

Before you read the feedback and report revisions, you are strongly encouraged to review the Overview, History and Calendar Web page at

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

**Feedback on Progress Implementing
A Framework to Foster Diversity at Penn State: 1998-2003
Information Technology Services**

Information Technology Services (ITS) has initiated some significant programs to enhance diversity at Penn State, such as the Professional Development Program, offering entry-level IT training and positions to employees in grades 15-18, Academic Computing Fellows, and the AT&T proposal. Also, the format of the report is excellent.

The ITS report acknowledges that the unit needs to make better progress towards its diversity goals, and the review team agrees with this assessment. Despite noteworthy exceptions, such as the programs mentioned above, the main approach to diversity for the unit appears to be to augment the diversity efforts of other units through assistive and other technology support. The team lauds these efforts and, at points, sees them as going “above and beyond” what is required. But the team also thinks that technology support needs to be separated from direct, more proactive diversity initiatives. The unit appears to have good intentions, but much of the language of the report, such as “we are discussing,” “will also be looking into,” and “is about to review,” suggests that a more proactive stance is needed. The report also proffers as an indicator of success that none of their staff have made “claims to the Affirmative Action Office”; the team sees this point as an example of a posture that is too passive. Unit demographics, which show little progress in increasing the representation of women and people from diverse racial/ethnic groups, also support this conclusion. Comments on the report under each Challenge follow:

Challenge 1: Developing a Shared and Inclusive Understanding of Diversity

- ❖ The team is uncertain whether or not the quote that begins this section is the ITS definition of diversity. If it is, the report needs to make it clear that it is the definition, and the definition itself needs to be more explicit in identifying specific diversity constituents. Many points in the report reflect a broad definition of diversity, but this conceptualization needs to be made concrete in the definition itself.
- ❖ The composition of the diversity committee, which includes LGBT people, is exemplary, but it would be useful to have more detailed information on the “concepts and strategies” that the committee has developed.
- ❖ This section cites many important projects including the information distributed via the ITS Web site and emails to staff on diversity initiatives, “special programs for new minority hires,” the OHR Staff Assistant Training Program, and the climate survey (the full description of the climate survey might fit better under Challenge 2). The report could be enhanced by providing more details on these programs, including program assessments and outcomes. One notable outcome of the climate survey is the monthly luncheon meetings among staff and the vice provost.
- ❖ The phrase “birds of a feather” is unclear and has some negative implications. The team recommends rewording this sentence.

RESPONSE: It is customary in various national IT organizations to call individual groups that at are interested in a specific topic or initiative by this term. To avoid any connotations in our report we have changed this terminology to “constituency groups.”

Challenge 2: Creating a Welcoming Campus Climate

- ❖ The report states, “ITS is a diverse workplace that is much broader than the local community of information technology workers from which its members are drawn.” Data are needed to support this statement, especially in light of unit demographics, which indicate that ITS is about 96% white and that women only occupy 15% of positions that have the highest grades (26 and above).
- RESPONSE: Data is included in our revised report to support this point.***

- ❖ The report specifies that climate issues will be taken into account in the reorganization efforts of ITS. Is input solicited by the ITS management on diversity and climate issues on the email comments and staff interviews, or must staff bring up these topics themselves before they are discussed?

RESPONSE: Diversity and climate issue are solicited by management. The staff members also know that these issues can be brought to management's attention at any time.

- ❖ The report also indicates that climate issues are handled in an “expeditious” manner. What does this mean? Examples of climate issues and how they are handled would be helpful, as would more information on how the climate survey has helped to shape unit responses to climate. The unit appears to respond to climate issues in an ad hoc manner. The team recommends developing specific processes for resolving these issues.

RESPONSE: There are specific processes in place to respond to diversity issues. They are detailed in our updated report.

Challenge 3: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Student Body

- ❖ Academic Computing Fellows is a best practice, especially given its long history and continued support by the unit.
- ❖ The unit's work with assistive technologies is commendable, but the inclusion of Access Accounts, software contracts, and other similar programs that are not really diversity initiatives detracts from the report. The report should concentrate on proactive projects that focus on diversity.

Challenge 4: Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Workforce

- ❖ ITS has developed substantive processes for recruiting and retaining a diverse workforce. The IT program for staff in lower grades is a best practice. Unfortunately, a substantial portion of graduates from the Professional Development Program leave Penn State. Has ITS assessed the program, and if so, have any recommendations for improving retention emerged? Also, the 1999-2000 strategic plan update indicates that the program had 17 participants to date; yet the *Framework* report, issued in December 2001, still indicates 17 participants. Is the program still in effect?

RESPONSE: The Professional Development Program (PDP) is aimed at addressing the national problem of the lack of individuals from underrepresented groups, particularly African Americans, that appear in the applicant pools for senior level Information Technology positions. This is a national issue rather than simply a local one – and the PDP is a national program. Our success in launching new Penn State graduates from underrepresented groups into IT careers is extremely important in our effort to help ensure that future hiring pools for senior level IT positions will be more appropriately balanced in the future.

The program is still in effect. This is a three-year program with the goal to add – and ‘graduate’ – one individual each year. In 1999-2000, we hired two individuals into the then two vacant positions in the program (rather than delay hiring the second individual for another year) and then did not add another individual the following year.

- ❖ These programs need to be thoroughly assessed in light of the demographic profile of the unit, which has changed little since 1997 and does not constitute a diverse workforce.

RESPONSE: The program participants, including employees in the program, mentors, managers, and senior management staff, assess the program each year.

- ❖ The report indicates that retention is difficult because of better salaries and social environments outside of Penn State. Did the unit come to this conclusion through formal processes, such as exit interviews or external benchmarking of salaries? Given the problems with retention in the unit,

formal, data-driven assessments need to occur to develop initiatives that will have the most impact.

RESPONSE: These conclusions are the results of exit interviews and from data obtained from the Office of Human Resources.

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

- ❖ The report cites several efforts in diversifying the curriculum, of which a few are noteworthy, but many projects are simply part of the normal operation of the unit, which happen to have diversity as a topic. ITS does not have curriculum as a strong component of its mission, so major projects in this area should not be expected.

RESPONSE: ITS is an academic support unit and as such works with faculty throughout the University to develop ideas and concepts that can be applied in various curriculums. In the past, we have made important contributions to the University's curriculum and feel we have another significant opportunity with ATT's funding of the MELD proposal. This effort has the potential to pay dividends, as did our work on the Martin Luther King lectures in past years when we won national recognition by Educom for that academic support initiative.

Challenge 6: Diversifying University Leadership and Management

- ❖ The strategy here is too passive and tentative. Strong initiatives that involve substantial commitments from the unit leadership will need to take place for progress to occur.

Challenge 7: Coordinating Organizational Change to Support Our Diversity Goals

- ❖ The report indicates that diversity will be given "consideration" in the unit's reorganization efforts. None of the specific points cited in this Challenge appear to directly address diversity. Diversity should be an integral part of the reorganization, not, as it currently appears, as a tag-along.

RESPONSE: Diversity has not been a 'tag-along effort' in our reorganization efforts. In fact, a diversity initiative (the small luncheons with the Vice Provost) have sparked more improvements or potential improvements for the climate and operational strength of ITS than any other program.