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**Feedback on Progress Implementing
A Framework to Foster Diversity at Penn State: 1998-2003
Schreyer Honors College**

The Schreyer Honors College (SHC) has made impressive strides since the original diversity plan was developed. The college has some unique challenges in advancing their diversity initiatives as both faculty and students involved in the SHC have homes in their academic colleges as well. In addition, the college does not own a curriculum per se. It would be very helpful for readers of this college's update to have a better understanding of the way in which the college is structured, funded (with any attending constraints or expectations), and an outline of its vision and mission.

The spirit with which the college approaches diversity issues is clear and well integrated into their activities. The SHC takes a highly collaborative approach to recruitment, retention, and curricular initiatives. Students have access to a wide variety of international experiences. However, there appears to be a focus on race and ethnicity more than on other characteristics such as gender, sexual orientation, and religion, for example.

It is clear that the full-time staff could be much more diverse. The data are difficult to obtain for faculty and students from the University databases; any information that the college could provide would be helpful in understanding the degree to which honors faculty members are representative of the students that they teach.

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 inclusive, including race, ethnicity, socioeconomic background, gender, age, sexual orientation, religion, abilities/disabilities, veteran status, international status, language, political persuasion, and regional or geographic origins as well as different talents, interests, ideas, and creativity.
- ❖ A student listserv is used to disseminate information; an understanding of the extent to which this reaches students would be helpful.
- ❖ The assistant dean oversees diversity initiatives in the college. The college's commitment to diversity therefore is highly visible.
- ❖ A Diversity Committee was established in 2001, and includes students. The goals and outcomes of this committee could be specified.
- ❖ There seems to be a focus on "students of color," perhaps to the exclusion of students in the other categories included in the definition of diversity.

RESPONSE: Thank you for your affirmation of the SHC definition for diversity. This definition helps us to determine what events to post on our listserv. We know it effectively reaches students because of program attendance figures and some of our senior surveys cite our listserv as the most important contribution of the college to their Penn State experience. We also routinely receive questions (some supportive and some critical) about the events we post. Those questions would not be posed if the list were not read. The purpose of the Diversity Committee is to fully implement the SHC Diversity plan and to assist the college with the recruitment of under-represented students. For the years 2001-03 we chose to focus our efforts on African-American and Hispanic students, not to exclude other diverse populations but rather to concentrate on the area of greatest need. The SHC is a very diverse college in many other respects.

Challenge 2: Creating a Welcoming Campus Climate

- ❖ More explanation of the focus groups and “Dinners with the Dean” would be useful in understanding the extent to which goals for both activities are met.
- ❖ Descriptions of climate initiatives focused on students and did not include climate issues for staff.
- ❖ The college is to be commended for using a variety of vehicles to communicate with students. An analysis of the effectiveness of each may lead to increased efficiencies within the college.
- ❖ Another activity about which the college can be proud is the development of a Web guide by students about Penn State as a multicultural university.
- ❖ There is good attention to residence hall programming.

RESPONSE: Focus groups and “Dinners with the Dean” are examples of regular efforts made to reach out to our students to provide them with a forum to express their opinions, questions, perspectives, and wish-lists for the future. Care is taken to create a welcoming environment in these exchanges for all students. However, additional effort is made to host groups specifically for under-represented students at least once/semester. Diversity as a topic also arises in our general discussions in about one-half of our events. We also regularly discuss climate issues in our staff meetings and give individual attention to it in each staff member’s development plan. Thank you for acknowledging our efforts.

Challenge 3: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Student Body

- ❖ Purchasing SAT scores and names and addresses of students from underrepresented groups is an excellent proactive recruiting strategy; it would be interesting to know the payoff.
- ❖ The college collaborates with other units on campus to recruit students from underrepresented groups.
- ❖ The extent to which recruiting is conducted to attract students from underrepresented groups to locations away from University Park is unknown.
- ❖ Developing donor interests about diversity issues and raising funds for additional scholarships to enhance diversity in the SHC are laudable efforts.

RESPONSE: We want to emphasize that SAT scores are but one component of our recruitment strategy. The purpose of purchasing the scores is to identify students who might have the other qualities we seek in admissions. It is difficult to say what the specific payoff is of such a purchase, but the cost is relatively small. The college collaborates with the academic colleges and the Office of Admissions, exchanging data on at least a weekly basis through the “recruitment season.” In addition, SHC materials are distributed to all recruiters in all Penn State locations. We also initiated recruitment receptions in Bethesda/Washington, D.C. and Philadelphia this year. They were targeted specifically to under-represented minority students. Information about all Penn State locations was provided in each attendee’s packet. Our External Advisory Board is also engaged in recruitment efforts. Each member telephones under-represented minority students we have made offers to in order to further encourage these prospects to choose Penn State.

Challenge 4: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Workforce

- ❖ While the review team appreciated to some extent that the college has an inclusive philosophy regarding staff, considering part-time employees, work study students, and scholar assistants as staff, they suggest that careful consideration be given to diversifying the full-time staff.
- ❖ A female African American postdoctoral scholar was hired as the Residential Faculty Mentor. It is not clear what her duties involve.
- ❖ While providing flexibility is a good employment practice, it is not a specific retention tool directed toward staff from underrepresented groups.
- ❖ The ways in which the two African American work-study students have been treated—“by being flexible and supportive, offering good training and varied tasks, treating them with respect, and

avoiding menial tasks” (p. 5)—could be interpreted as another good employment practice not specific to students from underrepresented groups.

