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

A Framework to Foster Diversity at Penn State 1998-2003

Information Technology Services

Challenge 1. Developing a Shared and Inclusive Understanding of Diversity

Response

a) How does your unit define or describe diversity? How is this understanding demonstrated in areas of emphasis within your unit?

Information Technology Services defines diversity as empowering variety within its people including but not limited to multiplicity in gender and sexual orientation, ethnic and socioeconomic origin, and other historically under represented backgrounds. -To that end, we strive to provide an opportunity for all to participate in an environment that is welcoming, supportive, and values all cultures and ideas. This reflects ITS' intent to implement a welcoming work environment. ITS demonstrates a shared and inclusive understanding of diversity by many of the services we provide to the University community. As an academic and administrative support organization, we also assist other units in their related efforts to enhance Penn State's diversity.

For example, we fund and support assistive technology in the ITS computer labs at University Park, provide support for the Office of Disability Services, partner with the Libraries at University Park in the Library Services for Persons with Disabilities lab in the Pattee/Paterno Library, and loan assistive technology to the campuses. ITS provides amplified handsets, visual indicators for telephony devices, teletypewriter (TTY) devices for communicating alphanumeric information over telephony networks to assist those who are hearing impaired, and emergency phones with raised keypads and single-touch 911 "panic buttons" to assist those who are sight impaired.

Working with the Provost's office, we have funded the acquisition of web-based tutorials on diversity and sexual harassment for inclusion with other self paced course offerings available to the Penn State community.

ITS helps fund special programs for new minority hires, such as the OHR Staff Assistant Training Program for graduating minority high school seniors. This program is held during the summer months.

b) How has your unit distributed and discussed information to staff about the University's diversity initiatives?

The Vice Provost has discussed *A Framework to Foster Diversity at Penn State 1998-2003* at his regularly scheduled senior director meetings. We distribute information regarding diversity initiatives to our staff through our organization's web site and via e-mail addressed to all staff members. Some examples of what we distribute are upcoming diversity events such as the Martin Luther King Day activities, Commission for Women banquet, LGBTQA banquet, etc. We also use this method to help encourage participation at these events by our employees. An example of the effectiveness of this approach is that ITS had 4 tables at the latest University sponsored event (Women's Commission Banquet). All attendees initiated contact to participate in this event from the e-mail posting.

c). Does your unit have a diversity committee? What is its role?

ITS has an active diversity committee that is comprised of a representative cross section of the ITS staff in terms of gender, ethnic background, and sexual orientation. The committee ascertains how the staff regards diversity, communicates and shares ideas with the staff, develops concepts and strategies for improving the work climate within ITS, and assesses their effectiveness. The committee membership is as follows:

ITS Diversity Committee

Committee Member	ITS Organization
Robin Anderson	Office of Vice Provost (past chair of Women's Commission)
Leanne Baughman	Administrative Information Systems
Brian Ladrido	Telecommunications and Networking Services
Sylvia Mackinnon	Digital Library Technologies
Paul Peworchik	Office of Vice Provost
Mary Ramsey	Teaching and Learning with Technology
Cathy Rideout	Administrative Information Systems
Tim Summers	Teaching and Learning with Technology
Susan Taylor	Consulting and Support Services
Susan Shuman	Office of the Vice Provost, Educational Equity
Morris Weinstock-Blair	Academic Services and Emerging Technologies

To assist in this effort to understand the organizational climate, we surveyed the entire ITS staff using the climate survey questionnaire developed by the Office of the Vice Provost for Educational Equity. After a review of the climate survey by the diversity committee, the following items were recommended as strategies to improve the current climate.

Hold monthly luncheon meetings hosted by the Vice Provost to discuss climate and diversity issues.

Implement a training survey to ascertain what types of training employees need for career advancement.

Provide managers and those at the next level below management with the opportunity to develop/learn management techniques to ensure fairness, equity and improved communication within ITS.

The luncheons have been so successful that they will be continued indefinitely. They have stimulated discussion on many topics important to our staff. Discussion topics have included suggestions for improving communications between units and with our customers, job shadowing, new employee orientation programs, constituency group sessions for individuals with like interests and responsibilities, improve opportunities for professional development and personal growth, etc.

Challenge 2. Creating a Welcoming Campus Climate

Response

a) How does your unit's leadership demonstrate visible support for diversity?

The ITS management team has taken a number of opportunities to clearly demonstrate visible support for diversity. The luncheons noted above (1c) are one method. Individual unit senior directors have made it clear that respect for individuals is a keystone of ITS' management philosophy. While ITS management has historically been sensitive to these issues, our expanded efforts have resulted in enhancing the broad diversity of our units.

