

»»» SELF-STUDY REPORT

PENNSYLVANIA HIGHLANDS
COMMUNITY COLLEGE

20
26



PREPARED FOR REVIEW BY THE
**MIDDLE STATES COMMISSION
ON HIGHER EDUCATION**

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Executive Summary

Institutional Overview

Pennsylvania Highlands Community College (Penn Highlands) is a mission-driven institution committed to accessibility, affordability, inclusivity, and student success. Established in 1994, the college serves a diverse student population across multiple locations and modalities, offering associate degrees, certificates, and workforce development programs. The institution's mission, vision, and values guide all planning, decision-making, and resource allocation processes, ensuring alignment with Middle States standards and best practices in higher education.

Alignment with Middle States Standards

Standard I: Mission and Goals

Penn Highlands maintains clearly defined and widely communicated mission, vision, and values that emphasize student success and lifelong learning. These statements are periodically reviewed through inclusive processes involving faculty, staff, students, and community stakeholders. Institutional goals are realistic, measurable, and integrated into strategic and operational plans. Decision-making, budgeting, and curricular development consistently reflect mission alignment. Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs) are embedded across all programs, ensuring coherence and academic rigor.

Standard II: Ethics and Integrity

The college demonstrates a strong commitment to ethical practices, academic freedom, and intellectual property rights. Policies governing conduct, grievance procedures, and conflict of interest are documented, disseminated, and enforced. Diversity, equity, and inclusion principles are embedded in institutional values and operational practices. Transparency in communications, marketing, and compliance with federal and state regulations ensures integrity in all public and internal representations.

Standard III: Design and Delivery of the Student Learning Experience

Penn Highlands offers high-quality academic programs designed to foster coherent learning experiences and prepare students for transfer, employment, and lifelong learning. Faculty are qualified, experienced, and supported through professional development opportunities. Programs adhere to credit-hour policies and align with state and national standards. Assessment processes are systematic and faculty-led, ensuring continuous improvement. The nationally accredited dual enrollment program exemplifies the institution's commitment to rigor and quality across all modalities.

Standard IV: Support of the Student Experience

Comprehensive student support services—including advising, tutoring, counseling, accessibility services, and financial aid—are available across all locations and modalities. Initiatives such as the Guided Pathways Model and Keystone Education Yields Success (KEYS) program enhance retention, completion, and equity. Data-driven practices, including early alert systems (PAWS) and satisfaction surveys, inform continuous improvement. Financial aid and scholarship programs, combined with affordability strategies like Open Educational Resources (OER), reinforce the college's mission of access and affordability.

Standard V: Educational Effectiveness Assessment

Assessment of student learning and achievement is systematic, integrated, and aligned with institutional goals. ILOs and Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) are clearly defined, mapped, and assessed regularly. Results inform curricular revisions, program development, and resource allocation. Disaggregated data is analyzed to identify equity gaps and guide interventions. Assessment processes are supported by robust infrastructure, including Weave software and faculty leadership, fostering a culture of continuous improvement.

Standard VI: Planning, Resources, and Institutional Improvement

Penn Highlands demonstrates disciplined, mission-aligned planning and resource allocation. Strategic and operational plans integrate assessment results and institutional priorities. Financial planning is evidence-based, transparent, and linked to strategic objectives. The college maintains a healthy financial position, supported by diversified revenue streams, strong reserves, and prudent fiscal management. Facilities and technology planning align with sustainability principles and institutional needs. Continuous assessment of planning and budgeting processes ensures responsiveness to changing conditions.

Standard VII: Governance, Leadership, and Administration

The college operates under a clearly articulated governance structure that promotes inclusive decision-making and accountability. The Board of Trustees exercises fiduciary responsibility and policy-level oversight while delegating operational authority to the President. Administrative leadership is qualified, collaborative, and aligned with institutional mission. Governance processes are transparent, regularly evaluated, and supported by systematic training and communication. Shared governance fosters engagement among faculty, staff, students, and administration in advancing institutional goals.

Institutional Overview

Pennsylvania Highlands Community College (Penn Highlands) is located in west-central Pennsylvania approximately 65 miles east of Pittsburgh and 135 miles west of Harrisburg, the state capital. Founded in 1994, the college recently celebrated its 30th anniversary. When established, its primary goal was to serve the region in retraining workers who had been displaced as a result of the decline in the steel manufacturing and coal mining industries.

Geographically, the college operates in seven locations. The college's main campus is in Cambria County, in Richland Township, a suburb of Johnstown. The college also maintains additional locations in Ebensburg, the county seat for Cambria County, a culinary center in downtown Johnstown, Somerset County, Blair County, Huntingdon County. This configuration enables the college to provide educational opportunities in its service region, the Southern Alleghenies Workforce Development Area. In 2024, the college opened an additional location in Centre County which is in the Central Workforce Development Area. In addition to the college's physical locations, it also has a very active dual enrollment program which operates in high schools throughout central and northern Pennsylvania. In fall 2024, dual enrollment courses and the Associate in the High School program, which are offered at 57 high schools, accounted for 60% of all credits generated. Due to the large number of credit courses offered within area high schools, the college elected to pursue and achieve accreditation through the National Association of Concurrent Educational Programs (NACEP) This accreditation, achieved by only two other institutions in Pennsylvania, has enabled the college to provide a high quality and academically rigorous program that adheres to the same policies outlined for all students.

The college obtained a substantive change in 2010 to offer education programs delivered entirely online. This change enabled the college to continue its expansion of program offerings through Penn Highlands Online. During the pandemic, it proved to be especially important to continue to keep students enrolled and succeeding. The college continued to expand its online courses and programs until the majority of classes were offered in this modality. The following table shows enrollment by course delivery method for the past seven completed academic years:

Enrollment by Course Delivery Method by Credit							
	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Lecture	21,335	19,822	14,224	9,561	10,809	8,456	8,022
Online	9,794	11,368	13,966	15,879	15,501	15,205	15,347
Total Credits Enrolled	31,129	31,190	28,190	25,440	26,310	23,661	23,369
Percentage Online (%)	31%	36%	50%	62%	59%	64%	66%

Students

Penn Highlands students are predominantly Caucasian, historically consistent with Allegheny Mountain populations which inhabit the northern part of the Appalachian Mountain range. Students have diverse socio-economic backgrounds and reasons for attendance, with

young high school graduates and transfer-bound students joining displaced workers and non-traditional students in classrooms.

Student Characteristics Fall 2025-2026	
Total Headcount (traditional and dual enrollment)	2,674
White	2,108 (79%)
Minority	269 (10%)
Undisclosed	297 (11%)
Total Males	957 (36%)
Total Females	1,717 (64%)
Mean Age (of degree-seeking)	24
Enrolled in associate degree, certificate, or diploma programs (degree-seeking)	704 (49%)
Enrolled as non-degree seeking, includes dual enrollment.	734 (51%)
Total FTE	1438
Total Full-time FTE	548 (43%)
Total Part-time FTE	890 (57%)
Total Receiving Financial Aid, including loans (degree-seeking students) *	82%

**Title IV Grants (Pell & FSEOG): \$1,263,277*

Title IV Loans: \$844,230

PHEAA PA State Grants: \$384,418

Largest programs by major and site:

Top 10 Enrolled Academic Programs AY2024-25 Overall

1. Liberal Arts and Sciences A.A.
2. Business Management A.A.S.
3. Liberal Arts and Sciences - Assoc in HS A.A.
4. Pre-Health Professions: Nursing CER
5. Medical Coding and Billing A.A.S
6. Education A.A.
7. Computer Technology Cybersecurity A.A.S.
8. Accounting A.A.S.
9. Psychology A.A.
10. Business Administration A.S.

Top academic program by student's defined home site for AY2024-25 although student can take courses at any site or modality:

- Blair: Business Management A.A.S.
- Central Park/Downtown: Culinary HS Certificate
- Centre County: Non-matriculated
- Ebensburg: Education A.A.
- Huntingdon: Liberal Arts & Sciences A.A. - Associate's in High School
- Online Campus: Medical Coding and Billing A.A.S.

- Richland: Pre-health Professions Certificate – Pre-nursing
- Somerset: Education A.A.

Faculty

The College currently has 25 full-time teaching faculty and 85 adjunct teaching faculty, with many of the adjunct instructors employed in the industries and businesses that are potential employers for Penn Highlands graduates. The following chart shows the ethnicity of faculty and highest degree conferred. Dual enrollment faculty are not included in these counts.

