

Equitable Resources for Underrepresented Minorities

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Introduction

Our proposed policy aims to address and highlight three UN sustainability goals. These goals are the fourth goal of quality education, the tenth goal of reduced inequalities and the sixteenth goal of peace, justice, and strong institutions. The United Nations defines the fourth goal as “(E)nsure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” (United Nations). The tenth goal is defined as “(R)educate inequality within and among countries” (United Nations) and the sixteenth goal is defined as “(P)romote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels” (United Nations). We believe that these goals are the essence of provided equitable resources for underrepresented minorities and minoritized groups at the Penn State University Park campus.

Although the United Nations Sustainability Goals are at the forefront of how we have shaped our policy, goals from the Penn State strategic plan are also at the foundation of our policy. Our suggestions and proposal align with the overall goals of the institution and those explicitly related to diversity, equity and inclusion in the Penn State strategic plan. Our policy aims to provide equitable resources for underrepresented minorities and minoritized groups and individuals at specifically the Penn State University Park campus. The University Park campus has a total of 8,362 students of color as of Fall 2017 (Penn state Undergraduate Admissions). In the Penn State strategic plan, the University has established four goals related to diversity, equity, and inclusion (Penn State Educational Equity).

These goals are...

- “1. Foster a culture of respect and inclusion that values the experiences and perspectives of faculty, staff, and students;
2. Develop and implement curricula and scholarship that interrogate social issues and inspire social responsibility;
3. Evaluate and rectify organizational structures, policies, and practices that cause differential impact and limit access and opportunities for faculty, staff, and students at Penn State; and,
4. Recruit, support, and advance a diverse student body, faculty, and staff” (Penn State educational Equity).

Although all the goals are imperative to the overarching topics of educational equity and resources for underrepresented minorities, our policy will specifically address the first and the third of these four goals.

Definitions and Acronyms

The Pennsylvania State University definition of underrepresented minority or URM adheres to the standard with compared to how other universities definitions. Although it was not explicitly clear as to how the university defines underrepresented minorities, the definition that was most consistent came from the College of Agricultural Sciences in house diversity team. They definition underrepresented minorities as “as a group whose percentage of the population in a given group is lower than their percentage of the population in the country. At Penn State, as well as many colleges and universities, underrepresented minorities are generally considered to include: Hispanic/Latinos, African Americans, Native Americans, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders, and those of two or more races. International students generally fall into a separate category of their own.” Although this is a somewhat adequate definition, for the purposes of our paper, we did not feel as if the definition was comprehensive enough. Through our research and after understanding the needs of undergraduate students on campus we have decided to define underrepresented minorities (URM) as individuals with marginalized and protect identities such as race, class, gender and condition of ability who are also statistically underrepresented in their fields.

Throughout the body of this paper we will also use the acronyms of some of the current resources that are already in place for underrepresented minorities.

PRCC refers to the Paul Robeson Cultural Center. The center is located in the HUB-Robeson Center and is one of the spaces on campus devoted to students of diverse backgrounds. The purpose of the center is to “make true the mission of the institution by serving students in the

development of character, conscience, and social responsibility through fostering identity development, social justice, and inclusion.

The Paul Robeson Cultural Center is committed to creating institutional programs that are driven by the Vision and Statement of Purpose in the following areas.

- Identity Development
- Social Justice Initiatives
- Cultural Enrichment
- Scholarly Initiatives & Cultural Education Programs” (Penn State Student Affairs)

MRC refers to the Multicultural Resource Center. The center is located in the Grange building and works with multicultural undergraduate students at the University Park campus through providing them with resources necessary to their overall success. According to the Office of Educational Equity, “MRC staff act as advocates for students in dealing with the complex makeup of a large university. They are eager to meet and talk with students. Any issue important to students is important to MRC counselors. For instance, if you have personal concerns or an issue related to the University, MRC can help you. More specifically, MRC staff work with students in a variety of areas including:

- University policies, procedures, and regulations;
- Study skills, time management, and test-taking strategies;
- Obtaining free tutorial assistance;
- Interpersonal relationships with peers and family, conflict resolution, and other personal matters;

- Careers, internships, graduate and professional school, education abroad, and job opportunities;
- Assistance with questions on financial aid, scholarships, and money management; educational programming, including study groups and seminars; and
- Assisting targets of bias motivated incidents so they might find quick resolution and attain their educational goals.” (Penn State Educational Equity)

CSGD refers to the Center for Sexual and Gender Diversity. It is located in the HUB-Robeson Center and seeks to provide “a comprehensive range of education, information, and advocacy services to students, faculty, staff, and alumni. We work to create and maintain an open, safer, and inclusive environment honoring gender and sexual diversity. Through educational, social, and supportive programming, along with workshops and individual consultation, the Center for Sexual and Gender Diversity strives to serve the entire Penn State community.” (Penn State Student Affairs)

SDR refers to Student Disability Resources. SDR is housed in the Boucke Building. It is “the designated office that provides reasonable accommodations and services to students with disabilities enrolled at the University Park campus.

Penn State has a disability services office at every Penn State campus that provides accommodations and services for students with disabilities. Each designated office

- requests and maintains disability-related documents
- certifies eligibility for services
- determines and develops plans for reasonable accommodations such as academic adjustments, auxiliary aids, and/or services

as mandated under Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADAAA) of 2008 and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.” (Penn State Educational Equity)

Problem Statement

Through our research we were able to conclude that overall URM students do not feel like there is adequate support for them to succeed in their studies here at University Park. Although there are resources and programs established for students of different backgrounds, these things need better support to be able to properly address the needs of these students.

