

A 4-Year University Here? Penn State Harrisburg Of Course

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A Press And Journal Editorial

In recent weeks, a select committee of the State House of Representatives has heard extensive testimony from Central Pennsylvania's leading educators and businesspeople regarding the founding of a four-year university in the City of Harrisburg.

Pioneered by Reps. Pete Wambach (D-Harrisburg) and Mark B. Cohen (D-Philadelphia), the "Harrisburg University" concept is believed by a handful of government officials to be a panacea for the troubled State System of Higher Education, which turned away 12,000 potential students last year due to overcrowding. According to Wambach and company, a comprehensive Harrisburg University would alleviate a great deal of that crowding, while enhancing the city's stature as a growing, prestigious metropolitan center.

What the committee has heard to the contrary, however, is that the addition of a 15th school in the State System—which includes Millersville and Shippensburg universities—would cut too deeply into already over-extended State funding. The alternative, many say, is to expand existing institutions of higher education in the area.

Penn State University officials have proposed just that.

On September 18, Dr. Ruth Leventhal, provost and dean of Penn State Harrisburg, told the committee that Penn State Harrisburg would be more than willing to increase its services in the capital region over the next two years, including the creation of freshmen and sophomore classes in the city's first four-year university.

By building its presence in downtown Harrisburg, Dr. Leventhal maintains, the school would create an urban setting for students who prefer such an atmosphere, and would provide local businesspeople who work in town with easy access to the city campus.

Leventhal told the panel that Penn State's 215-acre site in Middletown could be expanded to include additional dormitories and

classroom buildings, thereby accommodating the projected 800-1000 students that would eventually be added to the school's current 3,400-member student body.

The *Press and Journal* believes that the expansion of Penn State Harrisburg makes good educational and political sense. Penn State is the ninth largest university in the country. It has a reputation as the pre-eminent research institution in the state, while also maintaining undeniable stature among schools across the nation. Its students provide the country with more primary and secondary school teachers than any other college.

The Penn State Harrisburg campus, in particular, has built a solid foundation of respect and acceptance. It also continues to expand its services to Central Pennsylvania through the presence of the Small Business Development Center, the Pennsylvania State Data Center, the regional Ben Franklin center and the agricultural extension administrative office. It is also the home of the only accredited Economic Development Training Course in the state.

Despite the impression given by recent editorials appearing in *The Patriot-News*, Penn State Harrisburg—15 miles from downtown—is as accessible to public transportation as any "urban" university would be. The school is also within easy reach of the State government's resources, which the daily newspaper hints are so crucial to the future school's survivability.

In short, the regional expansion of a recognized, prestigious university would be far more beneficial to the Harrisburg area than the creation of a slow-growing, financially tentative institution.

Central Pennsylvania, which is growing far faster than anyone could have predicted a decade ago, needs educational resources now if it hopes to keep pace with its ballooning population and growing industry. Penn State Harrisburg is the only area institution geared for such an undertaking.