Penn State’s Commitment to Advancing Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Penn State is committed to advancing diversity, equity and inclusion on its campuses and in the communities it serves. While these values have long been embraced at Penn State, over the past year, under the leadership of President Eric Barron, the University has taken significant actions to foster a diverse, equitable and inclusive environment on its campuses. This includes action items implemented that contribute to an overall vision of diverse student, faculty and staff recruitment and retention.

In a June 2020 message to the University community, President Barron shared seven change initiatives to be guided by students, faculty and staff aimed at assessing, creating and maintaining a more inclusive University environment. During a virtual town hall event in that month, Barron, University leaders and committee co-chairs discussed these initiatives, along with a new Board oversight committee chaired by Trustee Brandon Short, and a new Action Together: Advancing Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at Penn State website for the community to share ideas and receive updates on the progress of ongoing and future initiatives.

The Select Penn State Presidential Commission on Racism, Bias and Community Safety and Student Code of Conduct Task Force both convened in July 2020 and shared draft reports on racism, bias, and community safety initiatives in December 2020. The reports, recommendations and supporting ideas were discussed at a virtual town hall event on Dec. 9 with President Barron and the chairs from both the commission and the task force. Both the commission and the task force members have reviewed the recommendations and begun the following actions:

- In January 2021, the Student Code of Conduct was updated for the spring 2021 semester, based on task force recommendations shared with the University community. The updated Code of Conduct is available on the Student Affairs website.
- University leaders also are working to further develop the Student Code of Conduct Task Force’s remaining recommendations, including developing curriculum for a mandatory training module for students to learn about the Student Code of Conduct and Penn State’s values at the beginning of their academic careers.
- In February 2021, President Barron shared a message on actions to address racism, bias, and community safety. Barron outlined his plan to advance the work of the Select Penn State Presidential Commission on Racism, Bias, and Community Safety, which includes embracing specific initiatives to move forward in the spring semester. Initiatives outlined include:

  - Moving to an enterprise approach for diversity, equity and inclusion
    - Complete a full inventory of Penn State’s investment in diversity, equity and inclusion programs and staff in order to discover gaps in our investments and to create more effective programs;
    - Create a chief diversity officer position reporting to the president, charged with coordinating and maximizing the effectiveness of programs and staff; and
    - Develop a stronger system of accountability reporting to the chief diversity officer as a centralized function and institutional priority.

  - Greater commitment to recruitment, onboarding, mentoring and building community
    - Address challenges in recruitment, with an added focus on accountability within units. This responsibility will be a key element of the portfolio of the chief diversity officer.
Invest in an onboarding and mentoring program that is a model for universities across the nation. The administration proposes to form a task group to design best practices for onboarding and mentoring, and for the University to provide sufficient investment to reach its realization.

- **Advancing key areas that align with the educational and research mission of the University**
  - Establish a center, institute or consortium dedicated to anti-racist, anti-bias pedagogy and scholarly research. The form of this (center, institute or consortium) requires additional analysis, but the potential impact of such an enterprise could be profound and multi-faceted. The administration will financially support the development of an enterprise dedicated to anti-racist, anti-bias pedagogy and scholarly research and is committed to attracting an outstanding leader for this effort.
  - Represent diversity, equity and inclusion as a mandatory element of education. The president has endorsed the combined efforts of the commission and the University Faculty Senate to consider the best approach to incorporating diversity, equity and inclusion into the learning commitment required for a Penn State degree.
  - Learn through a scholarly analysis of our past practices in teaching, research and service. Move ahead with a proposed exploration of Penn State’s history in diversity, equity and inclusion as a mechanism to develop a more productive focus on the future.

As part of a commitment to make changes and address racism, bias and community safety across Penn State, **University-level initiatives include**:

- **Scholarships supporting diversity**: Penn State announced in June 2020 that it made a $10 million commitment to scholarships that will support diversity across the institution, as part of “A Greater Penn State for 21st Century Excellence.” The funds will primarily be used to match new scholarships, created by Penn State alumni and friends with gifts of $25,000 or more, that “enhance our ability to recruit and retain students whose gender, race, ethnic, cultural, and/or national background contribute to the diversity of the student body.”

- **New resources available for underrepresented faculty members**: In September 2020, Penn State launched a Faculty Pathway website with new resources for supporting faculty members from underrepresented backgrounds – including a new faculty tenure and promotion resource, a mentorship resource clearinghouse, Multicultural Faculty Development Support Funds and a Mid-Career Faculty Advancement Program to support the advancement of associate professors to full professors.

- **Continued support for ongoing efforts via the existing Joint Diversity Awareness Task Force** to identify and recommend equity-centered curricular changes to elevate awareness and advance knowledge about histories of racism and social change in our society.

- **Policing Communities of Color Task Force**: In September 2020, a town-gown Task Force on Policing and Communities of Color, including Penn State and local community leaders, was reconvened as one part of Penn State’s ongoing efforts to combat racism, address bias and enhance community safety.

- **Work with the Board of Trustees to advance educational and employment equity** so that it has the full attention of trustees.
• Work with the University Faculty Senate, Staff Advisory Council, student leaders and University administrators to initiate **mandatory bias training for all employees**. Pilot programs are currently being considered for various areas of the University.

• Partner through shared governance with the University Faculty Senate to continue to develop improved policies, procedures and expectations that will increase the **hiring and retention of faculty who are members of underrepresented groups**.

• **Virtual Roundtable Conversations (Fall 2020):** The Office of Educational Equity has hosted the “**Toward Racial Equity at Penn State: Social Difference, Social Equity and Social Change**” series of roundtable discussions.

• **Strategic Planning:** As part of the [University’s strategic planning effort](#), the Equal Opportunity Planning Committee (EOPC) provides seed money for innovative pilot programs and existing initiatives that help create and support a climate of equity throughout Penn State.

• **Penn State Community Survey:** In February 2020, Penn State launched the University-wide survey as part of ongoing efforts to promote community, inclusion and diversity across campuses. A [summary report, findings and public results dashboards](#) for the Penn State Community Survey were shared with students, faculty and staff members, and leaders and budget executives are reviewing the results to [create action plans](#) for their areas.

• **Hiring, retention and advancement:** Over the past several years, University leadership has implemented a number of programs aimed at increasing diversity and have created several positions geared specifically toward better recruitment and retention of people of color. Additionally, Penn State is one of 19 universities [joining a three-year institutional change effort](#) to develop inclusive faculty recruitment, hiring and retention practices.

*Many other unit-specific efforts are ongoing within the University’s colleges, campuses, units and faculty, staff and student organizations, including new programming, resources, scholarships and initiatives.*

April 20, 2021