Partners in the Pursuit of Education

The Dixon University Center (DUC) is a place where it all comes together. It’s a crossroad and key access point for higher education and lifelong learning in the greater Harrisburg region. Whether you’re looking to go back to school to achieve a degree, to refresh your skills (or the skills of your staff) via a training or certificate program, or you’re looking for a technology-savvy learning environment to host your next meeting or event, DUC has all of these options in one convenient location.

“The DUC provides lifelong learners, no matter their age or field, a shopping mall of options in order to stay competitive in today’s job market,” said Dr. Kathleen Howley, senior associate vice chancellor for academic and student affairs for the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE). “Today’s adult learner can select the type of program, the college or university, and the delivery format they feel is the best fit for them. With so many options available, students coming to the DUC receive a customized learning experience.”

An estimated 2,000 students are enrolled in programs and classes through the DUC in the course of a year. Some are pursuing skills to make themselves more employable or advance at their place of work. Some are pursuing an undergraduate degree, some a master’s, and others a doctorate. Doctorate options at DUC will be expanding starting fall 2013.

The DUC is a partnership of seven members of PASSHE—Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania, East Stroudsburg University of Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania College of Technology, Millersville University of Pennsylvania, Lock Haven University of Pennsylvania, Shippensburg University of Pennsylvania, and West Chester University of Pennsylvania—plus two private institutions, Elizabethtown College and St. Francis University. Altogether, nearly 40 degree options are available.

The DUC represents a partnership between the participating colleges and a broad range of students with varied educational needs and life circumstances. An additional partnership exists in the sense of the DUC serving as a conference center and activity hub for the surrounding community. The DUC is also the headquarters, the administrative home, of PASSHE.

Some facts, based on a student survey done last fall:

- Fifty-nine percent of the students are women, 41 percent men.
- Seventy-seven percent are in the 25- to 44 age bracket.
- Eighty-nine percent of the students are working full-time while going to school.
- Seventy-two percent are pursuing bachelor’s degrees.

Most said they chose the DUC because it offers evening and weekend classes, because the courses and programs meet their particular needs, and because the location is convenient where they live. Most said they live and work in the general area in and around Harrisburg—an area roughly defined as near I-83, I-81, U.S. 22, and the Pennsylvania Turnpike.

A Special Environment

The DUC is located in the 2900 block of North Second Street in Harrisburg, between Front and Second Streets.

The campus looks out on the Susquehanna River. The historic campus began life as the Harrisburg Academy in 1908 and has since gone through many incarnations. One of the most interesting was its use as the Army Air Force Intelligence School during World War II. More than 5,600 intelligence agents were trained here. Among the school’s well-known graduates were the actors Bruce Cabot and Robert Preston, the director Joshua Logan, and the author Thornton Wilder. PASSHE has been the owner since 1991.

At the “center” of the DUC, so to speak, is the three-floor Administration Building, the newest building in the complex. Duncan Hall is the primary academic facility, which features classrooms, conference rooms and computer labs. Richards Hall includes a large conference room. South Hall has eight classrooms. The campus also includes the McCormick residence, Hughes Hall and an underground parking garage.

Delivering the Works—and What Works

The advanced computer and videoconferencing technology that has been blended into the historic campus setting is a sign of the DUC’s commitment to delivering education in the ways that today’s students need and want. Many of the courses and programs are delivered at least partially online or from remote locations.

“Recent studies have shown that students learn best in ‘blended’ environments that include both face-to-face and online teaching and learning, rather than those that are purely face-to-face or purely online,” said Dr. Christina M. Sax, associate provost and dean of academic outreach and innovation at Shippensburg University.

She pointed out that, nationally, more than 6.7 million students took at least one online course during the 2011 fall semester. “Distance education is no longer on the fringe of higher education. It is now the mainstream of education across the country,” she said.

“Technology can be used to improve students’ experiences in higher education by providing access to education and programs that [they] would otherwise not have through traditional means,” she said. “It also [provides] some students with an alternative educational experience that best suits their learning style and their personal and professional circumstances.”

A Ph.D. through the Dixon University Center

From continuing education and professional development programs to bachelor’s and master’s degrees to Ph.D.s, there’s not much that can’t be accomplished at the DUC.

Dr. Michael Driscoll, the president of Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP), has announced the addition of three new programs—a Ph.D. in nursing, a D.Ed. in curriculum and instruction, and an M.A. in employment and labor relations—in addition to IUP’s pre-existing doctorate program in administration and leadership studies.

The nursing program is designed to produce nursing teachers and professors as opposed to nurse practitioners. “Health care is a growth industry—it’s important in everyone’s lives,” Driscoll said, explaining the push behind the creation of the latest program. “Nursing is so important and visible right now, but there are not enough people at this (the doctorate) level to teach the next generation. This will resonate with a lot of folks.”

