

Lancaster County Higher Education Working Group Announces Formation of Campus Central

Kickoff Event Slated for Sept. 8 in Binns Park

LANCASTER, Pa. - Lancaster's Higher Education Working Group (the presidents of Elizabethtown College, Franklin & Marshall, Harrisburg Area Community College, Lancaster Bible College, Lancaster General College of Nursing and Health Sciences, Lancaster Theological Seminary, Millersville University, Pennsylvania Academy of Music, Pennsylvania College of Art & Design, and Thaddeus Stevens College of Technology), has announced the formation of Campus Central, an initiative designed to promote Lancaster County as a premier college destination and place to start a career.

The group has hired Emily Wells, a 2005 graduate of Franklin & Marshall College, to head Campus Central.

Campus Central will spearhead a variety of activities, including a student-oriented web site (www.CampusCentral.org), a live-music college festival, a multi-campus community service project, and internships with local businesses.

According to Wells, Campus Central will stress strong reinforcement through the student life cycle (prospect to student to graduate) that ideally will lead to stronger emotional attachment with the area and, ultimately, a personal desire to remain after graduation.

"We want students in Lancaster County to feel as if they have become vital members of a vibrant community," she said. "Instead of spending four years sequestered on their own campuses, we want students to become fully engaged citizens of Lancaster County and feel comfortable participating in the economic and social fabric of the community. Lancaster city, in particular, presents myriad opportunities with its thriving arts community, outstanding restaurants, and historic attractions."

Lancaster County is ready for Campus Central, according to Franklin & Marshall President John Fry. "In a state dense with institutions of higher learning, Lancaster has long been one of Pennsylvania's key hubs for higher education, with more than 17,000 students enrolled at area institutions. While the region has experienced its share of economic and migratory shifts, this student pool has remained consistent, yet these same students have remained underutilized as an economic and social force within the region.

"We believe that a stronger personal connection to the region will lead to enhanced perceptions of Lancaster, and ultimately create a greater willingness amongst college students to stay after graduation and contribute meaningfully to the workforce," said Fry.

Francine G. McNairy, president of Millersville University, is also enthusiastic about Campus Central's efforts. "Our students represent a valuable resource to help grow the Commonwealth's educated workforce," she said. "In Lancaster, we have a wonderful range of institutions to attract students who desire an education and then wish to remain here."

Campus Central will hold its official opening event, a back-to-school festival for area college students featuring food, live music, and other activities, on Thursday, Sept. 8, in Lancaster's Binns Park, from 5-9 p.m.

According to Pennsylvania College of Art & Design's President Mary Colleen Heil, "the project has already generated buzz" among her students, parents, and faculty. "Campus Central is not only a terrific idea, it is a perfect way to make sure that our students get to experience the best of Lancaster County while they are here. We were so enthusiastic we commissioned one of our alumni to design the logo and contribute it to the project," she said.

The Campus Central initiative is also drawing praise from other Lancaster entities, including the Economic Development Corporation (EDC). EDC President David Nikoloff said that "EDC is happy to be a part of this initiative and to support the Working Group's efforts to attract and retain the best minds in Lancaster County."

The idea for Campus Central grew out of research performed by Collegia, an 11-year old consulting company from Wellesley, Mass., that has helped spearhead similar campus programs in areas such as Philadelphia, Boston, and Pittsburgh.

Collegia performed a marketing study of recent graduates and enrolled students at various Lancaster County campuses. "We found that students who left their campuses for reasons such as internships, or to visit other campuses' events were more inclined to feel positively toward Lancaster, than students who did not," said Collegia's president, Todd Hoffman. "Our recommendation is that we get students off campus early and often - the more contact they have with Lancaster, the more they'll like it."