Lehigh University Approach to Diversity, Climate and Community – 2010

When we worked together to set out institutional goals for Lehigh University, we said that our goal was to: create and maintain an inclusive community which values, affirms, and advances the diverse backgrounds, interests, experiences, and aspirations of all its members. Achieving diversity requires working toward building a community that is more reflective of our society. Fostering a campus culture that embraces diversity will advance the intellectual and social vitality of the Lehigh community, and confirm the symbiotic relationship between diversity and academic excellence.

We have made progress toward this goal through the hard work of the Council for Equity and Community, the effective student groups working to improve our campus culture, and the many faculty and staff who advance the intellectual and social vitality of Lehigh through their leadership, example and excellent programs.

It is our strong belief that we have more work to do and that we need to enhance our efforts to transform our recruitment, our retention and our campus climate. Our approach is centered on the people making up our campus community and we highlight their roles in this transformation.

1) Faculty and Intellectual Climate

Lehigh’s climate and intellectual environment is driven largely by the faculty. We therefore are committed to recruiting a diverse faculty. We are driving that activity with a new position, the Vice Provost for Academic Diversity (VPAcaD). This person will be an important academic leader on campus and will collaborate with the deans, department chairs, faculty and staff to make recruiting a diverse faculty a reality. We also believe that this person will collaborate with the student affairs staff in ways that will aid the student experience and student diversity. We will work as a community with this new leader to:

a) Affirm our conviction that diversity is an integral aspect of the excellence we seek in faculty hires.
b) Bring the dialog about diversity, and actions to improve climate to a new and higher level in faculty searches and within departments.
c) Seek broader excellence in our candidate and finalist pools.
d) Make diversifying our faculty a high priority in cluster hiring.
e) Educate ourselves, our search committees and our colleagues about the best ways to recruit excellent faculty.

2) Students and Student Experiences

We pride ourselves on a distinctive educational experience that extends beyond the classroom. As we further integrate the student life and classroom study aspects of our education in the first year and beyond we will provide opportunities to develop appreciation and respect for campus diversity and varying talents.
We have outstanding individuals working in student affairs, in particular in multicultural affairs where they make progress in a number of areas such as: cultural programming, student advocacy, social justice education, community service, support, safe zones, first year experience, student leadership and more. We will work as a community and as a leadership team to:

   a) Make these staff and their organizations as successful as possible.
   b) Integrate the staff and faculty efforts to make the intellectual environment and student experience all that it can be for all kinds of students.
   c) Make the experience inside and outside the classroom one that supports effective discourse, respects differences of perspective and opinion, and brings new levels of awareness of and value for the breadth of intellectual diversity in our community.

3) Graduate Students

Graduate students are the primary pool for the next generation of faculty. Their experiences differ from those of faculty and undergraduate students. Their recruitment is also narrowly focused. We will work with departments and deans to:

   a) Enhance Lehigh’s efforts to attract and support underrepresented graduate students.
   b) Encourage women and minority students to pursue academic careers.
   c) Foster a sense of professional and intellectual community in this important peer group.

4) Staff and work environment

Lehigh benefits greatly from dedicated and talented staff. They are the backbone of the university, central to our mission and they make all that we do both possible and effective. They can be instrumental in contributing to the climate and culture of campus. We will work with supervisors and coworkers to:

   a) Enhance the work environment to be as productive and fulfilling as possible, benefitting from the gratifying mission and diverse roles throughout the university.
   b) Foster the recruitment and retention of a diverse staff to better benefit from their diversity of experiences and culture.
   c) Ensure effective feedback, rewards and recognition of staff efforts to enhance Lehigh’s climate and community.