Dr. Timothy Mack, dean of the School of Graduate Studies and Research at IUP, said graduate education “has changed dramatically in just the past 18 months alone.” The average age for a grad student at IUP is 32, it’s typically a woman, and someone who’s not straight out of undergraduate school. He said grad students are often “people who have been downsized… or [are] ready to move on to something else.”

For Sheri Matter, vice president of nursing for PinnacleHealth who is pursuing a Ph.D. in administration and leadership studies from IUP, going back to school was an opportunity for her to lead by example. Matter has over 1,000 nurses in the PinnacleHealth system that report through her, and she consistently encourages them to continue their education. “To be able to develop my leadership skills and challenge my staff to grow as well as was a win all the way around,” said Matter. “It was the perfect fit right here in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.”

Mack sees that the DUC fits nicely into the equation for many students, because the typical grad student is often looking for a program that’s either “fully online” or “something that fits their schedule.”

“We’re trying to be much more agile and responsible to the demands of the state’s students,” Mack said. “We have to look at what this state’s residents want and make sure that we have it—where they want it and in what delivery format they want.”

The IUP programs are blended—part online, part face-to-face. IUP has faculty members who drive from the home campus to teach at the DUC. It also has a faculty member who lives and is based in Harrisburg.

Mack is big on the term “tailored instruction.” He said, “The instruction has to be tailored to fit the person who wants the instruction. If the pants are too tight you won’t wear them. If the delivery restrictions on the program are too tight people won’t want it.”

For Matter, the benefit of belonging to an IUP cohort helped provide her with the support needed to balance her responsibilities of being a full-time employee, a mother, wife, and the primary caregiver of her own mother. And although she’s still working towards her goal, she’s already seen her experience at the DUC impact her career. “It’s given me a new way of thinking,” said Matter. “I now challenge myself and others in a different manner. I’ve found that I make better decisions within the department of nursing and for patient safety because I’m going through this program.”

continued on page 3
Keep Working, Keep Learning
Elizabethtown College is one of the oldest continuing partners at the DUC. It has been affiliated since 1951.

Dr. Carl Strikwerda, president of Elizabethtown College, said the DUC is one of Elizabethtown’s most important sites at which its School of Continuing and Professional Education offers courses.

The offerings are what Strikwerda describes as “education for working adults.” Elizabethtown usually reaches about 200 students at any one time through the DUC. Nearly 100 percent are full-time employees somewhere. Often they’re individuals who started college but didn’t finish.

Many of Elizabethtown College’s courses emphasize face-to-face learning, with some online content. “We’re pretty careful about how we introduce online education,” Strikwerda said. The school polls students and structures its courses based on what the students say they want.

Generally, the courses are considered “accelerated”—they take place in the evenings and on weekends at the DUC over just a five- or eight-week period. Strikwerda calls it “step in, step out” education. Students go at their own pace. They can take a course, stop, and then take another, depending on their own schedules.

This accelerated option allows students like Amanda Elliot to finish their degree while working, and organizational planning. He said it’s under discussion but probably still a year away.

“DUC is a major player in our plan,” said Dr. John Kokolus, dean of the College of Continuing Education and Distance Learning. He noted that the partnership with the DUC has strengthened Elizabethtown College overall, helping the College learn how to serve a different market of students and continually keeping the College “outward focused.”

Pushing the Limits
Dr. Scott Warner, associate professor and graduate coordinator for the Department of Applied Engineering, Safety and Technology at Millersville University, points out that even though there’s a great amount of material and instruction that can be put online these days, there’s still a trade-off involved. “There’s a lot to be said for that human connection,” he pointed out: being with peers in a classroom, having conversations, networking, seeing the body language of speakers, experiencing firsthand a mentor-mentee relationship—it’s all of that.

“Wes an’t to maintain the face-to-face connection as much as possible,” Warner said, so Millersville University’s approach is to “push the geographic limits on how far we can reach out.” That’s where the DUC factors in.

In this scenario, the DUC becomes the effective way of extending that reach. By sending professors to the DUC on a rotating basis, it becomes a satellite that can draw and serve non-residential students from much farther away than the main campus can. “We’re keeping the relationship as close as possible but extending it out,” Warner explained.

As part of its effort to keep its course offerings personal, Millersville University is launching this fall a master’s in strategic leadership, emphasizing strategic and organizational planning. He said it’s under discussion but probably still a year away.

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Open to Innovation
Tom Fletcher, associate vice president and dean of extended programs at Bloomsburg University, calls its course offering at the DUC a “degree completion program” designed to fill a specific need: boosting the qualifications of workers at daycare and child development agencies. “Many didn’t have a bachelor’s degree, most had an associate degree. There was a statewide push to change that,” Fletcher said.

