

State System students spend day at Capitol seeking support for universities

Meet with legislators; stress value of college experience, state investment in higher education

April 18, 2017 - Harrisburg – Nearly 100 students, accompanied by dozens of faculty, staff, university presidents, trustees and alumni from the 14 universities that comprise Pennsylvania's State System of Higher Education met with legislators throughout the Capitol today seeking support for and investment in the State System.

The students met with legislators to talk about their own college experiences and how important the education they are receiving is to them and to their families, and about the vital role the universities play in each of the campus communities, as well as in their regions and across the Commonwealth.

"Nearly 90 percent of the students who are attending the State System universities are Pennsylvania residents," said Logan Steigerwalt, a senior at Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania. "The vast majority of us will remain here after we graduate—to live, to work, and to raise our families. We will join the more than half a million State System university graduates living in the state today. Any way you look at it, an investment in the State System really is an investment in Pennsylvania's future."

Steigerwalt is president of SRU's Student Government Association and one of three students who serves on the State System's Board of Governors.

"The experience I have had at Slippery Rock – a state school – I don't know if I could have gotten anywhere else," he said. "The student-to-faculty ratio is low. The ability to meet with professors before class, after class; the ability to have them serve as mentors, has been so important. All of that really helped shape my experience."

"We, as students, certainly benefit directly from the funding the State System receives each year from the state," said Montana Leaks, president of the Student Government Association at West Chester University of Pennsylvania. "That support helps each of us achieve our educational goals."

"But the benefits go well beyond us. Every \$1 the Commonwealth invests in the State System generates \$11 in statewide economic impact. The State System universities support literally thousands of jobs in their home communities, in their regions and across Pennsylvania. That's what the state is investing in when it invests in its public universities. It's investing not only in our future, but in the future of every citizen of Pennsylvania."

Leaks, who after graduating next month will intern with the Chester County Bar Association then enroll in law school, said the education she has received at West Chester has given her "the tools to open any door in front of me." "I've learned that it's okay to think for yourself," she said. "If you think differently than others, that's okay. When you go out into the world, not everyone is going to think the same way you do. You have to be able to deal with that; to have the courage to think for yourself; to use what you've learned to make positive decisions."

In addition to the meetings with legislators, representatives from each of the universities also set up displays in the Capitol Rotunda, where they demonstrated some of their top academic programs and research projects and provided information about their schools to Capitol visitors.

The Capitol event was designed in part to demonstrate the high rate of return the state receives from its investment in higher education, especially in the 14 universities that comprise the State System. Ultimately, it is to help ensure the universities can continue to provide outstanding education opportunities to students, said Shaina Hilsey, president of the Student Government Association at California University of Pennsylvania, and another recently appointed member of the Board of Governors.

“At the end of the day, I truly believe we all share a single goal: We want the universities to not just survive, we want them to thrive, for years to come,” Hilsey said, as she also talked about the ongoing strategic review of the State System. “We want to ensure that not only current students like us, but also those who have yet to be born, have access to outstanding educational opportunities that will prepare them for success in their lives and their careers.”

“When Pennsylvania’s public universities flourish, Pennsylvania succeeds,” said Chancellor Frank T. Brogan. “A continued investment in the 14 universities in the State System is an investment in the success of every Pennsylvanian. These are our universities; these are our students; this is our future. And it’s time we make an investment in the future.”

Pennsylvania’s State System of Higher Education is the largest provider of higher education in the Commonwealth, enrolling more than 100,000 degree-seeking students and thousands more in certificate and other career-development programs. Collectively, the 14 universities that comprise the State System offer more than 2,300 degree and certificate programs in more than 530 academic areas. Nearly 520,000 State System university alumni live in Pennsylvania.

The State System universities are Bloomsburg, California, Cheyney, Clarion, East Stroudsburg, Edinboro, Indiana, Kutztown, Lock Haven, Mansfield, Millersville, Shippensburg, Slippery Rock and West Chester Universities of Pennsylvania. The universities also operate branch campuses in Oil City (Clarion), Freeport and Punxsutawney (IUP), and Clearfield (Lock Haven), and offer classes and programs at several regional centers, including the Dixon University Center in Harrisburg and in Center City in Philadelphia.