



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 1, 2021

Department of Aging Announces That Penn State Harrisburg Joins Intergenerational Program to Enrich the Lives of College Students and Older Adults

Middletown, PA – The Pennsylvania Department of Aging (PDA) was joined by students and faculty from Penn State Harrisburg along with older adults to announce the expansion of the department's Intergenerational University Connections Program.

First launched as a pilot at Slippery Rock University (SRU) in the fall of 2020, the Intergenerational University Connections offers students real world experience by completing service-learning projects that include engaging with older adults. Penn State Harrisburg, along with West Chester University (WCU) and Widener University, have joined the program for the 2021 fall semester.

Local Area Agencies on Aging connect older adults with PDA to take part in the program. Undergraduate and graduate students earning degrees in programs such as social work, behavioral health, gerontology, public health, and recreational therapy are then assigned to engage with a participating senior, either over the phone or virtually. Older adults can either use their own videoconferencing technology, or they can utilize a loaner iPad with internet connectivity for the duration of the semester thanks to a [PA Link grant program](#) with [TechOwl](#). The students earn service-learning hours, gain skills working in a telehealth environment and implement interventions while participating in a variety of activities with their assigned older adult.

Penn State Harrisburg is the first campus of Penn State University to join the Intergenerational University Connections program. Students in the Human Development and Family Studies major and the Psychology major, both programs within the School of Behavioral Sciences and Education, are participating.

"It is an honor to participate in this project with different universities. This project is a good example of how interdependence can help people that we care about. The Pennsylvania Department of Aging is listening to the needs of the population, and we, the universities, are not only teaching knowledge and values but also impacting the community with successful interventions," said Dr. Ana Patricia Aguilera-Hermida, assistant teaching professor and leader of the project at Penn State Harrisburg.

Another goal of the program is to get more young people interested in fields that involve working with and supporting older adults.

“This experience is one I will never forget. I was able to build a connection with someone 73 years older than me without even meeting them or seeing what they look like. With the increased use of technology nowadays, this is unheard of. I am blessed to have been given this opportunity to make a friend,” said Holly Logan, Penn State Harrisburg junior and Human Development and Family Studies major.

“Penn State’s mission as the commonwealth’s land grant university is not only to provide unparalleled access to a high quality education for students, but also to serve and support all Pennsylvania citizens through collaborative activities and the sharing of expertise and knowledge. Penn State Harrisburg’s partnership with the Department of Aging on this project illustrates the significant impact that we can have on the well-being of our communities when we join together,” said Dr. John Mason, Penn State Harrisburg chancellor.

PDA first discussed the Intergenerational University Connections program as a pilot with SRU following PDA’s presentation of the idea to PASSHE in early April 2020, when PASSHE shared the department’s interest with the 14 universities in the state university system. The increased risk of social isolation among seniors as a result of the pandemic put the program on the fast track.

“Meeting in person with students, faculty, and older adults who are participating in the program highlights the positive impact the program has on everyone involved. The stories that they have shared and what they have learned from each other and about themselves have shown how valuable this program has become,” said Secretary of Aging Robert Torres. “The feedback from these four universities also gives the Department of Aging great insight on what works or doesn’t work so we can improve the experience as we continue to build and expand this program.”

PDA has been in talks with additional universities throughout the commonwealth to explore inclusion of the program in their curriculums.

As the Intergenerational University Connections program expands in Pennsylvania, it is starting to receive national attention. PDA and SRU discussed the program during the Gerontological Society of America’s 2021 Annual Scientific Meeting online on November 12.

Learn more about the various programs offered by the Pennsylvania Department of Aging [here](#).

Note: Photos and video from the event will be available at [PACast.com](https://pacast.com).

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