Many holders of associate degrees in early childhood education who are working in the Harrisburg region are graduates of Harrisburg Area Community College (HACC). Fletcher said, “We laid out a roadmap to help get these individuals the additional training they needed without leaving the region.” The plan involved setting up what’s known as an “articulation agreement.” In effect, Bloomsburg University agreed to accept the credits earned at HACC for the associate degree. “We said that if you have that, we accept it and we accept you as a junior at Bloomsburg University no questions asked.”

The pilot project worked out well enough that the state Department of Education is interested in giving the green light to those that come through the HACC program to “continue right through to Bloomsburg.”

The concept has also found another application: a bachelor of applied science in technical leadership. The idea is to open a pathway for advancement for welders, electricians, carpenters, and other skilled people who hold two-year technical associate degrees. The concept is working so far on a test at the Lehigh Carbon Community College and the Lehigh Career and Technical Institute. “We believe this program can fill a huge void in the Harrisburg market,” Fletcher said. “We want to work with HACC on this. This could relate to a lot of technical areas. Show us that associate degree... and we’ll show you the pathway to the baccalaureate degree.”

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An Investment for Life.

Now is the time to prepare for a lifetime of business and community leadership. Your education is at the heart of this preparation. Elizabethtown’s accelerated MBA program offers a learning environment where you will build and enhance your business knowledge and core competencies. You will be challenged to innovate, think strategically and position your organization for success. In this flexible, part-time program, classes are offered in the classroom, online and in the blended format, giving you the highest level of flexibility to fit school into your life. Call us today or visit our web site. Take the first step to transforming yourself into a leader for life.

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Classes offered at the Dixon University Center in Harrisburg
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An Opportunity to Reach Out

Dr. Angela Tekely, associate dean of the College of Graduate and Professional Studies at Millersville University of Pennsylvania, said the Dixon University Center (DUC) “provides an opportunity to reach out to a market”—specifically the regional market—for educational offerings serving the needs of businesses, nonprofits and teachers in Dauphin, Cumberland, Perry, Lebanon, and Juniata counties.

Millersville University, a member of the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE), operates through the DUC in tandem with its outreach through the Ware Center in downtown Lancaster.

Tekely said Millersville University offers ongoing programs in several categories at the DUC:

- **The Nonprofit Resource Network (NRN)** provides training and development for the staffs of nonprofit organizations. This includes certificate programs focused on fundraising, strategic planning and nonprofit executive management. The latter is a new program. Programs are offered on a rolling basis in classes of eight to 10 students at a time.
- **The Corporate University** provides training—often customized to a company’s specific needs—in such areas as project management, computer skills and supervisory skills.
- **Educator Workshops** offer a broad variety of graduate-credit professional development courses for K-12 teachers from school districts throughout the market region.

Tekely said the NRN and the Corporate University each have a full-time director who stays in close touch with nonprofits and companies in the region to determine what their needs are and then helps develop customized programs.

For example, Anne Gingerich, director of the Nonprofit Resource Network, said its mission includes teaching nonprofit employees how to deal with nonprofit budgets, how to look for funding sources and even how to manage “underpaid” staffers.

The NRN serves an area as far north as Juniata, Mifflin and Schuylkill counties and south to Philadelphia. “We hold workshops at the DUC for 60 to 80 people at a time around 10 times a year,” Gingerich said. “We’re hoping to use it more.”

A similar approach—staying in close touch—is used to plan the Educator Workshops. “We work with area school districts and survey K-12 educators in the region to see what programs they would like to have in the Harrisburg area,” Tekely said.

“The Dixon University Center gives us an opportunity to reach out to a market that can benefit from our programs,” Tekely explained. “With working professionals and educators it may be challenging for them to come all the way to Millersville University, so we offer it in the Harrisburg area to make it more convenient.”

Tekely said that starting in the fall, Millersville University will begin offering a master of education in technology education degree program at the DUC. The program will help teachers become more innovative and creative in their use of technology to enhance their teaching skills. The program will take 2 1/2 years to complete based on the teacher-friendly schedule of one course per semester in the fall and spring and two courses over the summer.

Also starting next fall, according to Tekely, Millersville University will offer a Certified Public Manager non-credit certificate program designed to develop leadership and management skills for people in state, county and municipal jobs. Much of the course work will take place online, but the in-person sessions will be held at the DUC because of its central location in the capital city.

Tekely said the certification will come from the National Consortium of Public Managers and Millersville University will be the only provider in the state.

