DATE: April 4, 2017
FROM: Eric J. Barron
TO: James A. Strauss

I have reviewed the Advisory and Consultative report, *Addressing Issues of Classroom Climate and Bias in the Classroom*, which was passed by the University Faculty Senate on January 24, 2017. I concur with the report, but hope that the one recommendation is just the beginning of Senate discussion and recommendations.

All faculty, students, and staff have the opportunity to help create an inclusive climate at Penn State, especially for those who may be perceived as different. We can all work to become more familiar with the impacts of stereotype threat and implicit bias on our students and their learning, as well as on our faculty. I encourage all academic units to explore the opportunities noted in the report and identify additional ways to address inclusiveness and diversity within the context of the unit’s goals.

The report makes a number of important points including that while many instances of bias may be unintentional, they can still have a negative impact on the recipient. A wide variety of individuals experience bias and/or exclusion based on visible or invisible characteristics and by assumptions made about their identities. While bias based on race, color, ethnicity/culture, gender, sexual identity, national origin/ancestry, and religious/spiritual beliefs is generally well-known, other biases are given less attention (ability, age, veteran status, and physical appearance) but are equally important.

The Schreyer Institute for Teaching Excellence has already implemented the report recommendation by making available online resources to help faculty address issues of classroom climate and implicit bias. The resources are available through the Schreyer Institute’s Tools & Resources repository (schreyerinstitute.psu.edu/tools) by entering the terms “inclusive teaching” in the search box. While the worksheet included as Appendix A in the report may be used individually, it is important that users not treat it or any other resource as a “checklist” or a prescription. No faculty member is likely to use every strategy, nor would using all of them guarantee an inclusive learning environment. Creating an inclusive environment requires effort, attention, and intention. The worksheet from which the activity is drawn, *Teaching Inclusive Courses*, provides a context for use and activities to generate interest in the research that prompted development of the strategies. It also provides a forum for faculty to give voice to their own questions and concerns.

cc: Nicholas P. Jones
    Angela Linse
    Marcus Whitehurst