



Inside Outreach

November 2004

Dear Colleagues,

If we are to achieve a richer culture, rich in contrasting values, we must recognize the whole gamut of human potentialities, and so weave a less arbitrary social fabric, one in which each diverse human gift will find a fitting place.

MARGARET MEAD

Providing career advancement opportunities for members of underrepresented groups and offering programs that advance diversity are simply the right thing to do. Doing so not only recognizes each "diverse human gift", but also allows us to achieve a richer organizational culture, as Margaret Mead points out above. However, fostering a diverse work force is also in the best interest for any organization wishing to remain competitive and viable. In his widely cited book, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, Richard Florida chronicles the rise of creativity as a major economic force in our society. He notes that for the creative class—the growing segment of the workforce comprised of individuals working in and advancing knowledge-based companies fueling our economy—diversity is valued in all its manifestations. Dr. Florida contends that communities that are thriving economically possess the three "T's" - talent, technology, and tolerance (e.g., Boston, San Francisco, etc.). His perspective adds a strong reinforcement of the value and benefits that a diverse community brings to a successful organization. He contends that the key to our country's global economic leadership is our business culture's acceptance and enhancement of diverse perspectives in product development and services. He also observes, "Talented people seek an environment open to differences."

The Outreach Strategic Positioning Steering Committee also underscored the value of diversity, articulating it as the "strength that derives from honoring a variety of people, perspectives, and programs . . . inclusivity."

Jim Collins, author of *Good to Great*, states that his research shows that the most critical element of sustaining significant long-term organizational success is ensuring that you have the right people in the right seats in an enterprise. As Outreach works to have the right people in the right seats within our organization, I firmly believe the "right people" must reflect a diverse community of leaders to ensure our ability to solve problems, make informed decisions, advance, and most importantly, innovate.

We must be mindful not only of how we embrace diversity within our organization, but also of how we provide diverse perspectives in our programming and services, and how we provide access for diverse communities and individuals to Penn State's rich resources. The unique Outreach mission of access opens our organization up to a broad and inclusive perspective on diversity. Our interface with the spectrum of Penn State's external

constituents reinforces that there are many kinds of differences that characterize human lives, both for Outreach customers, clients, and students and in the University workplace. To be successful in our "business," our organization must embrace this diversity.

Penn State recently embarked on a new five-year *Framework to Foster Diversity*, and within this effort, all units within the University have developed five-year strategic plans for diversity. The *Framework* and unit plans may be found on the Office of the Vice Provost for Educational Equity website (<http://www.equity.psu.edu/>); our Outreach plan is also available through my.Outreach (<https://my.outreach.psu.edu/>) in the Document Library under Diversity. I encourage you to review this important plan and want to share some highlights with you.

Our initiatives focus on four key dimensions of diversity for our organization: 1) audiences; 2) programming; 3) workplace; and 4) leadership.

We will continue efforts to optimize program content, marketing, and delivery in the ongoing effort to provide barrier-free access to offerings for demographically diverse **audiences**. Outreach also has a special role to play in bringing part-time adult learners to the mix of students in our University community. Initiatives here include enhancing the role of continuing education in increasing the number of adult learners at Penn State as well as raising scholarship funds for adult part-time learners. We will also be exploring the dimensions and impact of diversity in the on-line learning environment for adult students to understand better how the World Campus can be supportive of the University's diversity goals.

The Outreach **programming** portfolio includes significant multicultural content reflecting our role in support of academic interests across the university and interface with a wide variety of external audiences. This includes Continuing Education at University Park and World Campus credit courses that meet the intercultural and international component of the University's general education requirements. It also includes a wide array of conferences on topics ranging from rural women's health to Middle Eastern Muslims in the aftermath of the Cold War to creating inclusive environments for the arts, education, and health care. Penn State Public Broadcasting offers both local and national programming on diversity-related topics including the locally produced *What Matters* that focuses on race relations and issues of diversity across Pennsylvania. Cooperative Extension provides many programs and resources that promote multicultural understanding, including a web site titled Dimensions of Diversity (<http://diversityeducation.cas.psu.edu/>). We are committed to continuing to work with academic partners to provide programming that is reflective of and responsive to the diversity of our society. We will also explore ways to proactively encourage the development of such programming.

Diversity in our **workplace** has two dimensions: diversity of the workforce and the workplace climate for diversity.

Increasing the diversity of faculty and staff from underrepresented groups is a priority for Outreach. We are giving special attention to search procedures to attract more diverse pools

of qualified applicants for positions in Outreach and have established a recruitment fund to help support the hiring of diverse faculty and staff. In addition, we are in the process of hiring a training coordinator for Outreach to develop training, leadership, and professional development programs to enhance our core competencies and foster diversity.

Creating a supportive climate for diversity is a never-ending task. The most recent Outreach diversity climate survey, conducted two years ago, indicated that the overall climate is positive for diverse groups within Outreach, but also told us there could be greater awareness of concerns and issues, increased involvement of staff in creating a supportive environment, and clearer expectations for acceptable and appropriate behaviors. I want to assure you that when specific concerns arise, they are taken very seriously. Among our climate initiatives, we are working with the Affirmative Action Office to put in place training for executives, directors, managers, and supervisors to establish clear and common expectations for leadership regarding their responsibility to promote and support diversity within the organization-this training will be provided early in the next calendar year. Beginning this year, Outreach also is including "Support for Diversity" in the annual SRDP process for all staff. The Outreach Office of Human Resources can provide information for employees and supervisors about this requirement, including examples of activities that address this factor.

Leadership is critically important to our diversity goals. We seek not only to increase the diversity of individuals in leadership positions but also to assure that all Outreach leaders are skillful and visible in promoting diversity within the organization. Accountability is also an important dimension of leadership for diversity; we will be tracking our progress and providing an annual assessment of the initiatives in the Outreach diversity strategic plan.

The Director of Planning and Administration will continue to serve as the lead point person for diversity issues for Outreach; a search currently is underway to fill this position. I also have elevated the role of the Outreach Diversity Council to provide leadership and accountability for policies, strategies, and actions to enhance diversity within the Outreach organization. Janet Patterson, Senior Conference Planner in Conferences and Institutes currently serves as chair of the council. A list of the council members follows at the close of this message; I encourage you to communicate with any of the members should you have questions, comments, suggestions, or wish to become involved.

The work of fostering diversity is never done. This is a multidimensional endeavor reflecting the breadth of differences in our society and the many ways that diversity impacts our Outreach organization. I appreciate your support and contributions in this important area and welcome your input as to what we might do and how we might work together in the future to foster diversity in Outreach at Penn State.

Craig

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