Because of the growing competition for the tuition dollar, Millersville University is emphasizing its advantage of being part of PASSHE. “We have highly qualified, full-time faculty that instruct the courses at the Dixon University Center, and we offer a tuition rate that is very competitive because we’re part of PASSHE,” Tekely said.

If you’re thinking about how to improve your workforce but don’t know where to start, contact Millersville University’s College of Graduate and Professional Studies at 717- 872-3099.

The Technology of Teaching Near and Far at the Same Time

One might be forgiven for thinking of Robert Hails as a tech guru. His formal title is distance learning coordinator for the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE). But he’s the person who has been at the forefront of helping to create the amazing high-tech classrooms at the Dixon University Center (DUC).

He’s the guy who goes to all the tech conferences and spends time talking to hardware and software developers. “My job is to research all of this and figure out where things are going to be in five years and recommend what we should invest in,” said Hails.

Four years ago there was only one classroom at the DUC capable of handling videoconferencing—in effect a link by both sight and sound in real time with another location. Now there are six such classrooms, and on any given evening they may be in full use—given that the DUC is often busier in the evenings than during the day because of all the after-hours learners.

Overall, PASSHE has 40 classrooms capable of videoconferencing in the statewide system.
Delivering ‘One-Stop’ Education

Dr. Kathleen M. Howley, senior associate vice chancellor for academic and student affairs for the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE), is responsible for overseeing the Dixon University Center (DUC). Here’s how she describes the purpose and positioning of the DUC.

Q: Some people might not be familiar with the DUC. Can you tell them what the DUC is all about?

A: The Dixon University Center is home of the headquarters of PASSHE. Its name recognizes the contributions of the late Eugene Dixon Jr., founding chairman of the Board of Governors of PASSHE. Comprised of six buildings on over 6.5 acres along the scenic Susquehanna River, the DUC also houses a consortium of nine colleges and universities. Managed by PASSHE, this DUC consortium gives those who live and work in the greater Harrisburg area a one-stop shop approach to higher education—providing access to various undergraduate and graduate programs and to the schools offering those programs, in addition to the choice of delivery format and when and how programs are offered.

Q: So how should think of the Dixon University Center as a delivery point for higher education in the greater Harrisburg area?

A: We have seven new programs coming in the next year or two. There’s going to be an increase in baccalaureate degree completion programs as well as doctorate programs. An additional university will be joining next year. We do market analysis to make sure we have a student-centered, market-centered approach. It’s about the services too, making sure the teaching and learning environment is supportive. We think in terms of having customers—students and faculty are all considered to be essential customers at DUC.

Q: Higher education seems to be undergoing a lot of changes.

A: It’s about providing access. It wasn’t that long ago that classes were one day a week or 15 weeks—the traditional [off-campus] option here. Nowadays you have a blended program and maybe 50 percent or more online. There are those who need flexibility, and now the technology allows them to access programs from anywhere. The DUC has the technology required.

Q: What’s driving it?

A: Employers need to remain competitive and they need help getting the most efficient and productive workforce. There are veterans from the military, there are self-directed learners, there are a lot of people with some form of college credits and they want a degree completion program. Since the mid-2000s knowledge has doubled every five years. The old adage was we’d have five to seven jobs in our lifetime. Now it’s five to seven careers in a lifetime. The shelf life of a college degree is five years. This is what higher education providers need to be able to respond to.

Q: Given that, how is it possible to keep up?

A: We provide programs adapted to skill sets that stay with you over time—intellectual flexibility, the ability to handle ambiguity, the ability to work with people who do not look and sound alike, the ability to work in teams, the ability to work face-to-face and virtually. Today you have to have those competencies no matter what your major is. Your major or your subject area is going to have a shelf life, but you will be able to stay involved and engaged by using those skill sets. That’s the [challenge] of the colleges and universities bringing programs here: making sure that all of these competencies and skill sets are part of the curriculum regardless of the major.

Q: At least 90 percent of our business is repeat business, ” Isbell said. “Our customer service is the one thing we always hear about.”

The technology is a close second as a draw. The DUC’s videoconferencing capabilities are in demand. And 50 percent is face-to-face. You have totally online programs, and the students and faculty meet here just for review sessions. You have weekend programs—Friday nights and all day Saturday every other weekend. So we do something unique. In a competitive marketplace we have nine colleges and universities working together in a single location. We’re offering multiple educational options and providing access to quality educational opportunities in one convenient location.

Q: What’s your excuse for not completing your degree?

Dixon University Center can help you work past it.

• An environment focused on the needs of adult learners
• Bachelor’s, master’s and doctorate degrees offered by 9 colleges and universities
• Flexible scheduling, including evening and weekend classes
• Classes that combine in-classroom and online learning
• Convenient Harrisburg location with free parking

WHAT’S YOUR EXCUSE FOR NOT COMPLETING YOUR DEGREE?