How does your unit's leadership demonstrate visible support for diversity?

ITS has just completed an extensive examination of how it should be organized to serve the University's needs. Every person in ITS has been able to participate in discussion meetings about this topic. Senior members of the Vice Provost's office have personally confidentially interviewed nearly 20% of the staff to solicit their ideas. In addition, email comments have been solicited from every staff member. As we have moved to create a new organization, concerns about climate issues have played a key role

ITS is more diverse than the local community of information technology workers from which its members are drawn. For example, 1.8% of the 1997 Centre County Labor force was black or African decent, while 2.1% of the ITS full time employees are. When one looks at the national data 11.3% of the population is of black or African decent while 7.3% of the computer and data processing force is. If the Centre county percentage of the labor force were the same as the national percentage, you would expect only 1.2% of ITS staff to be of black or African descent. It appears that we have successfully recruited folks from this group. Using similar data for women, the ITS percentage is 40.9% with an expected value of 32.2% from the national norms

b) How does your unit identify climate issues?

Climate issues are identified in a variety of ways. The senior directors are sensitive to climate issues as they discuss and implement new initiatives for their individual organizations. These ideas and initiatives are also reported at the senior level management meetings for consideration in other areas of the overall organization. Our diversity committee will continue its review of the issues identified in the climate survey previously distributed to the entire staff. Our plan is to begin implementing programs to resolve issues identified this summer. In addition, any climate issues discussed in the Vice Provost's luncheon meetings are forwarded to the chair of the diversity committee for review and action.

c) How does your unit respond to climate issues?

The leadership of ITS is committed to investigate and resolve any climate issue raised by an employee in an expeditious manner. While each climate issue is unique and requires special handling, the basic format for response is: The climate issue is identified and reported to the Human Resource Representative (also chair of the diversity committee). This individual monitors and provides guidance for handling the issue by the immediate manager in the area where the issue was identified. Progress and resolution is discussed with the Vice Provost and the resolution is discussed at his staff meeting with the other Senior Directors. We have had only one climate issue raised by an employee in recent years. ITS has a number of employees of Middle Eastern and Southwest Asian origin. Senior management is closely watching the situation following recent events and will act aggressively to forestall any problems that result of actions of a misguided few.

d) What unit-wide and individualized approaches have you developed to enhance overall climate and individual's satisfaction with the environment?

As mentioned above, one of our most successful endeavors was to invite small groups of staff members to luncheons with Vice Provost Augustson. These meetings have provided the staff with the opportunity to discuss issues of importance to them with him in an intimate setting without fear of reprisal. We have randomly selected individuals from all ITS organizations but have organized the groups by various demographics. Groups of individuals have included those from different ethnic background, age, gender, various job responsibilities, grade level, years of service, and whether the position was technical in nature or not.

The Vice Provost has felt that these meetings are so beneficial to maintaining open communications and an equitable work environment that he has committed to continuing them indefinitely. He has recently suggested that his senior directors institute similar meetings with their staff members and some have already done so. We have also held what we term "Office Hours" in a neutral location where staff members could schedule an appointment to discuss issues of concern with a senior member of the Vice Provost's staff.

e) On a scale of 1 to 10 how do you rate the climate for diversity in your unit at present?

We have rated the climate for diversity in our unit as at least 5 out of 10. While we believe that we have made significant advances with respect to hiring and training minority staff members and are working on programs that will improve our climate, we have not instituted formal

training programs to-date. One indication that we are succeeding is that our staff has not made claims to the Affirmative Action Office that have resulted in a change in current hiring or promotional practices and processes.

A representative sample of our female staff in grades 21- 26 has stated that opportunities for advancement are fair.

One strong suggestion from staff for improving the climate for all University employees would be for the University to provide domestic partner benefits.

Challenge 3. Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Student Body

Response

a) Does your unit contribute to recruiting and retaining a diverse student body? If so, how? And what practices have been most successful?

The Academic Computing Fellows program, supported by ITS, the Graduate School, and the Equal Opportunity Planning Commission (EOPC), has been in existence since 1987. This benchmark program offers promising advanced degree students an opportunity to pursue their information technology related research activities within their field of study. The program provides tuition, stipend, and a departmental grant to be used by the fellows in the pursuit of their research. The program has had 29 participants since 1987. One-half of the participants have been women and 31% have been minorities. This program, which provides a broad exposure to the University research community, academic administrators, and the information technology expertise within ITS, has been very successful in increasing student satisfaction with their graduate school experience¹.

