitment and retention strategies have been most successful?

Each item identified above has shown some measure of success. The Commonwealth College has not done a formal assessment of the success of our various initiatives, but assessment is a priority for the coming years.

Challenge 4: Recruiting and retaining a diverse workforce

1. How has your college actively engaged in locating and recruiting faculty and staff from under-represented groups?

Women:

Among faculty, we have almost doubled the number of women at the professor rank (8 to 15) and have significantly increased the number of women in tenure-track positions. We also have been successful in filling administrative and certain managerial positions with women (Appendix A.8). Currently, the Dean and three Associate Deans are women, as are four of the twelve Campus Executive Officers and four of twelve Directors of Academic Affairs.

People of color:

We have not made significant progress in increasing the representation of people of color in our college; the low numbers remain fairly constant in all categories since 1997. Based upon 2000 data of 596 faculty, we had 11 African-American faculty members and 10 Hispanic faculty members in all ranks. Among 513 staff members, we had 20 African-American, 6 Hispanic, and one Asian staff members. (Appendix A.8) However, during this academic year, we have increased those numbers.

Our efforts for faculty recruiting include establishing and maintaining networks, working directly with graduate schools to “grow our own,” and recruitment at conferences. As an example, the English division head has joined the College Language Association (a predominantly African-American association) to form ongoing networks. We have not placed as much effort on recruiting staff, although one location recently began networking with the local NAACP and community churches as methods to enhance applicant pools for positions filled in the local labor market.

This fall, we initiated a five-hour training session for faculty search committees. We also intensified our efforts by establishing search committees that include women and people of color, and expecting that search committees include women and persons of color on short lists. In conducting the training, the Dean stressed the importance of committee members serving as diversity advocates.

Also, we developed a mailing list of the Presidents of Historically Black College and Universities and the governing board of the Hispanic Association of Colleges and

Universities, to which we began sending postings of all openings for faculty positions and college administrative positions. We have also shared that list with other Penn State units.

2. What recruitment strategies have been most successful?

Diversifying the workforce is a priority in the college strategic plan. In the cases where there has been success, anecdotal data indicate that the most useful strategies have been networking and maintaining ongoing communication with key candidates. In addition, success comes when the Dean or Campus Executive Officer insists that diversifying the campus faculty and staff is a priority and supports activities committed to this goal.

3. What retention strategies have you implemented in your college to retain members of under-represented groups?

Many Commonwealth College locations assign mentors to new faculty and staff. Most locations link faculty and staff with others in the community to create a sense of belonging, offer professional development, and formalize a professional development plan. An important strategy is creating a welcoming environment, including college leaders' commitment to maintaining that environment.

4. What retention strategies have been most successful?

Anecdotal data indicate that networking, social connection, and one-on-one mentoring are critical strategies, along with commitment from leadership.

Challenge 5: Developing a curriculum that supports the goals of our new general education plan

1. What initiatives has your college taken in supporting multicultural curriculum efforts?

We are using expansion of diversity-focused courses, First Year Seminar, extracurricular programming that supports the curriculum, hiring new faculty who have expertise in diversity-related topics, and offering additional foreign language courses. This academic year, one location chose a theme of "Multicultural Understanding," with the theme integrated into all campus programming, including curriculum. The College's Royer Center for Learning and Academic Technologies has developed workshops on "Critical Thinking" and "Campus Climate" for faculty to improve their teaching. Appendix A.9 outlines examples of successful multicultural curriculum efforts.

2. What research and teaching in your college has advanced the University's diversity agenda?

The Commonwealth College offers diversity-related topics in the First-Year Seminars, extracurricular programming, and campus lectures that are diversity focused. Faculty

members perform research in areas of multiculturalism, gender issues, and other diversity-related areas. Appendix A.10 outlines examples of research and teaching initiatives.

3. How is diversity integrated into the curriculum of your college?

We integrate diversity into our curriculum through extracurricular programming, diversity-focused courses, and foreign language requirements for four-year programs. At some locations, faculty members provide extra credit for students attending diversity-focused programming. Other locations offer travel-abroad programs during spring break and limited education-abroad programs. Two campuses jointly offer a summer program in Belize. We plan to increase these kinds of experiences for students and have already begun meeting with appropriate staff from outside the College. For example, we have drafted a College brochure on international education and created an incentive fund for providing such opportunities. Appendix A.9 describes examples of successful integration of diversity in the curriculum.

Challenge 6: Diversifying University leadership and management

1. How has your college assisted faculty and staff from under-represented groups in developing leadership and management skills?

Penn State's programs on leadership and management are made available to all faculty and staff, primarily on a regional basis, but are not specifically targeted to individuals in under-represented groups. Since 1998, 179 employees have completed the programs:

Penn State Leader:	135 participants
Mastering Supervision	34 participants
Management Institute	7 participants
Leadership Academy	3 participants

Five members of the Dean's Staff, including one Campus Executive Officer, are former Administrative Fellows. Faculty and staff from under-represented groups have been included in strategic planning committees, campus senates, and the College Senate. Efforts are made to nominate faculty and staff from under-represented groups to University committees and task forces. We find that mentoring is useful but needs to become a more formalized effort at all locations.

Challenge 7: Coordinating organizational change to support our diversity goals

1. What organizational realignments, systems of accountability, resource mobilization and allocation strategies, long-term planning strategies, etc. has your college implemented to ensure the realization of the University's diversity goals?

Members of the Dean's staff of Commonwealth College have been designated to oversee diversity initiatives in four areas: students and academic services, staff human resources, faculty human resources, and curriculum. The College is instituting the climate survey at each location, including follow-up surveys and focus groups. All college locations follow University policies and procedures to respond to situations or events that arise. Additional efforts include establishing an annual college award for diversity, having all annual performance evaluations include a diversity component, appointing more people from under-represented groups to Advisory Boards, and designating specific funding for diversity-related activities.

ACTION ITEMS TO INTEGRATE INTO THE COLLEGE STRATEGIC PLAN

Challenge One:

- Create a single, broadly written definition of diversity for the College to reflect all the populations that it serves.
- Establish guidelines for each location for establishing and maintaining a year-round diversity team, along with guidelines for a mission for each team that includes both programming and response. The team must include the CEO and other campus leaders.

Challenge Two:

- Continue implementing climate surveys at the remainder of the college locations.

Challenge Three:

- Explore creating endowments for cultural programming that will enhance the climate for diversity and help student retention at college locations
- Ensure that students of color and students in non-traditional fields who need mentoring receive it.
- Continue strategies to recruit and retain students in under-represented groups.

Challenge Four:

- Target additional resources and efforts on recruiting faculty and staff members. Implement ongoing personal contacts with various community and professional groups.
- Continue outreach to HBCU and HACU institutions.
- Continue search committee training, including the naming of diversity advocates.
- Formalize mentoring program for new faculty and staff.
- Conduct focus groups with faculty and staff of color to gather information on retention strategies

Challenge Five:

- Continue efforts to internationalize the curriculum and offer international experiences to students.

Challenge Seven:

- Include outcomes in diversity in administrators' performance reviews
- Formalize opportunities for sharing of best practices in diversity efforts

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