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PASSHE Board of Governors approves new strategic plan

Contact: Kenn Marshall, (717) 720-4054 or (717) 329-0809

Harrisburg – The Board of Governors of the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) today approved a new strategic plan that will enhance and expand student learning opportunities and ensure the Commonwealth receives the greatest possible return on its annual investment in the System and its 14 universities.

The new long-range plan establishes a series of measurable goals for the System as a whole, including increasing the number of degrees and certificates awarded annually by the universities; increasing the number of working adult and transfer students enrolled in the System; and boosting graduation rates among all groups of students, especially low-income and underrepresented minority students. The goals are expected to be met by 2020.

“Strategic plans are never ‘final’ and should always be evaluated for relevancy,” said PASSHE Chancellor Frank T. Brogan. “But, today’s action solidifies a roadmap that will help the Board of Governors, the Councils of Trustees and the university leadership move this system toward even greater responsiveness to the needs of our students and all of Pennsylvania.”

PASSHE’s new strategic plan titled 2020: Rising to the Challenge includes 21 specific outcomes based on four strategic goals. The plan has been under development for nearly two years and will replace the System’s last long-range plan, which was approved nearly a decade ago.

The plan recognizes the shifting higher education landscape, both in Pennsylvania and nationwide. In its introduction, the plan notes that in order to achieve long-term success, PASSHE will need to:

- adapt to an ever-changing student population
- align academic programs with real workforce and personal growth needs
- provide greater flexibility in how, when, and where students learn
- ensure that competition and cooperation within the System is strategic
- preserve and promote accessibility and affordability
- enhance accountability and transparency

“Importantly, this plan includes specific goals with specific benchmarks, all of which will help us assure even greater accountability,” said Brogan.

The plan calls for increasing (from 5,600 to 7,500) the number of degrees or certificates awarded annually in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and health-related disciplines. It also calls for increasing the total number of degrees and certificates awarded annually to 31,500.

“As a system, we also need to provide more access points for non-traditional and working students—those who have jobs and families and want to pursue a degree at the same time,” said Brogan.

The plan calls for increasing the number of undergraduate students over the age of 25 to at least 11,000 and the number of community college transfer students to at least 4,000; and increasing to 53,000 the number of students enrolled in classes offered via distance education, including online. About 9,000 non-traditional students – those over the age of 25 years of age – and 3,300 community college transfers are currently enrolled.

“This new strategic plan establishes significant new goals for PASSHE and our universities as they seek to be responsive to the needs of the Commonwealth,” said Board of Governors Chairman Guido M. Pichini. “It is a blueprint that can be adjusted as those needs change.”

PASSHE is the largest provider of higher education in the Commonwealth, enrolling about 112,000 students. While each of the universities has its own unique set of program offerings, the plan calls for greater cooperation among the institutions in order to improve their operating efficiency and to ensure students have greater access to educational opportunities even as available resources become tighter.