The Community Survey

In the spring semester of the 2019-2020 academic year, Penn State University launched the first community survey of its kind. The survey was done to examine if the University's efforts to promote inclusion, diversity and community on campus were actually being achieved. According to the Community Survey Report, in total 20,483 people or 17% of the overall Penn State population completed the survey. 9,582 or 14% of undergraduate students responded. The six priority topic areas of the survey were

1. Belonging and inclusion
2. Institutional commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion
3. Engaging across difference
4. Cultural competence and knowledge
5. Experiences with stereotyping, microaggressions, and harassment
6. Off-campus contexts

Through the survey and the dashboard that allows the data to be displayed in a more conscience way, we were able to understand the different experiences of URMs and other students. However, because of the structure of the survey the data presented below is based upon race for the undergraduate University Park community.



According to the community survey, only 55% of underrepresented minority students feel a sense of belonging on campus. 4% felt very dissatisfied, 18% felt generally dissatisfied, 22% felt neutral, 36% felt generally satisfied and 19% felt very satisfied.



According to the community survey, 81% of White students feel a sense of belonging on campus. 38% felt very satisfied, 43% felt generally satisfied, 12% neutral, 6% generally dissatisfied and 1% very dissatisfied.

These graphs came from <https://opair.psu.edu/community-survey/dashboards/total/>

The community survey asked a slew of questions but from the data shown above, it is easy to see the underlying disparities between students on campus. Because of the drastic different in experience, we concluded that there was more to be told and conducted our own research through interviews.

Interview Findings

Although the community survey provided us with necessary background knowledge needed to come to some conclusions about what type of policy would be necessary for undergraduate underrepresented minority students at the University Park campus, we concluded that interviewing students and faculty would provide us with a more comprehensive view. These interviews were conducted to supplement the findings of the community survey and provide us with a more tailored view of the university and specific resources.

Student Interviews

We were curious about the untold stories that might have slipped through the cracks when it came to the data found. The community survey provided us with major insights but, there was still more to be said. Each member of our group interviewed several students who identify as underrepresented minorities in some way. In total we interviewed 24 students of various backgrounds. We asked interviewees a series of open-ended questions about their experiences as a Penn State student, background, demographics, and suggestions for the university.

1. How do you identify?
2. How would you describe your middle and high school experience academically and socially?
3. How have your identities impacted your educational experience prior to coming to Penn State?
4. How have your identities impacted your social experience prior to coming to Penn State?
5. How would you compare your experience before Penn State to now?

6. What about Penn State that startled or surprised you?
7. Do you think that your high school adequacy prepared you for college?
8. Is there any resource that could improve your educational and social experience at Penn State?
9. Is there any resource you wish you had earlier to better prepare you for the future?
10. What resources have helped you the most and how did you find it?
11. What would you ask Penn State administration to implement to support students?
12. Do the spaces allocated for underrepresented minorities provide you with a sense of safety?
13. Did you take the community survey and what do you know about it?
14. Is there anything else you want to add that we didn't cover?

In these interviews, we were able to gain a more detailed view of the resources available to students. Students of colors, students with disabilities, LGBTQIA+ students, low-income first-generation students, and students who fit into both of those categories were able to express their views and lived experience. We interviewed student across various identities and academic fields and came to conclusions that formed our policy suggestions.

Faculty Interviews

To understand the perspective of those who hold just as much stake in the issue of equitable resources as students, we interviewed three faculty members at the University Park campus who work in the realm of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Dr. Marcus Whitehurst, Vice Provost for Educational Equity

Dr. Whitehurst believes that the best thing for URM students he said that increasing the financial support given to students was essential. Through the research done by the office of educational equity, they realized that although the campus climate does determine a lot about student success, the essential factor was financial barriers to success. Through the addition of more scholarships and expanding programs that already exist like Bunton Waller and Millennium Scholars, tackling other issues can become easier. He also believes that adding more staff and financial resources to the offices that already exist will benefit URM students and faculty and the university.

Dr. Ashley N. Patterson, Assistant Professor of Education

Dr. Patterson believes that providing resources for underrepresented minority students is essential to their wellbeing. Providing them with a space where they can be themselves and be heard is imperative to student success. However, in the spaces that already exist there needs to be a culture shift and a better allocation of resources. She also believes that in each college, the resources for diversity, equity and inclusion must be standardized. For some colleges to have excellent resources and for others to have subpar resources doesn't help the overall community of URM students.

Gary Abdullah, Assistant Dean of Diversity and Inclusion for the College of Communications

Through Dean Abdullah's office, the college of communications is in the process of re-establishing affinity groups. These groups will serve as a space for URM students to gather to discuss issues that impact them both professionally and socially. Dean Abdullah believes that for URM students to succeed, their voices need to be centered. Students cannot succeed if things are created based upon what people believe would be best for them and not what is from the perspective of the people who matter most.

