The Pennsylvania State University at Abington, located just north of Philadelphia, is a primarily minority campus of almost 4,000 students representing 17 states and 29 countries. Diversity is one of Penn State-Abington’s five “core values” and defined as “a welcoming, inclusive, and safe environment which values civility and respect and celebrates our diversity.” As a show of commitment to diversity, Penn State-Abington recently restructured to create the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. The Director, Jose Rodriguez, is a current member of the NCAA Minority Opportunities and Interests Committee and has two full-time employees on staff.

Penn State-Abington offers several programs to encourage and facilitate open discussions and education amongst students, faculty and staff on diversity related issues and topics. These programs include “Stand by State” (bystander intervention) and “Safe Zone” (LGBTQ+) training in which 28% of the Penn State-Abington faculty and staff is certified, the highest percentage in the entire Penn State system. However, one of the most effective and continuous student run programs is the Diversity Leadership Retreat. This year’s program will run from November 20-23, 2016 in Rehoboth Beach, Delaware and will be the twenty-second one being conducted. Interest in the program continues to grow every year with a total of 25 student participants and three student leaders attending. Selection is on a first come, first serve basis.

The Diversity Leadership Retreat is open to all Penn State Abington students and provides an educational opportunity to grow as leaders and deepen their understanding of diversity. The retreat is free for students with all expenses for the intensive four-day retreat covered by Penn State-Abington. The student led and run event provides an opportunity for students to explore diversity in a comfortable environment where they can express what, how, and why they feel a certain way about diversity issues. Students will be challenged to think deeper and differently through various activities. The activities vary from exploring individually, group dynamics, identity, social justice, ethics, communication, and many other topics. The first 1 ½ days are focused on the self with activities morphing into collective group diversity and commonality experiences the following 2 ½ days.

The Diversity Leadership Retreat focuses on helping students to engage with individuals who are different from them, build bridges of understanding and create lasting bonds of friendship. Students will explore their multicultural self while developing an understanding of power and privilege, intersectionality and feminism. The purpose of the retreat is to not only learn about others but to encourage students to challenge themselves in exploration of their own definition of diversity.

Given the current climate and challenges faced in the United States, Penn State-Abington students are being well educated and trained to think independently while exploring ways in which they can make a significant impact locally, regionally and globally in an ever increasing diversified society. Penn State-Abington’s demographic affords students, staff and faculty the opportunity to not only learn about diversity but to live and experience it in an open educational setting.