

Controversy Over PSU Expansion Continues

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tain areas of the curriculum.”

Administrators remain uncertain about if or when PSH will offer all four years of education in every program. “We probably have enough courses that a student could complete all four years here,” said Dr. Susan Richman, interim associate dean for academic affairs.

Richman said this does not happen now because although the college offers many courses which apply to all majors, the number may still be too low.

Furthermore, PSH offers its general education courses on weekends or at night, which often poses scheduling challenges for students.

The college plans to eventually use a four-year approach for graduates of the engineering and information systems technology programs.

If PSH does become a four-year school, Mahar said it would help many more students earn a degree. “By having four-year programs and colleges closer to the centers of population, this approach allows education to regionalize, and campuses can have distinct missions,” he said.

Richman added that expansion could energize campus life with a higher number of residential students and more degree choices.

Money presents one of the biggest challenges to academic expansion here. Faculty did not want to speculate about the cost of such a measure. Mahar only said the college “does not have the resources” to consider it now.

Along with tuition hikes, the state legislature would help finance the growth of PSH or any other satellite campus. State lawmakers increased their financial support of the university by 5 percent this year. That translates to almost \$15 million more than last year, Langan said.

Mahar said, however, that this is the smallest increase in the last decade. Although Penn State gets more state money than any other state school.

Richman said the university gets less per student than any other state-owned or state-related school because Penn State’s enrollment has climbed more than that of other schools.

Members of the State System of Higher Education, including Shippensburg and Millersville, now receive \$4,600 per student from Pennsylvania.

The state provides \$4,700 for Pitt students, and \$6,200 per student at Temple, whereas Penn State gets \$3,000 less than the Philadelphia-based university.

“These numbers should tell you Penn State isn’t getting special treatment from

the legislature,” Richman said.

Availability of faculty is another reason why PSH has no firm plans to expand its programs.

“If we had the same number of students and all four years, we’d have half as many juniors and seniors with the same number of faculty,” Richman said. “We probably wouldn’t be able to sustain many of our specialty programs.”

However, officials at other local colleges and universities worry that as the number of four-year academic degrees offered by Penn State’s divisions grows, enrollment at their schools will decline.

Dr. Lawrence Pettit, president of Indiana University of Pennsylvania, listed his school’s main competitors as Pitt and Penn State’s main campus. However, IUP is located near several satellite campuses including Altoona, McKeesport, and New Kensington.

“Many students we get from branch campus communities will elect to stay home if they can get a four-year education there,” Pettit said.

In fact, IUP’s applications from Blair County dropped by 50% following Penn State-Altoona’s conversion.

Presidents at other local schools expressed concern over duplication of academic programs as Penn State’s growth continues.

For example, Henderson told The Patriot-News Point Park has gained students in every major except engineering technology and information technology, which Penn State offers.

York College has also felt the impact of Penn State offering similar programs. Approximately one mile separates York College from Penn State-York, and the proximity has hurt, according to York College President George Waldner.

Waldner told The Patriot-News that since Penn State-York started its four-year business program two years ago, his school’s part-time enrollment has fallen from 1,489 students to 1,210 in 1998-99.

Most of the students who left York College for its Penn State counterpart were business majors. “What’s the subtext there?” Waldner asked. “Don’t go to no-name York College. Go to Penn State.”

Although officials at other local colleges also expressed concern about their ability to compete with Penn State’s name and reputation, Richman stressed that they would not be the only schools affected.

The growth of some of the university’s satellite campuses could lower enrollment at PSH.

“One thing we do,” she said, “is offer degrees with specializations, such as

finance, marketing, and management. Adding four-year degrees at other Penn State locations affects Penn State-Harrisburg as much as any other local college or university.”

Penn State President Graham Spanier was unavailable for comment to the criticism. But in an article from the University Relations section of the Web site (psu.edu/ur/archives/intercom_1996/Feb29/plan.html), Spanier said, “This plan is about students and creating opportunities for students, particularly location-bound students, to acquire an education.

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