DixonUniversityCenter.org/NoExcuses

Where Meeting Planners find a Knowledgeable Partner

Last year, about 20,000 people from Central Pennsylvania attended meetings or events at the Dixon University Center (DUC). Serving as a partner to plan nonprofit activities, multi-day conferences, events focused on expanding the knowledge of attendees, and more—meetings and events is the other face the DUC presents to the region it serves.

Lorelee Isbell, the director of continuing education and conference services, and Kristina Heagy, the conference services manager, are openly proud of the reputation they’ve built for providing an all-around positive experience for those who use the DUC. It shows in the way people and groups keep coming back.

At the same time the DUC underwent a technological upgrade six years ago, it also got a facelift in terms of furniture and aesthetics to complement their continued commitment to providing top-notch customer service.

“At least 90 percent of our business is repeat business,” Isbell said. “Our customer service is the one thing we always hear about.”

The technology is a close second as a big draw. The DUC’s videoconferencing capabilities are in demand.

“Because of the technology there is no limit on the scope of who we can reach,” Heagy said. A lawyer in Nebraska conducted interviews with a mock Central Pennsylvania jury utilizing videoconferencing technology. An informational session with a Jordanian prince was accomplished “with the push of a button.” And most of the technology is included in DUC’s room rental rate, making DUC a cost-saving option for meetings and events.

The staff is careful to help users get up-to-speed with video and computer technology available in the rooms in the DUC. “We want to make sure our customers are empowered by the available technology in a way that boosts their confidence as a presenter and adds value to the content of the meeting,” Isbell commented.

Room rentals at the DUC can accommodate from one to 200 guests and prices range based on the number of event guests, time of day, the duration of the event, and the technology required.

Isbell encourages any group, organization or business interested in planning an event focused on education to contact DUC at 717-720-4080.
The University Center begins life as a 15-acre campus for the Harrisburg Academy, serving both day and boarding students.

The federal government declares all but one of the buildings on the campus surplus, and gives the Harrisburg Area Center for Higher Education a 20-year lease on theIon. The transaction allows the Harrisburg Area Center for Higher Education to take ownership when the lease expires.

The Harrisburg Academy adds a junior college.

The University Center at Harrisburg takes full ownership when the lease with the federal government expires.

The University Center officially becomes the University Center at Harrisburg.


The academic consortium, now known as DUC, celebrates 50-year anniversary.

The former Hunter Hall is torn down and replaced with a newly built headquarters building for PASSHE. The campus is renamed the Dixon University Center (DUC) in honor of P Eugene Dixon, Jr., chairman of the PASSHE Board of Governors. All other existing buildings are rehabilitated and restored. A parking garage is built under the quad.

PASSHE becomes owner of the University Center and moves its headquarters there.

Dr. Charles Clevenger, former vice president at Shippensburg University, becomes the first dean of the University Center.

In the midst of the Depression, the struggling Harrisburg Academy adds a junior college.

Elizabethtown College joins the consortium, now known as DUC, to include 9 partners and over 30 programs. Current partners include Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania, East Stroudsburg University of Pennsylvania, Elizabethtown College, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Lycoming College, Lebanon Valley College, Lebanon Valley College, Saint Francis University, Shippensburg University, and West Chester University.

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Building Community Connections in Time of Disaster

When The Silver Academy of the Jewish Community Center of Greater Harrisburg faced the devastating effects of Tropical Storm Lee in 2011, they turned to the Dixon University Center (DUC) as a safe place to continue classes for their K-8th grade students.

Although the DUC was facing its own emergency precautions as a result of the storm, The Silver Academy was welcomed to make the space their own for the next four weeks while the necessary repairs were made to the private school’s building.

The Silver Academy students were taught in the DUC classrooms, attended physical education on the vast grounds of the DUC, and even received hands-on instruction from Lock Haven University’s Physician Assistant students in the lab—taking blood pressure, checking pulse rates and vital signs.

“What our students were able to experience at the DUC opened their minds to college,” said Nachum Chasan, head of school, The Silver Academy.

Educators from The Silver Academy were equally impressed with DUC’s technology as they were provided with hands-on training by the DUC staff to ensure that The Silver Academy classes would continue without a hitch. The educators of The Silver Academy used their time at the DUC to learn more about incorporating technology into their everyday classrooms. As a result, the Academy has increased their investment into technology in their own school.

“Typically, you rarely hear about an elementary school using college resources,” said Stuart Gasner, director of development for The Silver Academy. Since their experience at the DUC, Chasan and Gasner agree they have learned to look at community partnerships as a way to offer inspiring, educational experiences to their students outside the classroom.