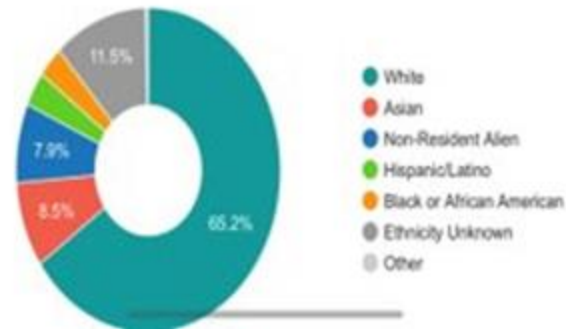
Flaws Within Penn State

Penn State University is an educational institution that is well-known for their pride and strong sense of community. This reputation is great for future students and those who pride themselves as being alum. However, for many students, Penn State does not feel like a welcoming and prideful environment. Students who feel left out, discriminated against, not represented through staff, or valued are underrepresented minority students.

The lack of diverse staff at this university creates an unwelcoming environment for underrepresented minority students. This is evident through the student surveys that were conducted to gain student's perspective at this university. One of the interviewees stated, "I feel like I have Imposter's Syndrome since none of my professors look like me. I feel like I don't belong here when I step into a classroom." Students who aspire to acquire an education should not feel like they do not belong in a classroom. Therefore, it is imperative to analyze the lack of diverse staff at this university and rectify the situation at hand.

According to the Daily Collegian, an independent student produced news outlet that is ran by Penn State students, in a 2018 report, 3.1% of Penn State's faculty members are black. Collegenatural.com reported the faculty diversity statistics of Penn State University Park. 8.5% of Penn State's faculty members are Asian, 3.4% are Hispanic or Latino, 3.1% are black or African American, and 0.3% are American Indian or Alaska Native. While 65.2% of Penn State's faculty members are white.

Pennsylvania State University - University Park Faculty Ethnic Diversity Breakdown

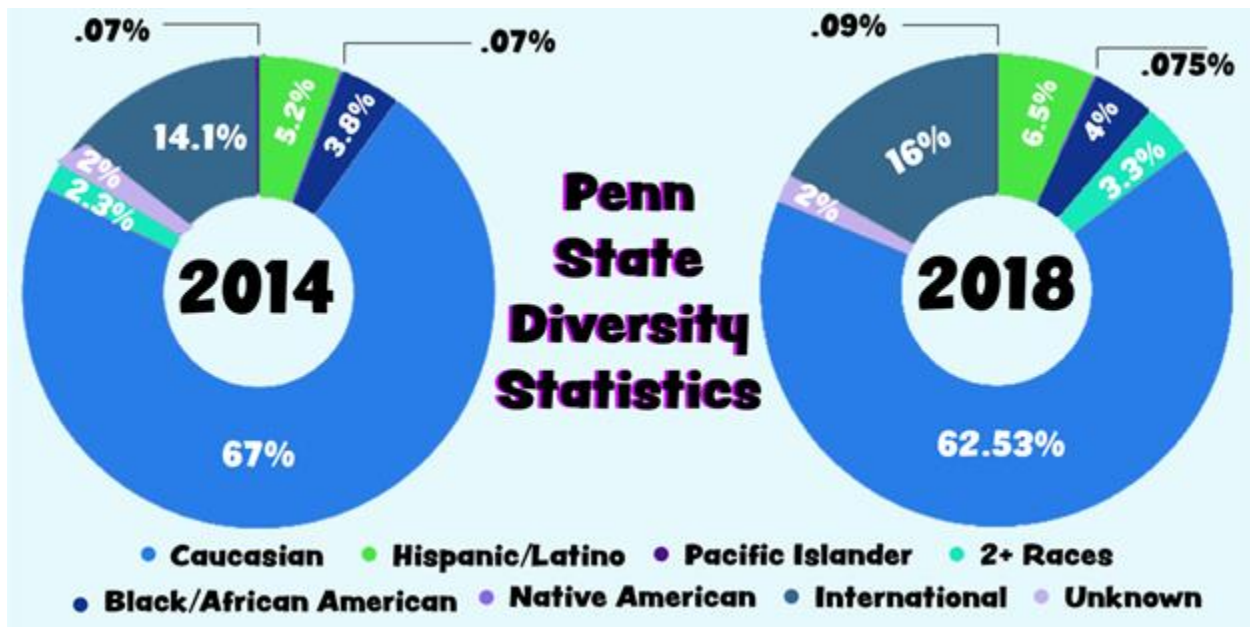


This image was found on <https://www.collegefactual.com/colleges/pennsylvania-state-university-main-campus/student-life/diversity/chart-faculty-ethnic-diversity.html>

After calculating the percentages of Penn State’s faculty diversity, it was discovered that only 15.3% of Penn State’s faculty are people of color, who are underrepresented minorities. This calculation does not include 11.5% of faculty members whose ethnicity remains unknown. It is imperative that it is noted how 65.2% of faculty members at Penn State are white. These numbers prove that there is an issue regarding hiring faculty members of color who can best represent and teach underrepresented minority students.

Another staffing issue that was found was the number of counselors that serve underrepresented minority students at the Multicultural Center (the MRC). There are only six (6) full time counselors that are provided to serve students of color (“Multicultural Resource Center

Provides Assistance, Home for Penn State Students”). According to Penn State University Admission Statistics, for the 2018-2018 academic year, there was a total of 40,639 undergraduate students. Out of that number, 32.61% of those undergraduate students are underrepresented minority students regarding race. That means, there are only six (6) counselors that are meant to mentally and academically support 13,252 students. In theory, that is a ratio of 2,208 students to one counselor (2,208:1). It is extremely difficult for one person to support that many individuals who all have different needs. In order to increase the lack of diverse staff at this university, it is imperative to hire faculty who meet the definition of an underrepresented individual.