Full Time Faculty	
Ethnicity	Highest Degree
White – 24	Terminal degree – 3
Black or African American - 1	Master's degree – 17
	Bachelor's degree* – 4
	Associate degree* – 1

Adjunct Faculty	
Ethnicity	Highest Degree
White – 80	Terminal degree – 12
Unspecified – 3	Master's degree – 63
Black or African American – 1	Bachelor's degree – 9
Hispanic – 1	Associate degree* - 1

** For courses which transfer to a bachelor's degree-granting institution of higher education (e.g., general education courses), qualified faculty must have earned a minimum of a master's degree in the relevant academic discipline or a minimum of a master's degree in an unrelated discipline plus significant coursework in the related discipline. For college preparatory courses, faculty are expected to have a minimum of a bachelor's degree in the relevant academic discipline. For courses that are generally not transferable, including program classes found in terminal A.A.S. degrees or workforce education diplomas or certificates, faculty are expected to have a minimum of a bachelor's degree in the relevant academic discipline and/or a combination of relevant education or training.*

Developments Since Last Reaccreditation

The college received its last accreditation in 2017. At that time the college was working to improve academic programs, establish financial security, and using assessment data to make institutional decisions. In 2019, the college's president, Dr. Walter Asonevich, retired, launching the college into the search for a new president. In 2020, the college hired Dr. Steven Nunez as the college's fifth president. Dr. Nunez began in January 2020 and by March the college had transferred operations to an online format due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Penn Highlands experienced the same pains as other colleges such as equipping faculty to teach remotely, establishing hot spots at each college location to enable students to access the college networks from outside the buildings, and to continue to recruit and support students. As a result of these factors, enrollment declined, only now is enrollment improving.

To assist colleges financially during this time, the federal government allocated funds for technology and subscription services to enable online learning. Penn Highlands used these funds to increase bandwidth, provide laptops to all essential college staff and faculty, and to help offset other losses incurred due to not being open for classes. These funds provided the necessary lifeline to ride out the pandemic and rebuild enrollment.

In 2022, after spending over 11 years operating an additional location in Huntingdon County, the college closed its facility. This closure was a result of declining enrollment in the largely rural area and the inability of the county to provide additional financial support to help lower student tuition. The college now maintains a small outreach office in Huntingdon County located in a facility owned by Juniata College, a college with which the college has several articulation agreements.

Other facility changes occurred in 2024, when the college moved its Downtown Center to a storefront that previously served as a restaurant. By making capital improvements to the location, the college was able to open the new Center for Culinary Excellence. The college entered into a unique partnership with the Greater Johnstown School District which allows their culinary students to take advanced college-level classes at the college's culinary center. In 2024, the college expanded its reach outside of its regional workforce area by establishing a new additional location in Bellefonte, Centre County – addressing a gap in community college access for central Pennsylvania resident who had previously been underserved. Both expansions were driven by workforce and enrollment needs within the service region and the desire to provide affordable, accessible education opportunities to the region.

Standard I: Mission and Goals

Introduction

Penns Highlands has been a mission-driven institution since its creation in 1995. While the mission, vision, and values statements have been reviewed and updated over the years, the fundamental tenets of accessibility, affordability, and student success have always been paramount. With the core understanding that education is one of the most powerful ways to positively influence a person's life, the college has always been focused on fostering student success and ensuring that graduates are equipped to achieve their own academic and career goals and leave the institution as productive members of the community.

1. Clearly defined mission and goals:

Mission

Pennsylvania Highlands Community College offers an inclusive, supportive, and affordable environment that empowers students to obtain the knowledge and skills necessary to be successful in work, life, and the pursuit of lifelong learning.

Vision

Pennsylvania Highlands Community College will be a premier institution of higher education and a driving force in regional growth, positioning students to be recognized as highly competent and exceptional members of the community and workforce.

Values

Pennsylvania Highlands Community College strives to be a community of learners where every student, employee, and community member is respected and supported. The College is deeply committed to the following values:

1. Student Success – creating a student-centered environment where individuals are challenged, encouraged, and supported to achieve their educational, professional, and personal goals as well as develop a spirit of intellectual curiosity and a commitment to lifelong learning.
2. Quality & Accountability – establishing performance standards throughout the institution, developing measures to document effectiveness along with a commitment to continuous improvement in the pursuit of excellence.
3. Integrity & Ethics – holding each member of the organization to high professional and personal standards.
4. Collaboration & Collegiality – informing and involving members of the College community in discussion and problem-solving at all levels in an atmosphere marked by civility and cordiality conducted with respect for personal and professional differences remembering the value of humor and humility as well.

5. **Responsiveness to Diverse and Changing Community Needs** – creating a positive culture that safeguards equity, inclusion, dignity, and respect for all while developing innovative and creative responses to the region's dynamic economic, workforce, and social needs based on interactions with all segments of the community. We respect and seek out inclusion of differences, realizing we can learn from others as partners in our community.

The college publishes the mission, vision, and values, along with its strategic imperatives and goals on the college website, in the employee/student information and date portal, myPEAK, and within all Board of Trustee meeting packets. The college uses these clearly defined goals as a way to drive operational change and achievement.

a. Are developed through appropriate collaborative and inclusive participation by all who facilitate or are otherwise responsible for institutional development and improvement;

In 2023, the mission of the college was reviewed and revised to ensure that it continues to reflect the college's ongoing commitment to its foundational tenants. Initially, an anonymous survey was distributed to employees, students, community members, and members of the Board of Trustees to gather their opinions of the mission, vision, and values statements. A core group of people from different areas of the college convened to form an ad-hoc taskforce to review and revise the mission, vision, and values statements. This ad-hoc taskforce consisted of the Dean of Library Services and Special Projects, Dean of Academic Affairs, Keystone Education Yields Success (KEYS) Program Coordinator, Student Success Center Director, Professor of Physical Sciences, Assistant Professor of English, Dean of Enrollment Services and Registrar, and Senior Cloud Analyst. Feedback from the survey was reviewed by the task force and incorporated into the new statements.

b. Address external as well as internal contexts and constituencies:

Internally, the college prioritizes student success through clear academic pathways, transfer agreements, and innovative instructional modalities. Initiatives such as providing online learning options and multiple educational centers for students to receive in-person instruction, and digital literacy support demonstrate the college's responsiveness to diverse student needs and scheduling constraints. These strategies are embedded in our strategic imperatives and goals, ensuring that faculty and staff are equipped to deliver flexible, high-quality instruction.

Externally, Penn Highlands actively engages with community and industry partners to align programs with workforce demands, ensuring that the curriculum offered at the college helps students in obtaining the knowledge and skills necessary to be successful in work, life, and the pursuit of lifelong learning. For example, the college's expansion into Centre County and partnerships with local employers underscore the college's commitment to regional economic development and lifelong learning opportunities. These efforts are supported by a strategic planning process that incorporates labor market data and community feedback, ensuring that the college's goals remain relevant and impactful.

c. Are approved and supported by the governing body;

All revisions to the mission, vision, and values, as prepared by the ad-hoc taskforce, were presented to the President's Cabinet for review. Upon approval by the President's Cabinet, the college's Board of Trustees was given the opportunity to review the changes, offer suggestions, and then approved the final revisions at the December 19, 2023, Board meeting.

d. Guide faculty, administration, staff and governing structures in making decisions related to program and curricular development; and the definition of institutional and educational outcomes;

The mission, vision, and values of the college play a critical role in guiding the President's Cabinet, faculty, administration, and staff in their daily decision-making process, resource allocation, and achievement of educational outcomes. For example, policy changes, operational adjustments, budgetary allocations, grant applications, and program offerings are all evaluated through the lens of the college's mission, vision, and values. The President's Cabinet regularly discusses these guiding principles when making recommendations that impact the college's operations both at the main campus and its regional locations. Further, when the President's Cabinet is working through the budget process, they keep the college's mission at the forefront of their decisions; the mission is stated at the top of every President's Cabinet agenda.

Decision making is clearly aligned with the college's mission of providing accessible and affordable higher educational opportunities. For example, the college has only raised tuition/fees an average of 2.28% each of the last five years. To improve accessibility for community members, the college operates six educational centers offering in-person instruction and provides an expanding online presence for students who face challenges with traditional, structured learning formats.