There are some indications that women and minorities have difficulty obtaining access to information technology. To overcome this potential problem, ITS provides services that help Penn State recruit students from these groups. For example, our Microcomputer Order Center offers students one-on-one consulting services for hardware and software purchases, which are provided at a discount for faculty, staff, and students. The staff at each of the help desks provides one on one consultation for software and hardware problems encountered. Our contracts with Microsoft and other software developers have enabled us to provide the Microsoft suite of software, Eudora and SAS to all students for no additional cost to them. This especially benefits the economically disadvantaged who are on financial aid or other forms of support that would not otherwise be able to purchase such software.

In the past, students with disabilities had a number of barriers to both academic and administrative information. ITS has worked aggressively to remove many of these barriers. For example in our computer labs, we also provide access to computerized information via assistive technology tailored for those individuals with disabilities. Every student at every location has access to this information. This has made it possible for all Penn State students with disabilities

¹ Each year the program participants provide an assessment of their experiences in the program

to far more easily access needed information. In many cases, they can do so from their residences.

All of these efforts have been successful in helping to provide a more level playing field for Penn State students in the information technology arena.

Challenge 4. Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Workforce

Response

a) How has your unit actively engaged in locating and recruiting staff from underrepresented groups?

ITS uses several different methods to locate and recruit staff from underrepresented groups. We continuously review resumes of minorities provided by the Office of Human Resources, participate in the spousal recruitment program², and advertise hard to fill positions through various electronic bulletin services such as IM-diversity and MonsterBoard³. We have run a professional development program for underrepresented groups for the past 12 years.

In 1999-2000, we created a recruitment and development program for staff in lower grades (16-18) that were interested in pursuing a career in information technology. Since females traditionally occupy these grade levels (University statistics show that the population of those grade levels is 81% female), this program is effectively focused on groups that are underrepresented in technology occupations.

Through this program, we have successfully recruited five individuals and retained four in technology positions within our organization. We are in the process of repeating this program this year. Additionally, we participate with other University organizations in an annual job fair and support and fund an internship program with the South Hills Business School in the spring of each year. This program focuses on students interested in establishing a career in the IT field.

b) What recruitment strategies have been most successful?

Our premier program is the ITS Professional Development Program. This program is intended to build IT leaders from new Penn State graduates from underrepresented groups. The purpose of the program is to build a national pool of information technology leaders, particularly African Americans. The program has been in existence since 1989 and has been extremely successful in launching the IT careers of young minority graduates. This program (jointly funded by the President's Opportunity Fund and ITS) is specifically geared to

² Interestingly, several female faculty have been hired because ITS provided jobs for their male partners.

³ For a number of years, we advertised in publications specifically oriented to various minority groups. We no longer do so because the yield was very low and less cost effective than our current approaches to increasing the applicant pool with under represented candidates.

underrepresented groups. We provide a three-year training program⁴ that rotates the individuals through mainstream activities in the ITS organization in progressively more responsible assignments. We traditionally have three program participants, one for each year of the program. The skills these individuals learn provide them with the necessary background to be extremely productive employees at Penn State in particular, and in the information technology field in general. At the end of the training program, each participant is guaranteed a standing position within ITS.

Graduates of this program have obtained positions in such areas as product development, consulting, multi-media, database, security, telecommunications, courseware development and campus technology support. To date, seventeen individuals have participated in this three yearlong program, and of those, six have been female. Five individuals that have completed the program are still working within ITS. The other graduates of this program have continued their careers in information technology in the private sector and with other universities.

This program is assessed each year. Each program participant participates in this process. Their individual progress, mentor relationship, technical expertise and team interaction is discussed. Improvements and changes are implemented for the next rotation. Two individuals will complete the program this June.

c) *What retention strategies have you implemented in your unit to retain members from underrepresented groups?*

Exit interviews have shown that individuals who leave often do so either because of better salaries elsewhere or to relocate to a community that better meets their social needs. Each of these factors is beyond ITS's control. National salary surveys have shown for several years that higher education and central Pennsylvania IT organizations pay below the national market.

We have examined a number of approaches to improving retention of members from underrepresented groups. Some of these have been to recruit more mature individuals as well as those that have ties to the local community. Another example of this approach was our offering of entry level IT positions (which included a year of training) to the grade 15-18 population of current university employees. Those grade levels are 81% female.

d) *What retention strategies have been most successful?*

In the past few years, we have tried to recruit individuals into our organization and the Professional Development Program who have a tie to the State College community in the hope that there is an additional incentive for them to remain with the university or us. We are still evaluating the effectiveness of this strategy.

Challenge 5. Developing a Curriculum that Supports the Goals of our New General Education Plan

⁴ Participants are fixed term-1 employees in positions funded by the program.