“We look for the partnership with the DUC to be ongoing,” said Chasan. “Our students, at a very early age, are now talking about going to college.”

Hosting ‘Cookie College’

In January, Girl Scouts in the Heart of Pennsylvania hosted a daylong “cookie college event” at the DUC to get their Brownie and Girl Scout members “excited and motivated” in advance of the annual sale of Girl Scout cookies, Emily Honafius, director of product sales and retail, said.

The event attracted nearly 200 Brownie scouts in the kindergarten through fifth grade age group and about 150 older Girl Scouts, mostly sixth through 12th grade.

Given the times, the tech offerings were a big hit as the scouts used laptops to connect to the DUC’s Wi-Fi and brainstorm ideas for sale pitches on social media like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. “It was great to have the technology,” Honafius said.

Reaching Out to the Wider World

The Harrisburg chapter of the World Affairs Council, part of a network of 97 chapters, has found a home at the DUC for events that encourage “global literacy” and teach young people appreciation for different cultures, according to Joyce Davis, the chapter president and CEO.

The council has held several forums and conferences featuring writers such as Hassina Sheridan, author of “Toughing It Out in Afghanistan,” and Sylvia Longmire, author of “Cartel.”

The DUC “truly is our favorite place,” Davis said. It’s centrally located, safe, has interior parking, and is beautifully maintained, she said. And the technology for presentations is easy to use. “Basically, we bring a flash drive and put it into the computer and we’re done.”
**Leverage for the Future**

**Second degrees offer extra push for success**

"These days it's always good to have a little something extra in your artillery," said 33-year-old banker Kimberly Lyons about why she's pursuing an MBA from Shippensburg University of Pennsylvania through the Dixon University Center (DUC). "I want to use it to set myself apart. I want to build up my knowledge level and move forward."

The world is changing rapidly and the knowledge needed to stay competitive and advance is constantly in flux. Lyons got her undergraduate degree in communications from Shippensburg University in 2001. She's currently working in private banking and wealth management for her employer—a large, well-known bank—but she wants the MBA so she can move her career into a training and development role in human resources. She's getting a tuition benefit from her employer to help pay for her education.

Lyons said she appreciates the way her courses are set up. She takes two courses at a time and is able to tailor her schedule so her education can co-exist comfortably with her work life. About two-thirds of each course consists of online projects and the other third takes place in a classroom at the DUC.

"I like the flexibility," she said. Like most students today, she's attuned and comfortable with online instruction and discussion, but she also said she likes having classes and the chance to interact face-to-face with professors. She commutes by train from Elizabethtown for her class sessions. She wanted a Shippensburg University degree—she's loyal to her original alma mater—but she emphasized that the 20-minute ride to Harrisburg for classes at the DUC is definitely a lot easier to handle than an hour-and-a-half trek to the Shippensburg University campus where the class would have been.

Lyons' experience is being replicated by more and more students, according to Dr. Christina Sax, associate provost and dean of academic outreach and innovation. "At Shippensburg University," she said, "student enrollment in online and off-campus classes continue to grow. Summer and winter online class enrollments have grown steadily. Summer online enrollments have grown from 155 in 2000 to more than 1,600 in summer 2012. Shippensburg University added a winter online term in 2006. Winter online class enrollments have grown steadily from 211 in 2006 to more than 640 in the 2012 winter term. Sax said Shippensburg University has also expanded the number of off-campus locations at which it offers classes via videoconferencing technology. In addition to the DUC, Shippensburg University now offers these classes at five off-campus sites."

Lyons said she's already using what she's learning in her day job. "I'm feeling very confident. The program has given me a lot of tools to move forward to make myself more marketable," she said. "This has been the best situation aside from actually being at Shippensburg."

In fact, she added, it's her understanding there are more students getting a Shippensburg University MBA at the DUC than on the Shippensburg University campus. "That's a testament to the location." Close-by location was the clincher for Elsa Wakefield and Elizabeth Messick, second-year classmates in the two-year physician assistant (PA) program offered by Lock Haven University of Pennsylvania through the DUC. The PA program is a full-time program that requires at least seven to eight hours of coursework a day.

Neither might have chosen the program had it not been for the convenience. Wakefield, who lives in Mechanicburg, is a 2010 graduate of Grove City College who majored in biology. She said her husband is a recent law school grad and is working in Harrisburg, so the convenient location of DUC was a "major reason" she chose that specific program.

"That was definitely my draw too," said Messick, a recent Messiah College grad in biology and psychology who lives in Elizabethtown. Surveys done for the DUC confirm that the attitudes of these students are shared by many. Survey results show that "evening/weekend classes, environment geared for the adult learner, and convenient location" were the main reasons students chose the DUC.
Paying for Higher Ed: You’ve Got Options

Whether you’re a traditional student on the way to a four-year degree, a commuter student working toward an associate degree, an employee getting a specialized certificate, or an adult learner polishing up your credentials, you’ve got options when it comes to paying for your education.