In alignment with the college's mission, vision, and values, student learning is at the forefront of what the college does. This is evidenced in the college's Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs), which also serve as the general education outcomes which are included in all degree programs. These are:

- Critical Analysis & Reasoning
- Cultural Awareness & Diverse Perspectives
- Effective Communication
- Information Literacy
- Scientific/Quantitative Reasoning
- Technological Competency
- Values & Ethics

Faculty use the mission and institutional learning outcomes when developing new or revising existing curriculum. For example, when the culinary program faculty revised courses in spring 2025, the Curriculum Committee of the Faculty Senate reviewed the changes to ensure the revisions mapped back to the ILOs and then the college's mission. To ensure adherence to the general education outcomes and mission, the Curriculum Committee of the Faculty Senate revised the Course Approval Revision Form in fall 2025, to contain the mission. This form also

includes the course description, transferability, alignment with program goals, and whether the course is a general education course and if so, which ILO it meets.

e. Include support of scholarly inquiry and creative activity, at levels and of the type appropriate to the institution;

The essence of scholarly inquiry is embedded in each program's curriculum and the college's ILOs, program learning outcomes, and course learning outcomes. Each program ensures that students have opportunities to develop intellectual curiosity. For example, the Penn Highlands Honors Program provides an academically challenging and enriching learning experience for highly motivated, academically prepared, and intellectually curious students. In 2025, Honors Program graduate Adelyn Dull, earned her Associate of Applied Science in Criminal Justice and an Associate of Arts in Liberal Arts and Sciences. As part of her Honors Program requirements, she completed a research project entitled, "Balancing the Scales: AI's Place in Criminal Justice Learning and Careers." Adelyn is now pursuing a bachelor's degree in criminal justice with a minor in cybersecurity at an area university.

f. Are publicized and widely known by the institution's internal stakeholders;

The mission, vision, and values statements are prominently displayed at each college location, including the board room, various departmental and committee meeting spaces, and on all hallway monitors, ensuring constant visibility for everyone within the college community. The mission, vision, and values statements are also posted on the college website at <https://www.pennhighlands.edu/about/mission-vision-accreditation/>.

"The Honors Program has been a wonderful opportunity for both the faculty and students to challenge themselves and explore new and different areas of study. It has been exciting to see the enthusiasm, dedication, and confidence of the students in the program when explore and ultimately complete projects."
--Sandy, Professor, Business Management

The mission statement is also included at the top of every President's Cabinet agenda and each Board of Trustees meeting packet and agenda. This visibility ensures that all employees, students, and the community are consistently reminded of these guiding principles.

g. Are periodically evaluated;

The evaluation of the college's mission, vision, and values statements is the first step in the strategic planning process. Each strategic planning process begins with a review of these statements to ensure alignment with the needs of the community the college serves. As mentioned, in 2023, the college's mission, vision, and values statements were reviewed and revised. This exercise yielded meaningful changes that better align with the population the college serves and the goals and values it represents.

The 2022 mission statement read, "Pennsylvania Highlands Community College provides its students with affordable opportunities to gain the knowledge and skills they need to be successful in their work, in their day-to-day lives, and in their pursuit of lifelong learning in a

supportive, student-oriented environment.” The 2023 revised mission statement now reads, “Pennsylvania Highlands Community College offers an inclusive, supportive, and affordable environment that empowers students to obtain the knowledge and skills necessary to be successful in work, life, and the pursuit of lifelong learning.” These revisions illustrate the college’s commitment to inclusivity, affordability, and the holistic life of the student.

The Strategic Plan 2021-2025 was developed on a five-year cycle; however, given the pace at which changes are occurring in higher education, the new 2026-2028 strategic plan will be on a three-year cycle. The current strategic planning process is informed by community, student, and employee feedback/listening sessions, a deep review of the previous strategic planning metrics and successes, a comprehensive review of community and employer needs of the region, and the findings of the self-study process. At the college’s fall start-up meeting, staff and faculty were presented with an overview of the state of higher education from Scott Van Pelt, of the University of Pennsylvania. Feedback on possible strategic initiatives was then compiled from employees, which represented the college’s first feedback gathering activity for the new strategic planning process. Over the course of the fall semester, stakeholders (e.g. employees, students, community members, Board of Trustees) were given numerous opportunities to provide further input into what became the next strategic plan. The draft strategic plan was presented to the Board of Trustees for approval in February 2026, which will allow next fiscal year’s budget to be appropriately aligned to its priorities.

2. Institutional goals that are realistic appropriate to higher education, and consistent with mission;

The Strategic Plan 2021-2025 describes imperatives and goals that are realistic, appropriate to higher education, and consistent with the institution’s mission. These strategic imperatives as identified in the college’s strategic plan are as follows:

- Strategic Imperative #1: Advance Student Access, Focus, and Success
- Strategic Imperative #2: Grow and Align Quality Programs and Learning Opportunities
- Strategic Imperative #3: Enhance Collaborative Partnerships
- Strategic Imperative #4: Improve Infrastructure and Operations

The Strategic Plan 2021-2025 Imperatives, Goals, Objectives, and Accomplishments metrics are published on the Institutional Research (IR) tab of myPEAK, the college’s internal portal, and with a summary available for the public on the Institutional Research page of the college’s website ensuring they are visible to all employees and board members.

3. Goals that focus on student learning and outcomes and student achievement that: Include retention, graduation, transfer and placement rates;

A key part of the strategic planning process is a review of the college’s foundational data regarding student retention, transfer out, placement rates, and graduation rates. This information is captured in the Strategic Plan 2021-2025 Imperatives, Goals, Objectives, and Accomplishments which is discussed at Board of Trustees meetings several times throughout the year.

Over the past several years, the college focused its efforts by implementing the Guided Pathways Model, an onboarding, advising, and guidance model developed in partnership with the Community College Research Center (CCRC) and the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC). In an effort to help improve completion and retention rates, the college adopted this model because it was identified by the strategic planning process as an opportunity to better align services and support students in an effort to help improve completion and retention rates. As such, the college has continued to yield strong retention rates for degree seeking students as evidenced in the following table.

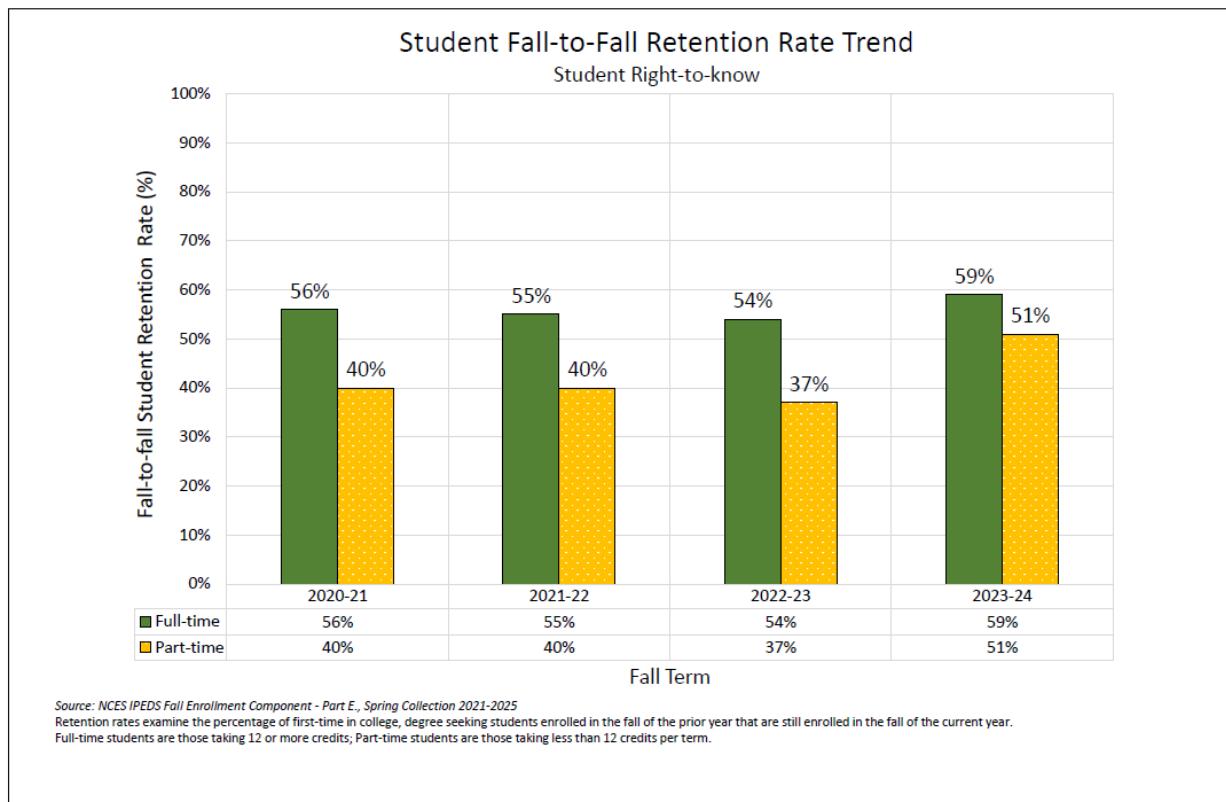


Table 1.1 Student Fall-to-Fall Retention Rate Trend. Source: IPEDS

The data shows the college has an average fall-to-fall retention rate of 56% over the past four years. This tracks slightly higher than the Pennsylvania average of 50% as determined by the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS).