(This image was found and provided by https://www.collegian.psu.edu/news/campus/article_3b6c4236-dff6-11e9-9269-13a5e8af91fe.html)

The Benefits of Promoting Diversity and Inclusion on College Campuses

Penn State University is an educational institution that prides itself on diversity and inclusion. As a community and educational institution, Penn State has made strides towards being a more diverse university. For example, the creation of spaces for underrepresented minority students such as the Paul Robeson Cultural Center (the PRCC) and the Multicultural Resource Center (the MRC). There is also the creation of a task force created to ensure diversity and inclusion is promoted and celebrated on campus. This task force has been fully supported by President Barron and multiple administrators on campus. Despite the strides that Penn State is making regarding diversity and inclusion, there is an extreme need of improvement. There is a need for improvement because underrepresented minority students need and deserve more.

Underrepresented minority students here at Penn State do not feel that the university is as diverse and inclusive as it says it is. This statement is evident after the various interviews we have conducted to assess the cultural atmosphere of this institution. According to the students who were interviewed, many of them felt safe in the places that are allocated for them, however, they all agreed that there needs to be more places designated for them.

The purpose of this policy paper is to highlight the benefits of diversity and inclusion within an educational institution. With substantial research of different universities, academic studies, and interviews, it is discovered that there are significant benefits of the promotion of diversity and inclusion on a college campus and propose the use of the recommendations stated to enhance Penn State's community.

The first organization that was researched is EVERFI. EVERFI is an organization that focuses on community engagement industry and is used to empower institutions through

workplace training, financial education, higher education, and community engagement. Penn State uses EVERFI as a resource to their prevention strategy. According to one of the informational pages on EVERFI's website, "73% of students believe that their institution's diversity and inclusion programming is either weak or non-existent" ("Diversity and Inclusion Training for College Students"), and almost 100% of our interviewees believe that Penn State needs to do more regarding diversity and inclusion.

In order to aid underrepresented minority students, it is essential to create more spaces allocated to them in order to nurture their cultural understanding of their identities, in order to help them succeed educationally.

Various studies conclude that students perform better academically and are more socially involved when diversity is promoted throughout their campuses.

An additional benefit of promoting diversity and inclusion within a college campus is highlighted in another informational post provided by EVERFI. The text states, Ultimately, studies show that diversity in education, particularly on college campuses, improve the "intellectual engagement, self-motivation, citizenship, and cultural engagement, and academic skills like critical thinking, problem-solving, and writing – for students of all races. Interacting with diverse peers outside a classroom setting directly benefits students, making them better scholars, thinkers, and citizens." ("Benefits of Diversity in Education for College Students")

Another source that confirmed the benefits of promoting diversity and inclusion on college campuses is the Center for American Progress. This center focuses on improving the lives of American citizens through a progressive viewpoint. The mission for this organization is

to focus on diversity as a way to promote peace, make the American government more effective, and to overall create positive change.

The most efficient route for continuing to promote a diverse campus is to hire diverse faculty and staff. This is apparent through the research that Texas A&M International University conducted. The university discovered the following:

1. Whether it is widely recognized or not, representation matters and even improves the academic performance of students who learn and interact with teachers and faculty who look like them. This finding is evident according to Texas Tech University which highlighted the findings of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Through research, they concluded that Teachers of color boost the academic performance of students of color.
2. Students of color, along with white students, report having positive perceptions of their teachers of color.
3. Teachers of color are resources for students in hard-to-staff schools.
4. Greater diversity of teachers may mitigate feelings of isolation, frustration and fatigue that lead individual teachers of color to leave the profession.

(“Importance of Having Teachers Who Look Like Their Students: Benefits of Diversity in the Teaching Workforce). The results of this institution’s extensive research highlight the benefits of having a diverse staff to teach diverse students. If Penn State were to take the initiative to hire more diverse staff to cater to their underrepresented minority students, there will be an increase in academic performance of these students and the university will have increased diversity within the student body and within faculty and staff.

The Center for American Progress conducts surveys and uses research from outside sources to explore the benefits of diversity. In their article, “10 Reasons Why We Need Diversity on College Campuses”, the center conducts further research on the subject and states, “Research shows that the overall academic and social effects of increased racial diversity on campus are likely to be positive, ranging from higher levels of academic achievement to the improvement of near- and long-term intergroup relations.” (Kerby)

Financial Resources

In order to ensure that these spaces are created, expanded and that affinity groups are created, there needs to be funding. The American Philosophical Association has grant funds that are allocated to diversity and inclusion. According to their website, this association will provide up to \$20,000 to projects that aim to “increase the presence and participation of women, racial and ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+ people, people with disabilities, people of low socioeconomic status, and other underrepresented groups at all levels of philosophy” (“Diversity and Inclusiveness Funding”). Another source of funding that is accessible is the Nonprofit Finance Fund. This organization focuses on financing, consulting, and partnering with different organizations to promote diversity and inclusion. So, this fund can directly lend money or partner with donors to donate the necessary funds that are needed to build and expand spaces for underrepresented minority students at Penn State.

