

# Penn GSE Plan for Diversity Excellence and Action

## Introduction

The University of Pennsylvania's strategic plan, *Building on Excellence: The Next Agenda*, describes the university's responsibility to serve society and emphasizes the importance of access for all, regardless of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or gender identity. Access is also the first commitment in *The Penn Compact*, as outlined by President Amy Gutmann during her 2004 inaugural address. In this address she argued that, "in great universities, diversity and excellence go together." Research supports these goals, showing that exposure to diverse faculty, curricula, and teaching methods produces students who are better equipped to deal with cultural differences and thrive in our heterogeneous and changing world. These students are also more likely to work to overcome societal inequality (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, Allen, 1998). Diversification of the faculty is thus important not only for individual students but also for the larger society.

This document describes Penn GSE's plan to build on our successful efforts and become an even more diverse and inclusive community.

## Framing Diversity at Penn GSE

**Penn GSE Definition of Diversity.** Diversity at Penn GSE is defined as the appreciation and development of a climate of scholars, administrators, and students who possess diverse knowledge, life experiences, and research directions that service and learn from diverse communities in Philadelphia, the nation, and the world with a unique concern for social justice. We situate our definition within the University of Pennsylvania's Action Plan for Faculty Diversity and Excellence that asserts diversity to be integral to learning:

*In the vision of our founder Benjamin Franklin, the diversity of our university must reflect the diversity of the world around it – and the diversity of the world that we want our students to lead. Diversity thereby informs our mission to prepare the students who will be the guardians and innovators of the future.*

The University expects to intensify its commitment to diversity by "building a more diverse faculty, whose composition reflects the pool of exceptional, qualified applicants nationally in all fields" and "creating a more inclusive campus community, where all feel welcomed, supported, and have equal access to networks for mentoring and research."

As such, the University Diversity Action Plan (DAP) focuses on two goals:

- *increasing faculty diversity* and
- *developing an inclusive community at Penn GSE*

At Penn GSE, we take as a given that these goals are interactive and synergistic. Growth in one supports the growth in the other. As these goals are essential to the mission of Penn GSE, they will guide us in establishing faculty development priorities over the next five to ten years. Mostly, we believe that reaching these two goals will lead to the successful recruitment, retention, and productivity of diverse scholars at Penn GSE.

## Diversity Search Advisor (DSA) Infrastructure

The Diversity Search Advisor position is held by Dr. Howard Stevenson, full professor in the standing faculty of Penn GSE. Dr. Stevenson's role includes involvement in the faculty search process, including preparing and instructing the search committee to follow University fairness guidelines, seeking clarity on job descriptions and listings, and supporting diversity efforts of the faculty search committees. At Penn GSE, the role of the DSA has included visiting search committee deliberations and giving feedback on candidates that might be overlooked. The DSA has on several occasions given feedback to search committees about unconscious bias that might commonly occur in tenure track search committee deliberations.

Given the importance of the DSA's responsibilities, we have been appointing one faculty member on each search committee to represent the Diversity Action Plan, to ensure that fair consideration has been given to minority candidates, and to ascertain whether qualified underrepresented candidates have been overlooked. Such faculty members are empowered to raise such issues in that role. These diversity officers are appointed by the Dean and work along with Penn GSE's DSA. Necessary learning and support for search committee members and faculty who are appointed to the role of diversity officer are provided by the Office of the Vice Provost for Faculty, the Dean, along with Dr. Howard Stevenson (DSA), and Dr. Jessie Harper (Assistant Dean, Faculty Affairs and Diversity). We believe this structure has strengthened our efforts to recruit a diverse faculty.

## Standing Committee on Race, Equity, and Inclusion

Dean Grossman has appointed a standing committee on Race, Equity, and Inclusion which she chairs along with Associate Dean Matt Hartley and Professor Howard Stevenson. The Committee has faculty, staff, and student representation. Its charge is to address ongoing issues of school climate and safety around race and diversity at Penn GSE and to develop proposals about how the School might best marshal its resources in order to make Penn GSE a more inclusive school.

## Faculty Mentors/Retention

It takes substantial work to recruit a diverse faculty, but that is only half of the challenge. However, the extra service demands on faculty of color, including formal and informal advising, committee work, and outreach initiatives where they are asked to serve in part because of their diverse perspectives, place a burden on these faculty members. In order to help colleagues navigate these challenges, Penn GSE will continue to assign senior faculty to serve as mentors for each junior faculty member. Care and concern has been taken to match mentors with junior faculty according to skill sets, temperament, and research discipline. Such mentors will make clear, especially to faculty of color, the relative weight of such responsibilities so that the faculty member can make an informed decision. The Dean and the Associate Dean also meet regularly with junior faculty, and ensure that the standards and procedures for advancement are clearly stated and understood.