The college continues to focus on supporting students as they transition to college life, but also while still in high school by helping younger students explore possible careers and the education needed for employment. Academic advising is leveraged with additional support offered through staff advisors who work with students to ensure they connect with the support they need, receive assistance in connecting with their faculty advisor, and have a full program, customizable plan built for them before the end of their first semester. These efforts have resulted in Penn Highlands having a graduation rate of 39%, which is higher than the Pennsylvania community college average of 25% and the highest among all Pennsylvania community colleges.

One of the goals in the Strategic Plan 2021-2025 addressed the need to establish a cross-functional Enrollment Management Team which was tasked with developing a Strategic Enrollment Management Plan. The team gathered and evaluated key college data that resulted in strategies designed to increase student enrollment, retention, and persistence to graduation. The

"I was a student who became a part-time staff member. I have seen first-hand as a student how the faculty and staff are dedicated to providing the best educational outcomes for students."
Michele, Graduate and Part-time Employee

Strategic Enrollment Management Plan has three key components: Recruiting and Admissions, Retention and Completion, and Transfer and Employment. Each student services department has ownership of various aspects of the Strategic Enrollment Management Plan. For example, the Dean of Enrollment Services and Registrar works with the retention component, ensuring the departments establish annual goals supporting the retention initiatives outlined in the plan. The student services staff use the plan for annual tracking and

departmental planning. Results will inform the next iteration of the Strategic Enrollment Management Plan that ties to the next strategic plan.

a. Consider diversity, equity, and inclusion principles;

The college's strategic plan considers diversity, equity, and inclusion principles as evidenced through the policies which ensures adherence to fair and equitable treatment of all faculty, staff, and students, and abides by legislation that includes Title IX, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity policies. The college does not discriminate in its admission or hiring policies based on race, color, sex, or religious affiliation.

b. Are supported by administrative, educational, and student support programs and services;

The college's strategic plan requires the support of several other operational planning documents; namely, a Strategic Enrollment Management Plan, an Institutional Effectiveness Plan, an Academic Master Plan, a Staffing Plan, a Facilities Master Plan, and the three-year Budget Projection Worksheet. These operational plans support both the strategic plan and the college's mission.

c. Prioritize institutional improvement; and 4. Periodic assessment of mission and goals to ensure they are relevant and achievable.

The review of the college's mission, vision, and values statements coincided with the evaluation and drafting of the new strategic plan. Since the college's strategic planning process, which is on a three-year cycle, the college ensures regular review for relevance and can incorporate change as needed.

Conclusion

Penn Highlands demonstrates a strong and sustained commitment to its mission, vision, and values. The institution's planning, governance, and assessment processes consistently reflect a

mission-driven culture centered on accessibility, affordability, inclusivity, and student success. The college engages in collaborative and inclusive review processes, ensuring that internal and external stakeholders contribute meaningfully to institutional direction. Mission-aligned decision making is evident across academic, administrative, and student support functions, and the institution's strategic planning cycle incorporates data, community needs, and broad stakeholder participation. The college's focus on student learning, retention, completion, and equitable access underscores its dedication to continuous improvement and responsiveness to the region it serves. Overall, the institution's mission and goals are clearly defined, widely communicated, regularly evaluated, and effectively guide institutional priorities and outcomes.

Recommendations

- Clear institutional commitment to accessibility, affordability, and student success demonstrated consistently across planning, budgeting, and decision making.
- Mission, vision, and values that are widely communicated through physical displays in all locations, digital platforms, and governance documents.
- Broad participation in the 2023 mission review process, including faculty, staff, and student-facing personnel.
- Use of surveys and constituency feedback to inform revisions to mission, vision, and values.
- Institutional Learning Outcomes are integrated across all degree programs and used in curriculum development and revision.
- Mission-aligned budgeting practices, including maintaining low tuition increases to support affordability.
- Retention and graduation rates that exceed state community college averages, supported by the Guided Pathways Model and enhanced advising structures.
- Strategic Enrollment Management Plan that uses data to guide recruitment, retention, and completion initiatives.
- Honors Program that promotes research and intellectual curiosity, with strong examples of student scholarship.
- Strategic planning and IR metrics are publicly available to employees and board members, supporting transparency and accountability.

Opportunities for Improvement

- Ensure alignment among the Academic Master Plan, Facilities Master Plan, Staffing Plan, and Strategic Enrollment Management Plan as the new strategic plan is implemented.

Evidence

Academic Master Plan

Board of Trustee meeting minutes, December 19, 2025

Board of Trustee meeting minutes, February 2025

Course Approval Revision Form

Facilities Master Plan

Institutional Effectiveness Plan
Staffing Plan
Strategic Enrollment Management Plan
Strategic Plan 2021-2025
Three-year Budget Projection Worksheet

Standard II: Ethics and Integrity

Introduction:

Penn Highlands prides itself on operating with integrity and in an ethical manner as evidenced in the institution's commitment to the integrity and ethics values statement of "holding each member of the organization to high professional and personal standards." This dedication to respect among all members of the college is demonstrated through college policies and procedures, various governance bylaws, as well as in everyday student and staff interactions.

A candidate or accredited institution possesses and demonstrates the following attributes or activities:

- 1. a commitment to academic freedom, intellectual freedom, freedom of expression, and respect for intellectual property rights;**

Penn Highlands demonstrates its commitment to academic and intellectual freedom and its respect for intellectual property rights through Board policies and language in the collective bargaining agreement between Pennsylvania Highlands Community College and the Pennsylvania Highlands Community College Federation of Teachers (CBA).

Article 22 of the faculty CBA addresses the concepts of academic freedom, ensuring faculty members enjoy academic freedom in the classroom, during scholarly presentations, in research and in their publication works within a framework of professionalism and respect. The language of the clause was adopted directly from the American Association of University Professors' 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure. Faculty and students are granted intellectual freedom, expressing individual ideas and perspectives without risk of retaliation, interference, or censorship.

Intellectual property rights are addressed in the college's "Intellectual Property Rights Policy" and in Article 23: E1 – Intellectual Property Rights of the CBA. "In keeping with academic traditions at Pennsylvania Highlands Community College, the creator retains all rights to the following types of intellectual property, without limitation: books (including textbooks), educational courseware, articles, non-fiction, novels, poems, musical works, dramatic works including any accompanying music, pantomimes and choreographic works, pictorial, graphic and sculptural works, motion pictures and other similar audio-visual works, and sound recordings, regardless of the level of use of College facilities."

The college's Intellectual Property Rights Policy provides a comprehensive framework for managing intellectual property across the institution and provides examples and instances of what corresponding rights are associated with each instance.

- 2. a climate that fosters respect among students, faculty, staff, and administration from a range of diverse backgrounds, ideas, and perspectives;**

The mission of Penn Highlands highlights the commitment to providing an inclusive and supportive environment that empowers students to freely express their ideas and perspectives from a variety of backgrounds. Highlighting values of Ethics & Integrity, Collaboration & Collegiality, and Responsiveness to Diverse and Changing Community Needs, the college strives to be a community of learners where every student, employee and community member is respected and supported.

The college's commitment to fostering a climate of respect is embedded in policy, communicated through the college website and myPEAK, the student and data information portal, and further outlined in the Student and Employee Handbooks. The Student Handbook, available to students on the college website and student portal, outlines students' rights and responsibilities, which include upholding values of honesty and integrity, behaving in a way that is civil and respectful of others, and supporting an appreciation for diversity and inclusiveness. The Student Code of Conduct, outlined in the Student Handbook, also clearly defines appropriate standards of behavior, and disciplinary actions for those who violate these standards.

The Employee Handbook contains the employee Conduct and Work Rules Policy and asserts employees must maintain a professional working environment that encourages mutual respect. The Ethical Standards for Employees Policy charges all employees with creating an environment that encourages academic success and fosters respect among students, faculty, staff and administration over a range of backgrounds, ideas and perspectives.

To connect student learning directly to concepts related to ethics and integrity, the college has included values and ethics as an Institutional Learning Outcome (ILO). As part of the overall general education requirements for degree programs specific courses are mapped to the ILO: "students should be able to explain their own values and beliefs, as well as to understand the histories and cultures behind those values and understand the complexities underlying moral and ethical questions and the consequences of choices we make as individuals and as members of communities." Courses mapped to this ILO include BUS 225 Business Ethics, HSC 160 Law and Ethics for Healthcare, PHI 110 Introduction to Philosophy.

To determine the effectiveness of establishing a climate that fosters respect among students, faculty, and staff, the college conducts a bi-annual Title IX Campus Climate Survey. These results are reviewed by the President's Cabinet and shared with the Board of Trustees and the college community. In the most recent Campus Climate Survey conducted in March 2025, the majority of the college community (88% of respondents) expressed satisfaction with their treatment on campus (7% were unsure who was responsible for their safety on campus, and 5% did not respond). Results can be found in the Campus Climate Survey 2025 document.

