



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Department of Aging Announces Penn State Scranton Joins Intergenerational Program to Enrich the Lives of College Students and Older Adults

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

"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 has shown how valuable this program has become," said Secretary of Aging Robert Torres. "The feedback from the 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."

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. The program has since expanded to Penn State Harrisburg, West Chester University, Widener University and this semester, Penn State Scranton – the first university campus in northeast Pennsylvania to participate.

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 Scranton is the second 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.

"This semester, we are happy to partner with the PA Department of Aging and their Intergenerational Program, which enables our students to practice clinical human service skills such as engagement, establishing rapport, listening skills and general clinical and ethical skills as well as administering a social isolation scale to the seniors. The senior will benefit as they

have been identified as being at risk for social isolation, which has been exacerbated for the elderly as a result of the pandemic. This program is a win-win for both the Penn State Human Development and Family Studies students, as well as the seniors," said Dr. Janet Melnick, teaching professor/program coordinator.

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

"It was a great learning experience. I got to incorporate everything I have learned and utilize my skills in real terms. I also had the opportunity to create a bond with my client and work out real life scenarios. Finally, I got to experience the daily life struggles of an elder and advocate for them. Elders carry wise words and pieces of history; it is important we take care of them and allow their legacy to live on," said Marisa Ivanko, Human Development and Family Studies student.

"The experience proved to be invaluable through the hardships faced in the semester. It helped me feel valued to be of use to the community in such a fascinating way," said Stephen Bednar, psychology student.

"We are very proud to be part of the Department of Aging's Intergenerational University Connections program and see it as a positive for all involved," said Dr. Marwan Wafa, Penn State Scranton chancellor. "Having a program like this, where there is one-on-one personal interaction between our students and older adults provides an invaluable real-world experience for our students, some of whom will one day be working with this age group, by making them more aware of the special needs of seniors, especially in regard to the isolation and loneliness that many of them are facing. Penn State Scranton is located in an area with a large number of senior citizens, and those who have participated in this program will not only be better prepared for their future careers, but also more aware of the special needs of this population and how to meet them."

PDA first discussed the Intergenerational University Connections program as a pilot with SRU following PDA's presentation of the idea to the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (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.

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

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

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

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