## Speaker Series

Each year, a number of scholars of color from all over the country are invited to Penn GSE to give lectures and share their research with faculty and students, as part of the “Visiting Faculty Scholars of Color” series. This series also provides an opportunity for doctoral student socialization and learning. These talks are followed up with a lunch and conversation between students and the speakers about their work.

## Community Meetings

Throughout this past year, both faculty and staff have engaged in a series of dialogues at their respective meetings on issues of race and inclusion. These discussions have been structured through the work of Dean Pam Grossman, Associate Dean Matt Hartley, Assistant Dean for Faculty Affairs and Diversity Jessie Harper, and the Diversity Search Advisor Howard Stevenson. Further, the Committee on Race, Equity, and Inclusion has furthered its charge in addressing ongoing issues of school climate and safety around race and diversity at Penn GSE in order to make Penn GSE a more inclusive school. Penn GSE also holds community meetings for students, faculty, and staff to learn about the committee’s work and to respond to their recommendations and suggestions. This year, the Committee will continue to focus on ways that University policies on sexual harassment could be better implemented in the School, and ways to create a more welcoming environment for our international and LGBTQ students. The Committee will also oversee the work to address racism and other forms of oppression, including preparing anti-racist educational teachers, leaders, counselors, and researchers; ensuring that our community reflects the diversity of our city, our country, and our world; and ensuring that schools become places where students of color, and Black students in particular, can flourish.

## Professional Development

We have been working to provide resources to assist faculty to maintain a safe and engaging classroom environment, particularly when controversial issues are being discussed. For example, at faculty meetings and at the faculty retreat, sessions were held that were designed to help faculty build inclusive classrooms. During these sessions, faculty engaged in small group discussions of real case studies that arose in Penn GSE classrooms over the past year and exchanged information on best practices. Similar sessions are planned for the coming year.

## Climate Study

We have assessed Penn GSE's climate through a survey in the spring of 2018 and have worked with a consultant to gather a more in-depth picture through focus groups. Our goal is to assess the climate annually by administering a climate survey to staff, faculty, and students,

and by conducting a complete climate study, that will include a survey, focus groups, and interviews every other year.

## Diversity Focused Centers

Penn GSE also has several diversity-focused centers, such as the Racial Empowerment Collaborative (Dr. Howard Stevenson, Director), where center staff and affiliates collaborate on diversity-focused funded research projects, environmental assessment activities, training, and the production of timely research reports. Penn GSE has recently launched a new schoolwide center – the Hub for Equity, Anti-Oppression, Research, and Development. The Center draws together members of our community committed to anti-oppression research. The new Center welcomes Penn GSE students, faculty, and staff who are interested in various anti-oppression topics. Jessie Harper and Manuel González Canché will serve as inaugural directors. The Center will coordinate seminars, certificate programs, reading groups, and establish a library of electronic and print resources. It will co-sponsor the Visiting Faculty Scholars of Color Series, and will also provide a safe space for intellectual discussions and debates.

## Prioritizing Diversity at Penn GSE

In discussing drafts of the Diversity Action Plan, the faculty has agreed to include the recruitment of diverse non-standing faculty, administrators, and students as well as standing faculty in this plan in order to meet the University's two-pronged mandate of *faculty diversity* and *inclusive community*. We agree with other Penn schools that have acknowledged how influential associated and non-standing faculty may be on the diversity climate, mentoring, and advising of students and faculty of color.

Penn GSE's mission centrally involves the production and dissemination of knowledge about education and human flourishing — and the use of that knowledge to improve education for young people. Doing research, teaching, and service on these topics requires the open exchange of ideas and the consideration of multiple alternatives — because context matters to education and relevant contexts are changing rapidly, such that we must be open to new ways of thinking and acting. One type of restriction on the open exchange of new ideas is a climate that limits freedom of expression. Restrictive climates can be created in many ways, but one central type of restriction has been beliefs and practices that limit certain types of people from participating, or consider them unlikely to have valuable ideas. In our American context, certain groups have been the focus of such treatment more than others, and we remain vulnerable to tacit use of limiting stereotypes based on race, religion, culture, gender identity, class, and sexual orientation. As a community that must remain open to new ideas, then, we must be vigilant about these entrenched means of limiting participation. At the same time, however, we must also be vigilant about other means of limiting discussion, including essentializing views that insist skin color, gender, sexual orientation, or other characteristics in and of themselves make someone "diverse."