"I don't know how I would have made it through this past year without the incredible faculty and staff at the Blair Campus. Each has gone above and beyond to make students feel seen, valued, and understood."

--Chelsea, Blair Student

Students, faculty, staff, and administration can freely express ideas from a variety of backgrounds and perspectives through the college's shared governance system. This system is comprised of four individual senates for students, faculty, staff, and administration, all of which

send representatives to a College Senate which serves as a recommending body to the President. All employees and current students are welcome to attend College Senate, which meets on a monthly basis throughout the academic year. With representatives from Administrative Senate, Faculty Senate, Staff Senate, and Student Senate, College Senate provides opportunities for open discussion on college policies and a forum to express ideas and concerns to a college-wide audience. All four senates have equal representation in College Senate, may request meetings and place items on the College Senate agenda, and are able to provide feedback from their fellow senate members. Students, faculty, and staff have additional opportunities to express their ideas and perspectives in serving on governance committees.

- 3. a grievance policy that is documented and disseminated to address complaints or grievances raised by students, faculty, or staff. The institution's policies and procedures are fair and impartial and assure that grievances are addressed promptly, appropriately, and equitably;**

The college has established, documented, and disseminated policies and processes through which employees, students, and the community can communicate grievances and concerns. The college's grievance policies and procedures are documented and available to each constituent on the college's Report a Concern webpage. Additionally, procedures for student grievances for academic and non-academic matters are provided in the Student Handbook as well as the college portal, myPEAK. Employee grievance procedures are outlined in the Employee Handbook. Anonymous reporting options are also readily available through the college's website.

Each grievance policy includes mechanisms for due process, appeals, and a timeline for response. Additionally, each process has an assigned office and individual for reporting, triaging, and tracking. These documents can be accessed upon request. For non-academic student concerns, the Dean of Enrollment Services and Registrar serve as the primary contact.

For academic related concerns, the vast majority of which are grade appeals, the Dean of Faculty serves as the point of contact. For example, between spring 2021 and spring 2025, 32 academic grievances were filed. Of these grievances, 100% were grade appeals, and all were resolved internally. For each of these grievances, the following steps were followed: six were resolved at the Dean level, 25 were advanced to the Academic Grievance Committee, and one was elevated to the Vice President of Academic Affairs and Student Services for final resolution.

The Associate Vice President for Administration, who is the senior human resource officer for the college serves as the point of contact for employee-related concerns. Tracking concerns and the method of resolution is kept in the Human Resources Office.

Any Title IX, sexual harassment, or disability concerns are addressed by the Title IX Coordinator, as documented in the Title IX Policy. A historical report of concerns or violations is kept in the office of the Title IX Coordinator.

Penn Highlands uses a formal grievance policy for union employees, which applies to issues related to Collective Bargaining Agreements with the Federation of Teachers, AFT, AFL-CIO, Support Personnel Unit (2023-2027) and the Federation of Teachers (2022-2026).

4. the avoidance of conflict of interest or the appearance of such conflict in all activities and among all constituents;

Penn Highlands has established a Disclosure of Conflict of Interest Policy for employees and the members of the Board of Trustees; which is included in their bylaws. This policy is established to ensure that employees, the College President, and board members “disclose any conflicts of interest that will or could be interpreted as benefiting the financial, professional, or political status of the Trustee/employee or their relatives or friends at the expense of the college or which could interfere with their professional duties and responsibilities to the college.”

The Disclosure of Conflicts of Interest Policy and form are distributed to new full-time employees at the time of hire as part of the employee new hire process. The Board of Trustees, College President, and members of the President’s Cabinet must disclose annually.

5. fair and impartial employment practices, including all phases of hiring, evaluation, promotion, discipline, and separation, with appropriate attention to diversity;

Penn Highlands’ Equal Opportunity, Affirmative Action and Non-Discrimination Policy affirms its commitment to equal opportunity and affirmative action in admissions and treatment of students, in educational programs and activities for students, employment, and in governance of the college in accordance with federal, state, local laws, and regulations and includes a prohibition of retaliation against those filing complaints.

One of the ways in which the college complies with these policies is through consistent recruitment, interviewing, and hiring process. Links to employee policies and the Search Committee Handbook, are both available on myPEAK. The Human Resources Employment Opportunities page on the college website includes an Equal Opportunity Statement that informs prospective applicants of the college’s commitment to ethical and legal hiring practices. It also includes contact information for applicants to reach out for further information regarding civil rights or grievance procedures. Additionally, all online and newspaper advertisements include Equal Opportunity Employment (EOE) statements.

Another way the college ensures fairness and accuracy with respect to employment is through the annual performance review which also triggers a review of job descriptions and employee goals. The review is conducted using a standard process administered through the college’s Paycom system. This allows employee input and manager feedback, goal setting, and how the manager can further support employee development.

If an employee is terminated or suspended for cause, resignation, job abandonment, elimination of the position held, or reduction in staff, the college follows the Termination or Suspension of Employment Policy. This document contains information items such as possible salary continuance and compensation of accrued paid time off and does not violate the rights of protected classes under federal employment laws. For employees covered by a CBA, the process is outlined in the agreements.

6. honesty and truthfulness in public relations announcements, advertisements, recruiting and admissions materials and practices, as well as in internal communications;

The college's brand identity focuses on affordability, transferability, flexibility, quality, and relevancy, as outlined in the Brand Statement. These values are woven into all marketing materials to create a truthful narrative and genuine audience connections. The brand provides a unified message while building credibility, trust, loyalty, and pride through testimonials, facts, and real-life visuals.

Penn Highlands ensures all recruitment materials and public announcements are crafted with integrity and transparency. The comprehensive materials in Brand Central include: Look Guidelines, Services, downloads of recruitment materials, posters, and PowerPoint templates. All communications undergo thorough checks and balances and receive approval from the relevant departments accountable for specific sections.

Publications are scrutinized for accuracy by the appropriate areas, and any facts sourced externally are properly cited.

"Thank you for fostering an environment where students like me not only receive an education, but are encouraged to grow, lead, and succeed beyond the classroom.

Pennsylvania Highlands has changed my life. For that, I am grateful."

-Matthew, Business Management Student

of Trustees. Further, bi-monthly distribution of packets and minutes from Board of Trustees meetings are also distributed.

The college maintains guidelines for its social media channels that emphasize and help to maintain an authentic and knowledgeable online presence that resonate with our community and stakeholders. By clearly outlining the expectations for content and behavior, these guidelines help ensure that all communications are consistent and aligned with the college's mission.

The college utilizes an annual Integrated Marketing Communications Plan to ensure consistent, accurate brand messaging to coordinate marketing activities. Information featured in advertisements is derived from the College Catalog or various departments, thus ensuring transparency by citing sources, and guaranteeing that all presented information is factual.

7. as appropriate to its mission, has policies, services, or programs in place to:

a. promote diversity, equity, and inclusion;

The college promotes diversity, equity, and inclusion through its values statement which includes, "Responsiveness to Diverse and Changing Community Needs – creating a positive culture that safeguards equity, inclusion, dignity, and respect for all while developing innovative and creative responses to the region's dynamic economic, workforce, and social needs based on

interactions with all segments of the community. We respect and seek out inclusion of differences, realizing we can learn from others as partners in our community.” Moreover, the college includes as an Institutional Learning Outcome (ILO), “Cultural Awareness and Diverse Perspectives: Students must explore various cultures to understand a diverse world and to compete in the global marketplace.” This ILO is required for all degree programs.

b. promote affordability and accessibility;

Access and affordability are the hallmarks of the college’s mission. The college demonstrates its commitment to accessibility through the college’s main campus, five smaller regional education centers, Penn Highlands Online, and through providing dual enrollment opportunities to 57 school districts across 11 counties. Courses and programs are offered in a wide range of modalities, such as in-person, online, virtual, video conference, hybrid, or a combination of any of these modalities. The college also provides preparatory courses for those seeking to enhance their skills in reading, writing, and math, either before or alongside their enrollment in college-level classes.

Penn Highlands recognizes and supports the standards set forth in Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, which are designed to eliminate discrimination against qualified individuals with disabilities. As part of the Student Success Center, the college’s Accessibility Specialist travels to all the college’s locations and works to provide students with documented disabilities with reasonable accommodations, auxiliary aids, and support services such as exam accommodations, alternate media and adaptive furniture. To ensure faculty are aware and prepared to meet student accommodations in their courses, the Accessibility Specialist provides training to new faculty each semester, covering the implementation of accommodations for students

Pennsylvania state law, specifically Community College Act of 1963-Chapter 35, dictates how community colleges are funded across the Commonwealth. Community colleges have three funding sources, student tuition, state funding, and a local sponsor. The law specifies that each funding source must support one third of the college’s total operating budget. Cambria County is the College’s local sponsor pledging one millage of tax revenue to the college’s budget. Currently, that allocation accounts for 8.1% of the budget, not equaling the one third portion. Nevertheless, this sponsorship reduces the cost for students residing in Cambria County by 25%, making the college one of the most affordable institutions of higher education in the region.