Christine A. Zuzack, vice president of state grants and special programs at the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency (PHEAA), said there is a large array of payment options out there.

Andrea DeLuca, a financial aid counselor at Elizabethtown College, said one of the biggest mistakes she sees is the assumption that the student doesn’t qualify for any aid and so he or she doesn’t even apply. It’s often a nontraditional student, an adult learner holding down a job and taking care of a family while going to school, who makes that assumption. And, she said, “That is not an accurate assumption. Many may not realize how affordable their education can be.”

Based on interviews with Zuzack and DeLuca, here are some recommendations for figuring out just what your options for obtaining financial aid are:

• **In general, the starting point for obtaining aid of any kind**—grants or loans—is filling out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). This can be done online at www.fafsa.ed.gov or by calling 1-800-4-FED-AID (1-800-433-3243). Filling out this form puts your information into the system accessed by all schools and puts you into the applicant pool for PHEAA grants. You can specifically choose 10 schools to have your information sent to, plus PHEAA.

• **“Always contact the financial aid office** at the educational institution you want to attend,” DeLuca advised. “We really like the one-on-one contact and getting to know our students. We can get the best financial aid for our students.” Many schools have financial aid counselors that specialize in helping adult learners. Financial aid counselors will also know best what scholarships may be available at each educational institution.

• **If you’re an adult learner** going back to school to enhance your job skills, check with your current employer to see if there are any tuition benefits available. “This is something anyone who is working and going to school should look into,” Zuzack said. Also, she added, if you’re already part of a profession, see if any professional associations or organizations offer scholarships for continuing education.

• **If you’re going into an academic program** of at least two years, you’ve been a Pennsylvania resident for at least a year, and you’re a high school graduate or have a GED, you might qualify for a PHEAA need-based grant ranging from $500 to more than $4,000 as part of an aid package administered through your school. Your application deadline will be May 1 if you’re in a two-year or four-year degree program at a Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) university and August 1 if you’re a community college or certificate program student.

• **Your FAFSA application** will determine if you’re eligible for a federal Pell Grant, which is based on your need and the cost of your education. Federal grants also are available to veterans with Iraq or Afghanistan service. If you qualify for a federal Pell Grant, the chances are excellent that you will also qualify for a PHEAA state grant, Zuzack said.

• **Two kinds of loans are generally available** directly through the federal Direct Loan Program to help pay for your education—subsidized or unsubsidized. With an unsubsidized loan, the interest begins accruing immediately. With a subsidized loan, the federal government pays the interest while you are in school. Your level of earnings will affect your ability to get a subsidized loan. You can apply through your educational institution for a federal Stafford Loan. The student is the borrower and a co-signer is not required. Privately sourced loans are available as supplemental or alternative loans but may have higher interest rates.

• DeLuca said it may be a scam if a scholarship service asks for a fee or your Social Security number. Zuzack recommends the free scholarship search service at www.fastweb.com. Always be careful, investigate and read the fine print.

• **The Dixon University Center awards** five $1,000 J. Bernard Schmidt Scholarships per year to students matriculated in programs at the DUC. The scholarships are awarded based on financial need and the student’s likely contribution to the capital region. Interested students should visit www.dixonuniversitycenter.org to apply.

• **Go to** www.pheaa.org and www.collegescholarships.org for a wide range of additional information on financial aid.

Using these tips, financing your higher education may be easier than you think.
On the Cutting Edge: The LHU Physician Assistant Program

This is a high-demand field at the moment,” explained Craig Ernst, assistant professor and clinical coordinator of the Lock Haven University of Pennsylvania’s physician assistant (PA) program at the Dixon University Center (DUC). “Our graduates are having no problem getting a job whatsoever, which is pretty unusual in the economy right now.”

The DUC in Harrisburg is one of four locations that offer the PA program. The program originated on the campus of Lock Haven University in 1996 and has since been extended to branch campuses in Clearfield, Coudersport and the DUC. This allows students to “have a campus close to their homes.” The program began at the DUC in 2010.

The PA program involves multiple elements including face-to-face instruction, hands-on practice of skills and videoconferencing via the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) videoconferencing bridge. The PASSHE videoconferencing bridge functions much like an old-fashioned switchboard and connects multiple videoconferencing rooms to each other—allowing students in all of the locations to listen to lectures, ask questions and engage in discussion back and forth just as if they were all in the same room.

They can even watch a dissection in a cadaver lab or a demonstration of a medical technique in a diagnostic lab without being physically present. The program is considered one of the most advanced in the country with this capability.