While a stated mission of the Graduate School of Education is deeply organized around the development, improvement, and innovation of public and independent education in urban America, our faculty research interests span educational problem-solving across the continent

and beyond. The faculty has discussed the importance of continuing the attention to diverse constituencies of underrepresented U.S. minorities as well as prioritizing international and immigrant populations in the future.

## Penn GSE Expectations in Fulfilling the Diversity Action Plan

In addition to soliciting GSE faculty input on the DAP, the committee felt it important to identify themes from diversity in higher education research including that published by Penn GSE faculty. Selected themes of relevant research directions are described below and frame our approach to this topic.

### ***I. Maintain Transparency in Candidate Selection***

According to research by Mero and Motowidlo (1995), rater accountability can increase the accuracy and objectivity of ratings. Penn GSE will make the hiring criteria for search candidates transparent.

**Action: One option could be using a standard candidate evaluation form (see a draft sample in Appendix B). The candidate evaluation form will be shared with Penn GSE’s standing faculty and will be used both to solicit feedback from faculty about search candidates and to guide faculty discussions about final selections.**

### ***II. Actively Pursue Targets of Opportunities***

In an article in the *Journal of Higher Education* entitled “Interrupting the Usual: Successful Strategies for Hiring Diverse Faculty,” Smith (2004) presents results from an analysis of 689 faculty searches at three large public research universities. The data indicate that successful hires of underrepresented minority faculty are more likely to occur when institutional intervention enhances or bypasses the traditional search process.

**Action: Penn GSE will continue to pursue Target of Opportunity recruitment.**

### ***III. Increase the Quality of Faculty Mentoring, Monitoring, and Coaching***

Among the senior faculty are journal editors-in-chief as well as members of executive boards, national research council committees, and educational research organizations. These individuals have the demonstrated capacity to foster the development and recognition of individuals from traditionally underrepresented groups, including Black, Latinx, Asian, and members of the LGBTQ+ community. Care and concern will be taken to match mentors with junior faculty according to skill sets, temperament, and research discipline.

The focus on *faculty increase* and *inclusiveness of climate* themes directed the committee to ponder the kinds of outcomes we might expect. Given the roadblocks to tenure and retention for faculty from diverse backgrounds, our plan, if successful, should stipulate how Penn GSE will help all faculty develop the following:

1) *Relationships with Colleagues* including mentors, wider university community and talent, students, staff, and administration;

2) *Access to Professional Capital* including grants competition skills, protection from overwork/burnout, national opportunities, and professional exposure;

3) *Intellectual Engagement* through the support of unique ideas, relevance of research to Penn GSE mission and programs, feedback on research progress; and

4) *Knowledge and Competence* about diversity climate and politics that students, administrators, and faculty face and resolve including the intellectual benefits of diversity.

**Action: In order to help colleagues navigate these challenges, Penn GSE will continue to assign senior faculty to serve as mentors for each junior faculty member. Standards and procedures for advancement of the junior faculty will be clearly stated.**

**We propose that annual faculty evaluations include a section for faculty members to describe activities to promote diversity within the Graduate School of Education or across Penn, so that these activities can be acknowledged and encouraged.**

#### *IV. Further develop policies for reporting and addressing incidences of bias.*

We are deeply committed to supporting any members of our community who have witnessed or have been the targets of bias-related incidents.

**Action: Make clear bias reporting policies, procedures, and resources for any members of our community who have experienced a discriminatory or hurtful act. Provide assistance in identifying campus, and school resources to help them understand their options.**

## Works Cited

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Appendix A – Criteria for Evaluating Quality of Candidates during Searches

| <b>CRITERIA</b>   | <b>CANDIDATE #1</b> | <b>CANDIDATE #2</b> | <b>CANDIDATE #3</b> |
|---|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Year Ph.D.  |                     |                     |                     |
| Ph.D. Institution   |                     |                     |                     |
| Advisor/Letter Writers  |                     |                     |                     |
| #Articles/#Other publications   |                     |                     |                     |
| Grants/Fellowships  |                     |                     |                     |
| International/Cross-cultural Work   |                     |                     |                     |
| International Development/Action Work   |                     |                     |                     |
| Cross-ethnic Domestic Work  |                     |                     |                     |
| Social Theory   |                     |                     |                     |
| Scholarship   |                     |                     |                     |
| Potential for Cross-school Collaboration  |                     |                     |                     |
| Potential for Grant Funding   |                     |                     |                     |
| Teaching Areas  |                     |                     |                     |
| Production of scholarship and teaching on diverse experiences, perspectives, and people |                     |                     |                     |
| Brings diverse experiences and perspectives in background                               |                     |                     |                     |
| Ambitious   |                     |                     |                     |