

Interim chancellor to spend first days meeting with students at Slippery Rock, Indiana universities

Dr. Karen M. Whitney also plans separate sessions with faculty, staff leaders; university presidents

Harrisburg – Demonstrating her No. 1 priority, Dr. Karen M. Whitney—the new interim chancellor of Pennsylvania’s State System of Higher Education—will spend her first days on the job on campuses meeting with students and others at Slippery Rock and Indiana universities of Pennsylvania.

“I want to spend my first days as interim chancellor listening and learning,” said Dr. Whitney, whose tenure as interim chancellor begins today. “I want to hear what is important to our students, and let them know my priorities. Everything we do at each of our universities—and as a system—should be focused on our students and their success.”

Dr. Whitney will visit Slippery Rock University today and IUP tomorrow. In addition to meeting with students on both campuses, she also plans to meet today with representatives of faculty and staff, and tomorrow with the university presidents.

“It’s impressive that Dr. Whitney will spend her first day on the job out here on the campus,” said Brian Swatt, IUP’s student body president and a student member of the Board of Governors. “There are so many opportunities and so many possibilities ahead for our universities and our system, and we look forward to talking with her about that.”

“These are just the first of many visits I plan to make to our universities,” Dr. Whitney said. “It’s important to me to have collaborative, open and trusting relationships with students, faculty and staff across the System. As we build these connections, we will enhance our ability to advance the distinctive roles of each of our universities.

“Every student succeeds by having strong state universities and a strong State System. That will be among my driving priorities as I work to help ensure the System’s continued advancement and a successful transition to the next era of system leadership.”

Dr. Whitney previously served for more than seven years as president of Clarion University of Pennsylvania. She is expected to serve as interim chancellor until the conclusion of a national search for a permanent chancellor sometime next year. “My job is to keep the System moving forward while we search for the next chancellor, and I’m laser-focused on that,” she said.

“Dr. Whitney is smart, strategic and pragmatic,” said Board of Governors Chair Cynthia D. Shapira. “Because she has strong relationships across the System and beyond—and is keenly aware of the challenges and opportunities ahead—I’m confident she will hit the ground running so we can continue our forward momentum.

“She is student focused, which is clearly evident from how she plans to start her tenure as interim chancellor. This meshes perfectly with our mission of providing high-quality, affordable higher educational opportunities to students in every region of the state, and we’re grateful to have Karen in this vital role at this important time.”

Dr. Whitney assumes the role of interim chancellor as the Board of Governors is preparing an inclusive process to develop an implementation plan as the next phase in the strategic system review, which the Board and former chancellor commissioned last year.

“Our purpose is to ensure we have a 21st century public higher education system that is second to none, and optimally serves the people of the Commonwealth,” said Shapira, describing the ultimate goal of the review.

“I applaud the Board and the System for having the courage to take these important steps for our universities,” said Dr. Whitney. “Because of the foundation they’ve laid, we are prepared to take bold steps toward increasing educational opportunities for students, modernizing how we do business and ensuring a successful transition to the next permanent chancellor.”

Dr. Whitney promised a “very intense and productive year, using a transparent, highly communicative, collaborative and evidenced-based leadership style.”

“Robust, public higher education is critically important to the future of Pennsylvania,” she said. “I will talk with and listen to folks who are committed to working together to drive this very productive agenda to advance every university.”

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.