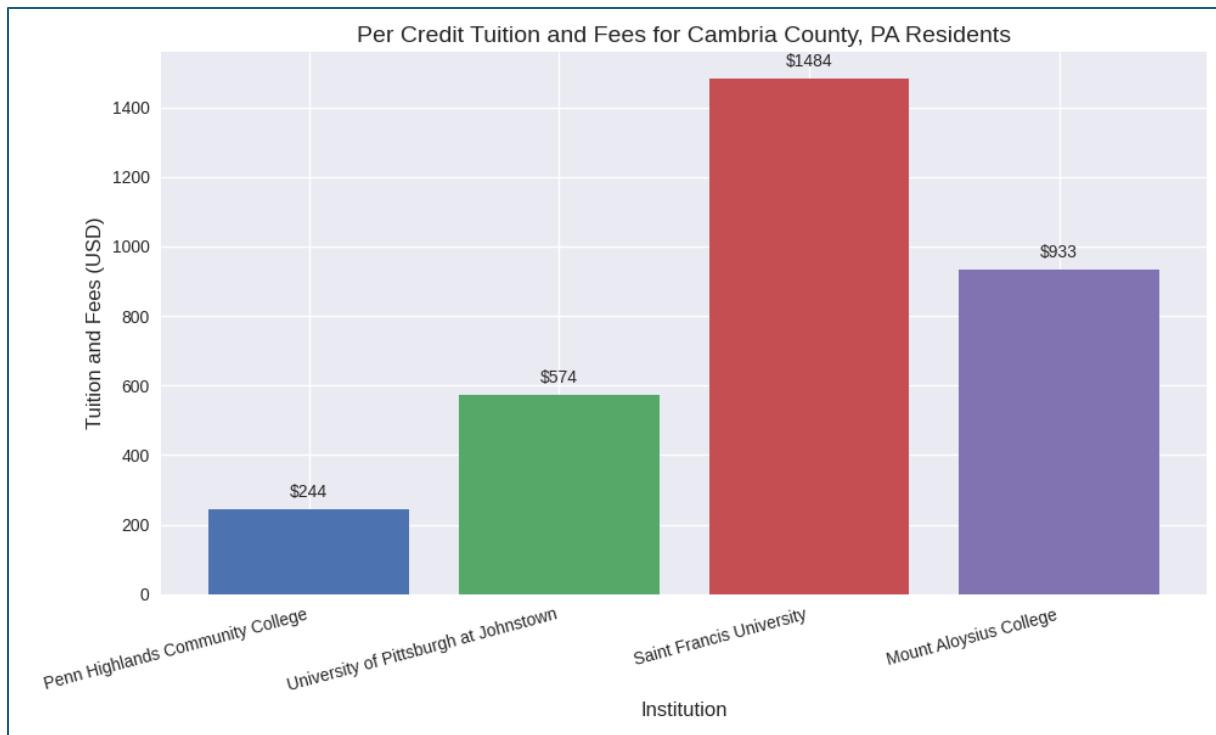


Table 2.1-Per credit tuition and fees for Cambria County, PA residents Source: IPEDS

As the above chart depicts, Penn Highlands offers the most affordable rate at \$244 per credit for Cambria County residents who receive the sponsored tuition, while Saint Francis University is the highest at \$1,484 per credit. All institutions included in the above chart operate campuses within Cambria County.

Another way in which Penn Highlands promotes affordability and access is through the dual enrollment program. The Accelerated College Education (ACE) program enables high school students to enrich their academic experience by earning college credits at a reduced price. Based upon 2024-2025 tuition rates, ACE students pay \$71 per credit, less than one-third of the cost of tuition for Cambria County residents. Since ACE courses do not have additional fees, students are accessing a college education at a reduced cost.

In an effort to further reduce the cost of education for Penn Highlands students, the college library works with faculty to identify ways in which they can adopt Open Educational Resources (OER). There are 18 courses that are using OER or ebooks (14%) in place of traditional print textbooks, thus ensuring that students have necessary texts on the first day of class. Moreover, Inclusive Access materials are also available to students. This program provides low-cost e-textbook and digital access materials at a low fee added to the cost of the course. For fall 2025, this includes 42 courses (34%), 83 sections (38%).

- c. enable students to understand funding sources and options, value received for cost, and methods to make informed decisions about incurring debt;

The college has several initiatives in place to inform students of the value received for the cost of education at Penn Highlands, including support for making an informed decision about incurring debt. Transparent information about the cost of tuition, fees, and materials is available on the college's public website as well as in documentation provided to students through the

"What makes this journey even more rewarding is having a strong support system every step of the way. At Penn Highlands, that's exactly what you get – a caring community that genuinely wants to see you succeed. Whether the road is long or short, the staff and programs are there to encourage and guide you, and that kind of support makes all the difference."

--Paige, Social Service Assistant, AAS and Recovery Technician, Certificate.

Admissions and Financial Aid Offices. Moreover, the college's Financial Aid Office provides clear information on all types of financial aid that is available and how to apply. This includes foster youth support, veterans and military services, financial aid estimator, and links to important information in an FAQ section. Additionally, before students engage in borrowing money through loan programs, students must complete a mandatory federal loan entrance counseling session designed to assist students in making informed decisions about taking on debt.

Financial literacy and borrowing wisely is also an outcome of the college's New Student Orientation program. Information on debt, repayment, interest, and how credit cards and loans work is included in both the mandatory in-person and online orientation programs.

To help students become informed consumers, the college provides them with a self-assessment worksheet that enables them to make comparisons regarding the cost of education across institutions and draw conclusions

regarding expenses and offers from those institutions. Currently, the value received at Penn Highlands as compared to other institutions is not outlined directly in college publications, which could provide a competitive advantage.

In addition to participating in Title IV Federal Financial Aid programs and Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency (PHEAA) funding programs, the institution continually supports its students by offering a variety of scholarships through the Pennsylvania Highlands Community College Foundation. The college's Foundation also provides numerous scholarship opportunities to assist with college expenses. In 2024-2025, the Foundation awarded over \$110,000 in scholarships. One notable example of how Penn Highlands supports affordability and accessibility is through the Foundation's Student Emergency Fund which assists students with unforeseen financial emergencies who might be at risk of dropping out due to financial hardship or unexpected expenses such as car repairs, temporary lodging, and more.

In 2025, the college was awarded a Dual Enrollment Innovation Grant that will provide over \$700,000 in dual enrollment scholarships for the next two years. The grant has eight elements designed to build dual enrollment. They are:

1. Dual Enrollment Scholarships Providing Enhance Accessibility

The college budgeted \$525,823 of grant funds to cover the cost of dual enrollment courses for eligible students over the two years of the grant. By providing dual enrollment scholarships,

students who have traditionally been unable to afford dual enrollment courses or have not considered themselves college ready or college worthy, will have enhanced opportunities to take and complete college-level dual enrollment classes.

2. Expansion of the Cybersecurity Dual Enrollment Program

As the college works to expand this program, grant funds are set aside to cover the tuition and fees for high school students enrolled in the Cybersecurity Certificate Program. Students that complete the program will graduate with a Cybersecurity Certificate and will be workforce ready after high school graduation.

3. Improved Professional Development for High School Teachers

High schools in rural areas have difficulty hiring qualified teachers to instruct their standard curriculum, especially in the sciences and computer sciences. This has led to a shortage of teachers in rural areas, and school districts are scrambling to find ways to adequately meet the instructional demand. Providing grant funding to support professional development will increase the number of high school teachers who are certified to teach dual enrollment courses.

4. An Immersive College Experience for High School Students: The Black Bear Academy

In this program, high school seniors would attend in-person classes at the College's main campus (Richland) as full-time college students but still be able to participate in high school extracurricular activities in the evenings. Eligible students who complete the Black Bear Academy will earn up to 30 college credits before they graduate from high school, saving one entire year on their associate or bachelor's degrees.

5. Dual Credit Consortium Project for Huntingdon County

The college has budgeted \$61,000 to cover the cost of full tuition courses for students in Huntingdon County, a rural county in the college's service area. This element of the grant provides an enhanced opportunity for high school students living in a remote, rural area to take meaningful, high-quality college courses.