After continuous research, it was discovered that Purdue University receives funds to finance their Black Community Center (the BCC) through corporate matching gift programs. “Corporate matching gifts are a type of philanthropy in which companies financially match donations that their employees make to nonprofit organizations. When an employee makes a donation, they'll request the matching gift from their employer, who then makes their own donation” (“Corporate Matching Gift Programs: Understanding the Basics”). Purdue University allows individuals to donate to specialized funds in case alumni, or anyone, wants to donate to a specific aspect of the Black Cultural Center. For example, some of the specialized areas that people can donate to include “Scholarships, Cultural Art Series, Research Tours, and Unrestricted Support” (“Giving to the BCC”). If Penn State were to use their alumni association

to start corporate matching gifts, there will be enough funds allocated to ensure that underrepresented minority students feel safe, represented and seen on campus.

Deciding who manages the funding of this policy is equally important as finding ways to generate funds to provide the necessary resources for underrepresented minority students. Based off of the recommendation given by the Senior Director of Development and Alumni Relations in Schreyer Honors College, Sean Miller, it is essential to have an individual or a team to be responsible for the finances being allocated to underrepresented minority students. By creating a position to ensure that funds are being collected and distributed to various initiatives that aid underrepresented minority students, there is the creation of an opportunity to hire more diverse staff to ensure that this position is filled. Thus, another way Penn State is being an active participant regarding enhancing diversity and inclusion on campus. If this policy were to be enacted, underrepresented minority students will have more funding for their overall benefit, and there will be an opportunity for an increased diverse staff.

Objectives and Precedents

The objectives that we want our policy paper to target include 3 main areas; to create policy that will lead to the creation of spaces for underrepresented students to safely find community, to create policy that will lead to the allocation of more funds for underrepresented minorities, and to create policy that will lead to better addressing the distinct issues of those with intersectional identities.

In order for our policy to lead to the creation of spaces for URM students we want the spaces that Penn State has already allocated for minority students, for example the Paul Robeson Cultural Center, the Multicultural Resource Center, and the Center for Sexual and Gender Identity to be expanded. These spaces are very small and are not big enough to accommodate for the populations that they are there to serve. Additionally, we wish for more safe spaces to be prevalent throughout campus and not just those few. Safe spaces for URM students are extremely important and vital to their success on campus. In her book, *Campus Counterspaces: Black and Latinx Students' Search for Community at Historically White Universities*, Dr. Micere Keels, an associate professor of comparative human development at the University of Chicago, says that minority-focused spaces help students validate their cultural identity, which can lead to positive personal growth. Keel says, "Access to counterspaces promotes minority student college persistence and their psychological, emotional and cultural-wellbeing, thereby lessening the psychological costs of college" (Stewart 2020). Safe spaces can really help URM students form communities on campus and aid in so many ways. We believe that Penn State should place more importance on this and as a result allocate more space.

To create policy that will lead to the allocation of more funds for underrepresented minorities Penn State needs to dedicate more money to getting underrepresented minority students to feel safe in the school environment. This includes more funding to build safe spaces. A majority of the safe spaces on campus tend to be in the same area and for the sake of accessibility there needs to be more locations on campus designated for URM students to feel safe in. In addition to that the school also needs to increase the employment of minority professors and staff. The 'More Rivers To Cross' report by professors Gary King and Darryl Thomas details the depths of systemic bias that has prevented the recruitment and retention of black faculty at Penn State. King and Thomas found that in the span of 15 years the number of full-time black faculty at Penn State decreased from 105 to 103, or 1.9%, according to the Penn State Factbook (Paez 2020). All students should be able to see themselves in their professors, and even students who are not underrepresented would benefit from a diverse teaching staff. This is an issue that needs to be handled by Penn State, and hopefully increase the numbers of underrepresented minority employees. Additionally, there should be more funding going into minority organizations and events, in order to educate everyone on campus as well as foster relationships within URM communities. Lastly, there needs to be renovations on older buildings on campus. Penn State has been around for more than 100 years, and as a result there are some very old buildings that may be out of code or are just very difficult for disabled students to navigate. There needs to be funding allocated for these buildings to go under renovation in order to make them more accessible for all students able and disabled.

Finally, this policy will lead to better addressing the distinct issues of those with intersectional identities. Oftentimes when you are not the majority in a given environment your voice may not be heard, or it can just be ignored. Over the years the population of URM students

at Penn State has grown, and as Penn State continues to push for diversity students to come to their schools, they also need to be prepared to adequately serve their needs. A lot of these students have intersectional identities, meaning they have different identities that overlap with one another. For example, a person that is both black and disabled has an intersectional identity. In order to better serve these students, Penn State needs to be more attentive to their intersectionality. For example, in the PRCC there should be an office for someone from the Student Disability Resource center in order to cater to attend to students with those identities. Also, Penn State should make surveys like the Community Surveys more easily accessible and known to students who identify as underrepresented minorities. This could be done by letting the directors of the PRCC, MRC, CGSD aware of this and to advertise it within their spaces. This would allow for the school to get more accurate insight on how URM students feel at Penn State.

While Penn State has some positive programs in terms of diversity, equity, and inclusion, there is always room for improvement. Thus, identifying and analyzing the actions taken by other universals can prove beneficial. The following are case studies and analyses of options from the university of Tampa, Armstrong University, Kent State University, James Madison University, Stanford University, and The Ohio State University.