RESPONSE: The SHC maintains an on-going commitment to diversify its staff in each and every job search. Our Residential Faculty Mentor serves the entire living-learning community. Her primary function is to serve as an adult role model illustrating how she integrates academic study and other life activities. She also plans our monthly social receptions in Atherton and Simmons Hall where faculty, administration and students mingle in conversation, poetry-slams, music making and other activities, serves on our diversity committee, assists with the Undergraduate Exhibition, and provides an ear to individual students concerns and issues, mentoring students with their research and career goals as well as their academic and social adjustment in the living/learning community of Atherton and Simmons Residence Halls.

With regard to flexibility and our treatment of staff, we acknowledge that our practices are not unique to the retention of under-represented minority personnel. However, our techniques work. We have had 100% retention of our under-represented work-study students not only within each school year, but they choose to return for as many years as they can (until their graduation). The flexibility we provide is a way of showing respect for their individual needs.

We might add that SHC staff are also involved in university leadership on diversity issues. The Assistant Dean who serves as the multicultural director to the SHC has also been an active member of the President’s Commission on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Equity; Ms. Lori Campbell, Administrative Assistant also serves on the Diversity Subcommittee of the University Staff Advisory Committee.

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

- ❖ There is good emphasis on international experiences for scholars; the update states that the college's international mission “can only be accomplished by helping students understand domestic diversity within a national and international context.” (p. 7)
- ❖ SHC supports a suite of five signature diversity courses that are intensely promoted to incoming students. These courses seem to focus primarily around race and ethnicity. An evaluation of the impact of these courses is planned for Spring, 2002.
- ❖ Three important, potentially high impact initiatives have been developed: provision of seed money for the creation of two new diversity courses, creation of two courses involving building homes in Mexico and on a reservation in Montana, and offering a first year honors seminar focused on diversity and leadership.

RESPONSE: Thank you very much for your support of our curricular initiatives. We would also like to share information about three other important courses. We have partnered with the Department of Geography for four years to co-sponsor “The Re-invention of Poverty” which includes a two-week community practice experience in W. Philadelphia. The first-year seminar, “Leadership Jumpstart” taught by SHC staff also introduces students to the SHC definition of diversity and focused on religious diversity in 2001. “Leadership Forum” also taught by SHC staff is a new course for upper classmen. It was offered for the first time in Spring 2002 and had units on gender, international and intercultural diversity issues in leadership practice.

Challenge 6: Diversifying University Leadership and Management

- ❖ While it is stated that staff development is given a high priority, the activities described are those typical across the University.
- ❖ Given the female profile of the SHC, the college might consider offering educational opportunities about diversity issues to help diversify the philosophy of management and leadership; however, staff have taught diversity-related courses.
- ❖ A “culture of staff development and cross-training” is cited without providing a sense of its relationship to diversity issues.

RESPONSE: We respectfully disagree with the first statement. Structured diversity development plans are made for each individual employed in the SHC, taking advantage of the programming offered by the office of Human Resources, but also going beyond that. The Diversity Committee shall help create parallel development plans for the unit as a whole. Greater participation (100%) of our staff in diversity development activities should be noted as well as the gain from a zero baseline (established at the founding of the Honors College in the fall of 1997). In addition to leadership from senior staff, staff assistants are deeply engaged in extra activities beyond their job description. For example, one staff assistant served on the Planning Committee for the Women’s Leadership Conference, and two other staff members went to London on their first international experience with SHC support from their personnel development fund. A staff assistant will also be going to Montana to work on a Cheyenne reservation with SHC students in a service learning course this summer. We believe the extent of the SHC’s commitment from all levels is unique.

With regard to balancing men’s and women’s perspectives on leadership, it might be useful to note that the Faculty Advisory Committee reflects the gender balance of faculty at Penn State as a whole, i.e., it is predominantly male whereas the leadership (at present) in the SHC is predominantly female. Of course, the leadership in either category can be expected to evolve from year to year.

Challenge 7: Coordinating Organizational Change to Support Our Diversity Goals

- ❖ The assistant dean assumed responsibility for multicultural issues and attends meetings of the Council of College Directors of Multicultural Programs.
- ❖ It would be useful to include the 2002-2005 SHC diversity plan.
- ❖ The diversity plan includes accountability for specific staff members for reaching desired objectives; the form of this accountability was not specified.
- ❖ The update includes a very useful chart that shows progress toward the 1999 goals as well as new objectives and progress reaching those objectives.
- ❖ Collaboration with campus and community organizations to further the University’s diversity goal is a model other colleges could apply toward reaching their goals.

RESPONSE: The SHC diversity plan is available on our website under the “About the College” section. It should be noted that our website is more student centered than most academic colleges and a major recruitment tool. In terms of accountability, the SHC requires each individual to set goals and objectives for the year, including personal development and diversity awareness. These are taken into account during the annual review and assignment of merit increases. Please refer to the plan for more information on reporting lines.

Thank you very much for this opportunity to receive feedback and reflection from an external group and also for the stimulus to conduct self-reflection and review inside the unit.