6. Improved Supportive Services and Academic Advising

To ensure that students are well educated regarding their post-secondary or career path, the college has hired a Dual Enrollment Student Liaison to work with all dual enrollment students, assisting them in understanding their chosen career pathway and how dual enrollment credits can assist them with their intended major. This liaison advises and mentors students (and parents) on the dual enrollment opportunities available to them and discusses pathways from high school to post-secondary education or directly into the workforce.

7. Engaging Students of Career and Technology Centers: Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness Program

Due to the Students Occupationally and Academically Ready (SOAR) agreements and other articulation agreements that the College has in place with all Career and Technology Centers (CTCs) in its service region, offering dual enrollment classes to their students are not as necessary as CTC students may already transfer earned CTC credits to Penn Highlands. An online course is being developed aimed at ensuring the workforce readiness of CTC

students. This course will be available free of charge to all CTC seniors at all CTCs located within our service region.

8. compliance with all applicable government laws and regulations and Commission policies and procedures, including but not limited to:

a. required information for students and the public;

Penn Highlands is in compliance with all applicable government laws and regulations, and the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) policies and procedures. Required information regarding how the institution meets each compliance standard is available on the college's public website under [Consumer Information](#), including graduation, retention rates, licensing board pass rates, and institution-wide assessments.

b. representation of accreditation status;

Penn Highlands accurately represents its accreditation by MSCHE and National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP). The accreditation status for Penn Highlands can be found on the Mission & Accreditation page of the college website, within the Institution Directory of the MSCHE website, and on the Accredited Programs page on the NACEP website.

c. full disclosure of information on institution-wide assessments, graduation, retention, certification and licensure or licensing board pass rates;

Information on student outcomes data is available on the college's Consumer Information webpage. The college also disseminates information annually to the college and community through its [Community Report](#). This report presents college data and accomplishments and serves as the de facto annual report.

d. institution's compliance with the Commission's Requirements of Affiliation;

Requirement	Compliance
The institution is authorized or licensed to operate as a postsecondary educational institution and to award postsecondary degrees; it provides written documentation demonstrating both. Authorization or licensure is from an appropriate governmental organization or agency as required by each of the jurisdictions, regions, or countries in which the institution operates.	Pennsylvania Highlands Community College (formerly Cambria County Area Community College) was first approved by the Pennsylvania State Board of Education on September 19, 1993, to operate as a community college within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and continue to be approved.
The institution is operational, with students actively enrolled in its degree programs.	IPEDS data documenting enrollment, finances, employment, and graduation rates.
For institutions pursuing candidate for accreditation status or the grant of accreditation,	The college has been successfully enrolling and graduating students since its authorization by

<p>the institution will graduate at least one class before the team visit for the grant of accreditation takes place, unless the institution can demonstrate to the satisfaction of the Commission that the lack of graduates does not compromise its ability to demonstrate that students have achieved appropriate learning outcomes.</p>	<p>the Pennsylvania State Board of Education in 1993. Further evidenced by successful accreditations by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education.</p>
<p>The institution must communicate with the Commission in English, both orally and in writing, including all accreditation materials to support the multi-level accreditation decision-making process.</p>	<p>Evidenced by this report. College applications also stipulate that potential employees are proficient in the English language.</p>

e. verification of student identity in distance and correspondence education;

The process for verifying student identity across all learning platforms including distance education is available on the Identity Verification HEOA webpage. Processes include a unique username and password assigned to students and employees, account multifactor authentication processes to ensure user identity, and self-serve account activation with a three-question profile setup.

Currently, the college offers faculty the option of using Respondus Monitor, a software available to verify student identity prior to completing online exams. This program also provides a lock-down browser and video interface to further ensure academic integrity.

f. substantive changes affecting institutional mission, goals, programs, operations, sites, and other material issues which must be disclosed in a timely and accurate fashion;

Since the college's last accreditation in 2017, the following substantive changes were submitted and approved by Middle States.

- June 22, 2022 – Substantive Change to close the additional location in Huntingdon County. After several years in a fully operational additional location, enrollment declines, and lack of local financial support led to the decision to close this campus.
- August 22, 2022 – Substantive Change to reclassify the college's downtown location from an instructional site to an additional location. This is now the location of the college's Culinary Center where students can complete the Culinary Arts certificate.
- December 19, 2024 – Substantive Change to reclassify the college's location in Centre County from an instructional site to an additional location to allow degree completion.

9. periodic assessment of ethics and integrity as evidenced in institutional policies, processes, practices, and the manner in which these are implemented.

To maintain ethical standards for college employees, Penn Highlands has several policies and procedures in place that explain the ethical expectations of the college and the processes followed if a violation of these expectations is reported. The college also has a college governance ad hoc Ethics Committee that can be convened to address ethical issues raised within the governance process. This process for investigating ethics violations is embedded within the College Senate Bylaws.

The college uses a formal process of policy review. Policies are first proposed for updating by the President's Cabinet, then sent to the College Senate to disseminate to the four senates for feedback. Each senate is given an opportunity to review and provide their input on a policy before it is finalized and sent to the Board of Trustees for approval. Feedback on policies is recorded on a spreadsheet on the Governance myPEAK page entitled College Policies and Items Review Chart.

Conclusion

The college has in place several levels of policy and procedures that serve as checks and balances to ensure fair and ethical treatment of both employees and students. The college discloses on its webpage pertinent student data, compliance with state and federal guidelines, and other information to enable the public and students to make informed decisions regarding the operation and affordability of the college along with expectations of the level of service that will be received. The college has documented that it receives few questions or complaints annually, but when received responds in a timely manner and follows through with action until a satisfactory conclusion is reached. The college's webpage, social media platforms, and all print materials adhere to strict usage guidelines and are subjected to several levels of review before being made public. This ensures that content accurately and fairly represents the college, its faculty, staff, and students. Finally, the college provides numerous opportunities through the Foundation for students to find ways in which to fund their education and avoid additional debt. The Foundation also provides funds to assist students with emergencies that could prove to be a barrier to persistence.

Recommendations

- According to Campus Climate Survey results, 88% of students expressed satisfaction with their treatment on campus.
- All academic grievances which were submitted by students were 100% resolved internally.
- The college's Integrated Marketing Plan ensures consistent, accurate brand messaging.
- The college's Accelerated College Education (ACE) dual enrollment program is an affordable option for high school students to earn college credit.
- The college has 17 courses using open educational textbooks or ebooks, and 42 courses use Inclusive Access to ensure students have all course materials on the first day of classes.
- The Financial Aid Department provides students with a self-assessment worksheet to enable them to make comparisons regarding the cost of education across institutions and draw conclusions regarding expenses and offers from those institutions.

Opportunities for Improvement

- The value received by attending Penn Highlands as compared to other institutions is not outlined directly in college publications, which could provide a competitive advantage.
- Continue to find ways to make course materials more affordable and accessible through all the college's academic programs.

Evidence

Brand Identity Guidelines

BUS 225 syllabi

Campus Climate Survey

College Catalog

College Governance

College Policies and Items Review Chart

College Senate Bylaws

Community College Act Chapter 35

Community Report (2024-2025)

Conduct and Work Rules Policy

Consumer Information

Disclosure of Conflict of Interest Policy

Dual Enrollment Grant

Employee Handbook (2025)

Equal Opportunity, Affirmative Action, and Non-Discrimination Policy (2022)

Ethical Standards for Employees Policy

Faculty Collective Bargaining Agreement (2022)

Financial Aid Student Self-Assessment Worksheet

HSC 160 syllabi

Human Resources Employment Opportunities Page

Identity Verification HEOA

Integrated Marketing Communications Plan

Intellectual Property Rights Policy (2017)

IPEDS report

New Student Orientation agenda

Open Educational Resources

PA State Board of Education newsletter

PHI 110 syllabi

Search Committee Handbook

SOAR agreement

Statement of Accreditation Status

Student Handbook (2025)

Support Staff Contract

Termination Policy

Standard III: Design and Delivery of the Student Learning Experience

Introduction:

Penn Highlands recognizes that our diverse student population expects flexible learning options. To meet these needs, the college offers courses and services in multiple formats including in-person, virtual, and hybrid delivery. The college ensures that the student learning experience, regardless of the classroom modality or location, is accommodating to all learning styles and provides students with the support systems necessary to succeed in their coursework.

Qualified and dedicated faculty provide quality and contemporary learning experiences for students. As the second smallest community college in Pennsylvania, the college employs 25 full-time faculty and a pool of approximately 59 adjunct faculty to teach its for-credit programming each year. The faculty are educationally qualified and experienced. Full-time faculty have been employed at the college on average 10.5 years with the top 10 longest tenured faculty averaging a total of 20.6 years. The stability of the faculty has enabled the implementation of assessment processes that provide longitudinal data to be used for program and course development. The students are also served by a pool of adjunct faculty that averages 9.4 years of teaching at the college with the top longest serving 10 part-time faculty averaging 18.2 years.