There are some precedents set by other schools which Penn State could follow or learn from. For example, at the University of Tampa there is an initiative called Diversity Fellowship which hosts events designed to raise awareness of groups who are often marginalized because of their sexual orientation, gender, religion, race and socio-economic status, among other things (Howard 2017). If something like this were to be implemented at Penn State, there would be an increase in URM students feeling more at home on campus. It also would serve as a learning opportunity for people who don't identify as underrepresented minorities to learn more about

their peers and get rid of any stereotypes or preconceived notions. Numerous schools such as Armstrong University, Kent State University, and James Madison University have Safe Zone and Safe Space programs in place that train students, faculty members and administrators to be special allies to LGBTQ and other groups (Howard 2017). Again, this would not only be a great addition for URM students to feel more cared about on campus but would also be a great way for Penn State to show how committed they are to supporting their minority population. With programs like this in place all students learn more, and minority students feel supported. Lastly, the University of Toronto has begun making renovations to their oldest buildings to make them more accessible to all students (Levine 2017). These renovations include wider hall space and more elevators. Penn State also has buildings that are very old that would benefit from renovations with accessibility in mind.

Stanford University in Stanford, California often ranks highly in diversity indexes. According to their own dashboards, the student body tends to be between 24 and 34% white. While still presenting a majority, this means that 66 to 76 of the student body is non-white across a variety of different ethnicities. Stanford has chosen to acknowledge this critical piece of demographic information and subsequently create programs that focus on supporting students. Programs range from specific colleges, to the general student body, to graduate students, and to hiring. These programs include a variety of centers under the Centers for Equity, Community, and Leadership (ECL), resources under the Center for Learning and Teaching, the Diversity and Access Office (D&A), and finally Stanford's Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access in a Learning Environment (IDEAL) initiative. These programs are being highlighted due to their relation to our own goals, however, represent the tip of the iceberg in relation to Stanford's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

The previously mentioned programs act to serve the Stanford community at varying levels. Similarly, to Penn State, most colleges at Stanford have some sort of department or chair with a focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion. Most colleges will have some sort of college specific programming through-out the year, but also make use of university-wide programs such as Stanford's "Diversity Works" under which are housed several of the resource centers and affinity spaces. Most colleges also partner or have some sort of relationship with these resource centers, meaning a student could access them through the department they are familiar with (or access them directly). This connectedness is a good way for students to access spaces that are dedicated for their use, and an efficient way of advertising. This could be beneficial for Penn State since it faces a problem regarding a lack of knowledge about what resources are available to students. The Center for Learning and Teaching provides students with extra help and resources necessary for students to succeed, and also partners with community centers such as the ECL to help students work with faculty, staff, and peers who are like them. Under part of the Diversity Works initiative these students have access to twelve different affinity-based centers focused on various religions, genders, and ethnicities. These community centers provide resources, counselling, support, academic advising, and more for the wide range of students found on Stanford's campus. Community centers are also physical places for students to feel safe, included, and welcome on campus, a critical factor in overall inclusion and celebration of diversity on campus. The actions and activities taken by these community centers can provide a source of inspiration for the Penn State equivalent MRC, PRCC, and Center for Sexual and Gender Identity in the work of revitalizing the spaces to best serve student interests.

At the administrative level, Stanford also has the semi-recent IDEAL initiative with goals related to diversity of thought, ensuring that all members of the campus community feel accepted

and supported, and ensuring that everyone has access to the opportunities and benefits present at Stanford. IDEAL also emphasizes existing structures related to recruitment, research, education, and engagement. It primarily uses public rhetoric and initiatives, while supporting existing programs to try and address campus culture. Its primary means of doing this is by very publicly publishing intricate and accurate information about the demographics of the school at all community levels. However, it does not end there as the information is collected and used with the purpose of highlighting and taking steps to address disparities in the diversity of the community. While a good system, the President of Stanford, Marc Tessier-Lavigne, in a public letter after the tumultuous 2020 summer, emphasized that IDEAL is not enough on its own at the administrative level but also required cooperation and work at the level of the community body. Thus, the president called for all departments, schools, and units to hold “listening sessions” throughout the Fall 2020 – Spring 2021 school year for students and faculty to publicly share their experiences regarding race on campus and through discussion develop recommendations on how to improve the campus culture from the smallest unit up. IDEAL, specifically its dashboard, helps to provide a metric of progress and transparency in the University’s goals. This is an important way for a university to demonstrate to its URM students that it cares about their success and well-being. An action like such a dashboard could allow Penn State to make University Park (and the satellite campuses) a place where URM students can feel like they belong and are included. As Penn State also witnessed increased “ZOOM Bombings,” the harassment of black faculty, and other racially based actions, listening lessons could possibly, if done correctly, help to create a campus culture where the previously mentioned occurrences do not take place.

Of course, since Stanford is a private university, they also have more freedoms on how their money is spent. The important thing to note however, is the emphasis on these programs' ability to relate to the University's values, including integrity, diversity, and respect. The benefit this relation has is a driving factor in commitment to providing equitable opportunities to the University's diverse student body. Through value statements it becomes much easier for the use of funds to be justified in a strong and substantial way.