Guest medical experts who visit one of the four campuses can, in effect, make a presentation via videoconferencing to all of the students, either in real time or on a delayed basis. Recently a former faculty member—now relocated to a hospital in New Mexico—offered a remote lecture via videoconferencing on using EKGs.

In addition, students can study where and when they want through access to the Internet (they’re required to have laptops). They can review and study pre-recorded tutorials, download their assignments, send questions and get answers back from their professors via email, take part in team projects, and even access the full texts of specialized medical books, all over the Internet.

The physician assistant program currently has 140 students overall, of which 14 are in Harrisburg. There are 10 faculty members, two each in Harrisburg, Clearfield and Coudersport, and four in Lock Haven. The physical plant at the DUC even includes a cadaver lab and a physical diagnostics lab to support this program. Students practice skills on real people or on a high-fidelity simulation mannequin—which serves as a hands-on learning tool that simulates everything from vital signs to symptoms of shock.

Lock Haven University’s PA program has been a “remarkable success story,” according to Dr. Nirmal Joshi, senior vice president of medical affairs and chief medical officer for PinnacleHealth.

“We’ve been impressed with the quality of the work,” Joshi said. PinnacleHealth has recruited half a dozen program graduates as full-time “hospitalists”—specialists who take care only of patients in the hospital.

He said graduates of the PA program have demonstrated a good attitude and a consistently high level of medical knowledge.

Ernst is himself a graduate of the Lock Haven University PA program. In addition to teaching and helping to administer the program, he actively works as a PA for a local cardiology practice while pursuing a master’s degree in education.

His counterpart, Sarah Lewis, serves as chair of admissions for the Lock Haven University PA program, as an assistant professor, and works as a PA in the emergency department at the Penn State Milton S. Hershey Medical Center.

Lewis’ dual role as a practicing PA and an assistant professor offers a mutually beneficial opportunity for both her and her students—challenging her to be a continuous learner clinically and allowing her students to learn firsthand from her experiences in the field. Many of Lewis’ students have even spent time shadowing her on the job.

“In both roles I serve as an educator [of patients or of students],” said Lewis. And with a diverse mix of people in the classroom, ranging in age from 22 to 60, the PA program is a melting pot of students with varied backgrounds.

For all students, Lewis makes it clear that joining the field of medicine means they are joining a field of continuous learning.

“There is a huge demand for medical education in Harrisburg, especially at the graduate level,” Lewis said. “Within our PA program, Harrisburg [at the DUC] is our most in-demand campus,” she added. “I think we’ll be growing in the future.”
EXCUSE #1:
I want to go back to college, but there's no way I can go away to college.
Dixon University Center is conveniently located in Harrisburg near major thoroughfares, so you can earn a bachelor's, master's or doctorate degree from one of nine colleges, close to where you live or work.

EXCUSE #2:
I'm not sure if I can fit both college and a full-time job into my schedule.
Programs offered at Dixon University Center combine in-classroom and online learning, and feature flexible scheduling, with evening and weekend classes.

EXCUSE #3:
I'm worried I won't fit in on a campus where other students seem barely out of high school.
The learning environment at Dixon University Center is focused entirely on the needs of adult learners, so you'll encounter many working professionals like yourself, looking to advance in their careers.

EXCUSE #4:
I keep noticing classes that are offered in business parks or other rented spaces – I want more of a campus environment.
Dixon University Center features a picturesque educational campus along the Susquehanna, complete with fully equipped, high-tech classrooms. If you're looking for a program that's not listed on the website, give us a call – there may be plans to offer it at another time or may be a program one of our partners would consider adding.

EXCUSE #5:
I've looked around, but can't find a program that's right for me.
The educational partners at Dixon University Center offer a wide range of learning opportunities in categories of business and finance, education, government and nonprofit, health and human services, and technology.

EXCUSE #6:
I see a lot of online degree options out there, but I want an authentic in-classroom experience.
Programs at Dixon University Center combine in-person and online learning, so you can interact with professors and students alike.

EXCUSE #7:
I know completing my degree will increase my earning potential, but how can I make it affordable?
The majority of the educational partners at Dixon University Center are part of the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE), the most affordable of all four-year colleges and universities in the state. Plus, there are scholarships available for those pursuing their degree at Dixon University Center.

EXCUSE #8:
I know completing my degree could open doors for me in my career, but I don't know what steps to take next.
Review the programs listed on the Dixon University Center's website, find the one that interests you most and then contact the educational institution offering it using the email link or phone number provided. Or to learn more about the educational experience at Dixon University Center, contact one of the Admissions Coordinators from our partner institutions.

DixonUniversityCenter.org