

PSH to become 4-year school

By **KAREN PLOTT**
Staff Reporter

Fall 2004 will be the beginning of a new era for Penn State Harrisburg. The campus has finally opened its doors to lower division students, transforming the campus into a 4-year school. Freshmen will be able to begin their Penn State experience in any of Penn State Harrisburg's 26 programs, and continue on any campus he or she desires.

Currently, the campus has about 370 lower division students, with approximately 62 freshmen in the programs that allow underclassmen. The number of freshmen is expected to escalate to roughly 200 by next fall when all majors will be 4-year programs.

"For the first time students will be able to start here and continue in any major in any PSU campus. The same courses will be offered at all the campuses to ensure programs and transitions will become seamless," Penny Carlson, academic advisor of the Division of Undergraduate Studies.

"The students will have more flexibility and will have all access to any resources the university offers, which is exciting."

Incorporating lower division students into the university is an exciting accomplishment for the Harrisburg area and is being embraced by much of the faculty.

"We aren't afraid of change. We look forward to it because it is an opportunity for us to be better than we are now," said Dr. William J. Mahar, associate provost and senior associate dean for academic affairs.

This long-anticipated change is occurring for several reasons. A tremendous amount of students have been leaving the area to attend college and many within the University think it is time for them to have an opportunity to attend a 4-year school locally.

"Most colleges around the area attract mostly regional and national students. We are targeting students who may not otherwise be able to go to school," said Mahar. For this reason little competition is expected between local colleges.

Students can cut down the cost of attending school with the luxury of staying at home while at the same time receiving top quality education. This is projected to attract a large number of students.

Also, a group of senior leaders known as Project Envision have an educational inspiration to keep top students in Central PA. Project Envision goes by the motto, "grow our own, keep our own."

"There are many promising jobs here in Central PA that are waiting for young intelligent minds, and we feel by keeping top students in the area we can help

stimulate local growth," said Mahar.

Through the implementation of the change there will be more labs, wireless technology, and educational materials needed for efficient educational support. There will also be additional faculty hired whose sole responsibility is to teach the general education requirements that will be offered.

"We did hire about a dozen new facul-

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ty already in areas such as biology, physics, and math," said Mahar. "We make it necessary to provide the top quality faculty."

The number of general education classes added is not official.

"We are working on that now. What we are doing is using the other Penn State campuses as models. We are carefully analyzing what they will be doing and looking at our size," said Carlson.

"Our goal is to have our decisions to Academic Leadership by the end of the month."

The programs will change to include more courses that are a part of the university catalog. This will help accredit some programs such as education, criminal justice, and business.

"We are somewhat losing our individuality to become part of the broader university," said Mahar. "But a strong advantage we still have is the small classroom size."

There will be a first year seminar for all freshmen to start out in a baccalaureate program. This will create opportunity for small classes to help guide students to become more adjusted to college life, specifically classroom experiences as well as extracurricular experiences.

"My office will provide the First Testing, Counseling, and Advising Program (FTCAP), which will be the academic orientation to Penn State," said Carlson.

There will be an activity orientation as well. For instance, this year Student Affairs had a student orientation team to meet new students as they arrived on campus move-in day. The team worked with students to get them acquainted with campus activities.

"We are looking to expand the presence of the Orientation Team as a way to quickly encourage students to come out to campus events," said

Janet Widoff, director of student life.

First year students are also encouraged to become involved in Student Government affairs as well.

"In the recent SGA elections, the student voters approved additional working in the SGA constitution that provides for the elected representation of first year students," said Widoff.

The future looks even brighter as Mahar does not foresee any major problems in the future as a result of this change.

"We will not have any startup problems, because we are modeling ourselves off of the Schuylkill campus, which has been doing this for about fifty years. We are also heading off other potential problems by being positive on the way we approach things," said Mahar.

"For the juniors and seniors, they will have the chance to show a greater sense of leadership and there will be more tutoring and mentoring opportunities," said Carlson addressing the upcoming need for more intense learning support.

Parking should be no problem, due to the adequate amount the campus has.

There is one new dormitory already in planning, which will house 72 addition-

al students, however, there will not be a significant amount of new available housing since most of the new students will commute from home.

As for the first year students, as well as the other students, who reside on campus there were opportunities this September to get better acquainted with college life, such as *In Your Living Room*, which offered the students tips. There is even a "Mall Trip" series that provides the students transportation to go shopping.

"The Mall Trip series is offered because we realize that a lot of our first year students don't have their cars," said Widoff.

This transformation is also expected to be positive for transfer students.

"I don't see any barriers," said Mahar. "HACC students will be able to transfer sooner and the flow will be seamless. Admissions are ready to answer any questions."

"There will be a much greater course selection for transfer students, especially in gen-ed," said Carlson.

"HACC is our oldest partner and they are cheering us on," said Mahar.

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