Response

- a) *Does your unit contribute to a curriculum that supports the diversity goals of the University? If so, how? What practices have been most successful?*

As an academic support unit, ITS supports colleges and schools at all Penn State locations. In this capacity, ITS actively supports the diversity efforts of the University through curriculum-based activities. This is focused through the Teaching and Learning with Technologies (TLT) unit of ITS. TLT has a plan to develop "course materials" that can be used in every section of Penn State's first-year seminar program, which is available to 13,600 students annually. We will digitize the Beverly Daniel Tatum's⁵ presentation at Encampment and then work with faculty to offer teaching materials based on her talk.

In addition, we have recently completed two courseware projects that support diversity. In the first of these projects, "Technology Enhancement of Instruction in Two Less Commonly Taught Languages: Arabic 1, 2, and 3, and Swahili 1, 2, and 3" developed in cooperation with Drs. Thomas Hale and Steven Thorne, TLT support has helped instructors of Arabic and Swahili to move beyond traditional methods of instruction and take advantage of the enormous variety of Arabic and Swahili language material now easily accessible on the Web.

ITS staff worked with instructors to incorporate audio, video, and graphics, using such software as Flash, into contemporary and authentic examples of Arabic and Swahili on-line language materials. These resources and documentation on creating similar resources reside in newly created instructor resource Web sites that will provide new instructors, typically graduate students, an archive of materials to use and to build upon.

In the second project, "Philosophy, Race, and Social Justice"⁶ developed in cooperation with Drs. Christine Clark-Evans, Emily Grosholz, and James Stewart, ITS worked with faculty members from Philosophy and African and African American Studies to design a Web-based resource for teachers who want to address questions of philosophy, race, and social justice in their classes, and for students who want to do further research on related topics. This Web site draws on teaching and research resources stemming from two courses taught at Penn State in Fall 1999. Philosophy 103 (Introduction to Ethics) and Philosophy AAAS 497A (African American Philosophy), brought students together to discuss the parallels and differences between the thoughts of Martin Luther King, W. E. B. Du Bois, Nelson Mandela, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. They discussed how these readings related to current race relations at Penn State. The Web site contains course materials, such as syllabi, student narratives, with instructor comments, a library of readings with study questions appended, and a series of tutorials for directed study related to these readings.

Finally, our "MELD" proposal to the AT&T Foundation was funded at the \$250,000 level. This AT&T funded project will help faculty incorporate diversity into their courses through the use of technology. As part of this project faculty workshops will be developed to help professors

⁵ She is the author of "Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? And Other Conversations about Race" (1999).

⁶ Information on this project can be found on the Web at <<http://ets.cac.psu.edu/projects/prsj/>>

explore techniques for creating an open classroom climate, web sites that catalog teacher and student views of classroom experiences for useful feedback will be created, as well as databases of successful diversity-based classroom activities including projects, lessons and research that faculty members can be used in their courses. The ultimate goal of this project is to use technology to aid students in obtaining a broader world-view. A copy of proposal can be found on our web page.

It is located at - <http://www.cis.psu.edu/>

Challenge 6. Diversifying University Leadership and Management

Response

a) How has your unit assisted staff from underrepresented groups in developing leadership and management skills?

ITS has been active in developing the leadership and management skills of underrepresented groups. This has been done mostly in the programs previously mentioned in this report. For example, our Professional Development Program provides staff from underrepresented groups with an opportunity to increase their professional growth in the IT field over a three-year period. The primary goal of the program is to help build a national talent pool. Our recruitment and development program for lower graded (grades 15-18) University employees provides individuals who have an interest in technology with an opportunity to enter the IT field and obtain the skills and background necessary to advance into progressively more responsible positions. We have also sponsored one female in the “Leadership Centre County” program. This program’s mission is to bring diverse individuals and groups together for education and networking, develop leadership succession for civic service and create a support network for present and future leaders.

Challenge 7. Coordinating Organizational Change to Support Our Diversity Goals

Response

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

ITS is completing a careful examination of how it is organized. A key element of this examination has been the realization of the University’s diversity goals. Given the complexity of ITS, this organizational change is likely to take a number of years to accomplish. One item that has already come to the surface is the enhanced level of responsibility for some of our staff that the restructuring has caused. Three of these four advancement opportunities that have evolved have been for female employees. We are currently working with the Office of Human Resources to appropriately compensate these employees for their increased responsibilities.

Even in times of declining budgets, we continue to allocate funds and human resources to support mentoring activities, training facilities and program needs for the Academic Computing

Fellows Program, Professional Development Program and the Recruitment and Development Program of employees in grades 15-18. We have even agreed to participate in a summer intern program for young minority black technical IT school students. We will provide two students with summer employment with our Lab and Classroom support group where they will learn software and hardware installation skills.