In relation specifically to supporting the MRC, Ohio State also provides a good precedent. Ohio State's MRC equivalent is their Multicultural Center, or MCC. The notable thing about Ohio State's MCC is that it puts forth over hundreds of programs every year in addition to providing a physical space for students. This is a place where Ohio State's MCC is more successful than our MRC. The programming and engagement done by the MCC is critical to the experience of URMS and for the campus community as a whole in terms of creating a more accepting and inclusive campus. Programming creates better relationships between these offices and students which in turn creates more engagement which is critical for students to even know about the resources available to them. This is something Penn State struggles with. From some of our interviews we found that people underutilized resources such as the MRC and PRCC simply because of poor communication. In addition, the Ohio State MCC also undergoes program reviews and submits a strategic plan meaning it is subject to evaluations of its success, meeting institutional values, and functioning with goals and actions in mind.

Another important action found while researching Ohio State was related to their strategic planning. Strategic planning is often linked to university values which typically relate to diversity, equity, and inclusion. At Penn State this is the case where we reference 6 institutional values including respect on which we have the following statement: "We respect and honor the

dignity of each person, embrace civil discourse, and foster a diverse and inclusive community.” This is a good statement by Penn State and in writing about our strategic planning additional similar statements can be found. However, Penn State’s strategic planning can benefit from greater transparency as seen in Ohio State.

The Penn State strategic planning website shows users a timeline entitled “Our Commitment to Impact.” At the current moment, this serves as the only public measure of progress in terms of strategic planning. This timeline provides users with dates and hyperlinks to Penn State News; however, these articles tend to be vague and finding specific actions or measures of progress is time consuming and not user friendly. On the other hand, strategic planning at Ohio State is a more publicly accessible matter.

Ohio State does their strategic planning at the unit level. This is not a recommendation to structure strategic planning at Penn State in the same way, but simply a statement. Once a user accesses the strategic planning webpage, they have clear and easy access to several links including public copies of strategic plans (which all have sections about diversity, equity, and inclusion), unit reviews, information on how to submit strategic plans, and their university dashboard. The ease of access and navigation of this site and its links is important in terms of transparency because ultimately, it benefits the students who are empowered simply by having the easy chance to find the information on what tangible steps their university is taking to benefit them.

The Ohio State University Dashboard mentioned previously is also a place where Penn State can take notes from. The dashboard houses downloadable copies of Ohio State’s “scorecards,” which are a metric to monitor progress, be transparent, and hold Ohio State accountable to its strategic planning. These scorecards are updated prior to Board of Trustee’s

meetings and published. What's so critical here is that these are accessible to the public on the strategic planning website and show clear, tangible actions, costs, and a gauge of whether the unit and university has met, is close to meeting, or has failed to meet their goals at the time of updating. This transparency is powerful because it creates a way for students (especially URMS) to see that their interests are being met, that programs are being proposed for them, and that there is progress on those programs. This allows students to feel welcome and valued by their university. A concession can be made however since it seems that the scorecard for the most part have not been updated since 2018. Perhaps this is an instance where Penn State can improve on Ohio State's model.

None of this is to say that Penn State does nothing for their students. The existence of spaces like the Paul Robeson Cultural Center and the Multicultural Resource Center are great starting points. These spaces allow for URM students to form relationships with one another, as well as get the support and guidance that they need that will carry them past the line of graduation. President Barron's Task Force is also commendable and again was a great first step at addressing the issue of what to do when a Penn State student perpetuates racism. However, while Penn State has made some advances, there are still some ways to go when it comes to addressing the issues of underrepresented minority students on campus.

Recommendations

Based on our evaluation of these findings, we have recommendations for programs at Penn State that can support our policy of equal access to resources for URMs. As stated previously, we interviewed students with a range of backgrounds, identities, and experiences, in varied academic programs, to gain a holistic understanding of what University Park Students need. It is recommended that Penn State take action to actively promote diversity and inclusion on campus by creating and expanding more spaces for underrepresented students, create affinity groups for students who request them, and to mandate cultural understanding courses for students, and staff.

In order to embody Penn State's policy of equitable education for disabled students, the office of Student Disability Resources (SDR) must also be adequately supported. Based on interview findings, Penn State has made large strides in making college accessible, and we have some further recommendations for programs that could be put into place to make the university a true leader in disability justice.

Recommendation: SDR office initiates communication with professors.

A consistent theme in interviews was that disability accommodations at Penn State are very helpful, but one part of the process is especially dreaded: reaching out to professors each semester to let them know about the accommodations. Students fear facing a stigma and feel drained after being tasked with operating as a liaison between SDR and their academic college.

One interviewee was a transfer student from Arizona State University, and described their disability resources as having “knocked it out of the park.” They described a process in which a student with accommodations could bring their class schedule to the university's SDR, and the

disability specialist managing their case would reach out to professors with the accommodations letter. The interviewee also mentioned that they built a relationship with the specialist, and still exchange emails to this day, even after transferring. This speaks to the environment of disability resources at Arizona State as a place students feel comfortable and empowered.

If something similar were implemented at Penn State, we could streamline the process of getting accommodations for students and eliminate much of their stress. In fact, the SDR disability specialist already has access to a student's schedule, so having them reach out to professors would eliminate an unnecessary barrier of contact and reduce the burden on disabled students.

Recommendation: SDR office expands and collaborates with other spaces to reach all students.

Penn State is home to many students with intersectional identities. To reach disabled students in all corners of University Park, it makes sense for SDR to collaborate with and be hosted by other spaces dedicated to student groups. For example, an SDR specialist with an office in the PRCC could better serve disabled students of color who utilize that space more often. Furthermore, these SDR specialists should have training in cultural sensitivity in order to understand and connect with all students.

Recommendation: Academic colleges advertise SDR and welcome disabled students.

No student wants to feel like an afterthought or a burden. Disabled students should be encouraged to participate in all aspects of Penn State life through messaging from the university. The goal should be to make disabled high schoolers as confident as any high schooler applying to Penn State that this is the institution where they belong.

Based on anecdotes from interviews, accessibility is the deciding factor in where many disabled students go to college. A university can have amazing academic programs and a

welcoming social environment, but disabled students will be looking for whether they can even take advantage of these features. When disabled students are given the tools they need to excel, the Penn State community is greatly enriched.

The university is already working to recruit and retain disabled students, and we can further this goal by strengthening our SDR office. We can facilitate connections between specialists and students, and between the office and academic colleges. We can bring these options to the forefront as reasons that Penn State is a good fit for students.

Recommendation: Reevaluate and re-conduct the community survey.

The 2020 Community Survey was conducted in February 2020, and students were alerted to their opportunity to participate through an email from the independent service that conducted the survey, HEDS. The results of the survey are available on the Penn State OPAIR website. There is a full report, a supplementary demographics report, and a dashboard with a breakdown of each question.

While the community survey provides valuable insight into overall trends of attitudes at Penn State, further review shows we could still strive for a more complete picture. Only 14% of undergraduate students responded to the survey, as opposed to over 70% of administrators and executives. Overall, 58% of the 20,483 included responses were from students, and 42% were employees (“2020 Penn State Community Survey”). This shows that the survey does not comprehensively represent the student body, and although it is the best large-scale data set, we have at the moment to form our understanding of student experiences, it would be beneficial to the university and to every minoritized group on campus for a similar survey, with some changes, to be carried out to hear input from the Penn State community.

Firstly, a suggestion from an interviewee was that professors could announce in class, or there could be an announcement in Canvas, that the survey is being conducted, and we could even provide a short explanation as to why. Based on interviews, most students did not notice the email or disregarded it as spam. Creating a more prominent announcement would increase participation, and this already works in similar situations, like classes where the professors urge students to complete the SRTEs. Secondly, a demographic option should be added for students who self-identify as disabled. This would give us an avenue to examine what the disabled community on campus experiences, which we have no data for with the current iteration of the community survey. The new community survey could help inform Penn State's strategic plan by showing what has been working, and what areas need our attention. It could help spark conversations and support, and allow students to be heard.

Recommendation: Create affinity groups within colleges.

“An affinity group is a designated safe space where everyone in that group shares a particular identity.” In an affinity group, an identity can be based on “race, gender, sexual orientation, language, nationality, physical/mental ability, socio-economic class, family structure, religion, etc.” (Affinity Groups FAQ). It is recommended to create affinity groups for Penn State Undergraduate students. Penn State only has affinity groups for students in the Medical School where only 7% of students accepted into Penn State Medical School are underrepresented minority students. According to “Penn State Demographics and Diversity”, 32% of students at Penn State University Park are students of color. Since students of color are clearly the minority of this university, there needs to be affinity groups provided for them.

Affinity groups create and promote diversity by providing the safe spaces necessary for minoritized students to share their experiences, freely express their emotions, and overall build

strength and pride within their community. Overtime, members from different groups join together to create a more diverse atmosphere where they can thrive amongst each other and their peers. Affinity groups promote diversity by collaborating with allies to create and promote diversity throughout their organization or campus. The benefits of creating these safe spaces are building the sense of community between minoritized groups, creating allyship, forming pride within communities, and making institutions that have said groups become diverse and inclusive (“Affinity Groups FAQ”).

In order to successfully have and maintain affinity groups on this campus, there needs to be more spaces allocated to the communities who would best benefit from these groups.

Recommendation: Allocate resources to the PRCC and MRC and expand their reach.

In regards to expanding the places and resources allocated to underrepresented minority students, it is best that Penn State expand spaces like the Paul Robeson Cultural Center (PRCC) and the Multicultural Resource Center (MRC). If both of these spaces are expanded, there will be more room for diverse students to thrive and increase diversity at Penn State. For example, bigger spaces require more faculty and staff. This way, when these spaces already provided are expanded, there will be the need to hire more faculty and staff of color or faculty and staff that can best recognize with the underrepresented community, thus, increasing the diversity of faculty and staff and making sure students feel represented and protected at a large predominantly white institution.

Penn State’s method of addressing racism, however, it is ineffective. No matter how many paragraphs are sent, students, faculty, and staff constantly see racism and hate speech all around this campus. A university that is making a positive impact for their students of color is

Rice University. According to a report conducted by Business Insider, Rice University is among the top 25 universities combatting racism and responding the Black Lives Matter movement. Rice University condemned the horrible actions of the police officers who took innocent Black lives and created a “diversity and cultural understanding class that is included in the required orientation coursework” (Hadden). It is recommended that Penn State follows suit with Rice University and create a required course created for students to further their education regarding cultural understanding and to take an active role in promoting diversity through education.

Conclusion

We hope that this policy will encourage and motivate Penn state to become a leader in higher education educational equity. Through the implementation of our policy, we hope that the university will become a safer place for students and individuals of all walks of life. Championing diversity, equity, and inclusion outside of just words and putting that into tangible action will be the catalyst for change and cement Penn State as a powerhouse for positive social change.

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