The college offers a nationally accredited, expansive dual enrollment program to 57 area high schools. The college is accredited by the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP) which is the sole accrediting body for dual enrollment programming nationally. This accreditation process ensures that college courses offered by high school teachers are as rigorous as courses offered at the sponsoring college. The college has been accredited by NACEP since 2014 and is the only community college accredited in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Dual enrollment high school teachers are required to have the same minimum qualifications as the college's full-time faculty, as indicated by the Penn Highlands faculty collective bargaining agreement. This, combined with the required use of Penn Highlands approved syllabi and regular oversight by college administration and faculty, ensures that dual enrolled high school students receive the same quality and rigorous instruction as matriculated students.

Whether receiving instruction in-person, online, or in a hybrid format as a matriculated student or receiving instruction at our local high schools as a dual enrolled student, Penn Highlands students receive a quality education provided by faculty who consistently assess and evaluate course and program content to ensure students are meeting the approved learning outcomes.

A candidate or accredited institution possesses and demonstrates the following attributes or activities:

- 1. certificate, undergraduate, graduate, and/or professional programs leading to a degree or other recognized higher education credential:**

a. are designed to foster a coherent student learning experience and to promote synthesis of learning;

Penn Highlands offers more than 35 academic programs, including associate degrees, certificates, and diplomas across seven academic pathways that foster a coherent student learning experience and promote synthesis of learning. Each course taught at Penn Highlands, independent of modality, is instructed in accordance with an approved course syllabus. An approved syllabus template outlines the course learning outcomes, evidence of student learning, and the assessments that lead to mastery. Moreover, faculty design courses that build on complexity, providing the content students need to succeed in courses later in their programs. Prerequisites are implemented in courses where it is imperative that students learn foundational concepts prior to enrolling in higher-level courses to be successful. Academic advisors which include both primary faculty advisors and secondary staff advisors, assist students with course registration, help establish educational goals, outline transfer opportunities, and provide interventions to keep students enrolled and on track to graduation.

Regarding the college's dual enrollment program, the processes used by the college to determine the feasibility of a high school to offer college content is guided by the standards set by NACEP. As mentioned earlier, high school teachers must have the required qualifications necessary for course instruction as stipulated in the college's faculty collective bargaining agreement. Once college administration approves the high school teacher for instruction, the college ensures the quality, rigor, and adherence to the approved course syllabus through periodic site visits by college discipline-specific faculty liaisons. Visits are scheduled based upon a cycle established by the School Partnerships Office in compliance with NACEP standards. The faculty liaison provides feedback and guidance to the high school teachers during these meetings, as well as during an in-person Accelerated College Education (ACE) Faculty Annual Discipline Specific Workshop held at the beginning of each fall semester. This engagement provides professional development for high school teachers, allows the college to review the requirements for adherence to the college's syllabi, and provides examples of how teachers can increase their depth and breadth of knowledge in the discipline. For high school teachers that are unable to attend the workshop in person, a recording of the workshop is sent to them after which they must complete a survey documenting attendance. The Office of School Partnerships would like to build on the success of the face-to-face participation by getting more high school teachers to attend. By following the NACEP accreditation requirements, this also ensures compliance with relevant Middle States standards. Accelerated College Education (ACE) Observation Reports are maintained to document site visits that have occurred along with the results and feedback collected during the visit. These reports are available for review in the School Partnerships Office.

b. are assigned a reasonably approximate number of credit hours (or other value) for the amount of work completed by a student;

Penn Highlands ensures the reasonable assignment of credits for college work by adhering to the established Credit Hour Policy which aligns with the Carnegie Standard and the Graduation Requirements for Certificate, Diploma, and Degree Programs Policy that dictates credit-load

standards for each program type. To ensure compliance, a credit hour worksheet is developed for each approved course that outlines all course activities, and the hours expected to complete each, independent of course modality. The total number of hours for these activities must meet the credit hours assigned to the course. All credit hour worksheets must be presented to the Curriculum Committee of the Faculty Senate at the time of course revision or creation and are housed on the syllabi drive for access by faculty.

c. include sufficient course content and program length appropriate to the objectives of the degree or other credential;

Programs offered by the college include sufficient content and program length appropriate to the credential earned. Programs are aligned to the skills needed to succeed in the job market while also meeting the requirements of Pennsylvania's Community College Act of 1963-Chapter 35, which establishes the funding of community colleges, credit requirements for programs, and empowers the college's Board of Trustees to govern. Graduation requirements are established in the Graduation Requirements for Certificate, Diploma, and Degree Programs policy which sets a 60-credit minimum for degree programs, 30-59 credit hours for diplomas, and up to 29 credit hours for certificates.

For A.A.S. degrees, diplomas or certificates the college leverages the program advisory committees and external professional organizations to ensure that there is sufficient and relevant content for each program. For instance, English faculty reference the National Center for Teachers of English standards (NCTE), Computer Science faculty use the Center for Academic Excellence in Cyber Defense (CAE-CD) standards, and Mathematics faculty use the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) standards to help align course content to course objectives and the skills needed in the workplace.

For A.A. or A.S. degrees, statewide committees such as the Transfer Articulation Oversight Committee (TAOC), which consists of all Pennsylvania community colleges and universities found within the PA State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) system, help align course content for transferability. The Pennsylvania Department of Education established and oversees the TAOC committee and its function. Individual articulation agreements established with 34 colleges and universities also inform program content decisions.

2. student learning experiences that are designed, delivered, and assessed by faculty (full-time or part-time) and/or other appropriate professionals who are:

a. rigorous and effective in teaching, assessment of student learning, scholarly inquiry, and service, as appropriate to the institution's mission, goals, and policies;

The College's mission is to empower students to obtain the knowledge and skills necessary to be successful in work, life, and the pursuit of lifelong learning. Penn Highlands provides learning experiences that are rigorous and effective in teaching, assessment of student learning, and appropriate to the institution's mission, goals, and policies. The College has a robust and effective academic assessment process that allows it to assess student learning. Faculty assess course level student learning and report results and actions taken on the Course Assessment

Form. Faculty follow a schedule of learning outcomes assessment in which they select important outcomes to assess within the program-review cycle. Based on assessment results, faculty make changes to courses or programs.

For example, the Accounting A.A.S. program is fully online. Many students enrolled in the program work in addition to attending college. As such, several students each semester expressed difficulty in fulfilling the internship requirement for Capstone Seminar (ACC 299). To address this problem, an online internship simulation was implemented, enabling students to meet program requirements.

Further, the professor of Psychology explained that after analyzing program and course learning outcomes data from PSY 100: General Psychology and PSY 200: Abnormal Psychology assessments were revised to include stronger applied components, emphasizing critical thinking and evidence-based reasoning. These changes led to improved student success rates and deeper engagement in course discussions. Additionally, data from student performance on research-based assignments prompted the integration of structured American Psychological Association (APA) 7th edition formatting modules and improved use of peer-reviewed resources. These enhancements have improved writing quality and preparedness for upper-level coursework. Assessment-driven feedback also guided the redesign of PSY 215: Death & Dying, strengthening its reflective and applied learning outcomes, which students consistently describe as transformative.

“It's fantastic, and I look forward to offering my students who are unable to manage an in-person internship the ability to complete this electronic internship simulation moving forward.”
-Melissa, Associate Professor of Accounting

b. qualified for the positions they hold and the work they do;

Penn Highlands has several policies, procedures, and a faculty collective bargaining agreement that ensure that curricula are designed, maintained, updated, taught, and assessed by qualified faculty. These policies and procedures are in alignment with the Pennsylvania Community College Act of 1963-Chapter 35 (35.24a).

The Faculty Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) defines the requirements for instructors to teach at the college. Teaching qualifications will differ depending on the type of programming offered, and a Faculty Credentials Manual has been developed by the college that shows appropriate credentials for each course and is used for assigning faculty to courses.

For courses which transfer to a bachelor's degree-granting institution of higher education (e.g., general education courses), qualified faculty must have earned a minimum of a master's degree in the relevant academic discipline or a minimum of a master's degree in an unrelated discipline plus significant coursework in the related discipline. For college preparatory courses, faculty are expected to have a minimum of a bachelor's degree in the relevant academic discipline. For courses that are generally not transferable, including program classes found in terminal A.A.S. degrees or workforce education diplomas or certificates, faculty are expected to have a minimum of a bachelor's degree in the relevant academic discipline and/or a combination of relevant education or training.

c. sufficient in number with a core of faculty (full- or part-time) and/or other appropriate professionals with sufficient responsibility to the institution to assure the continuity and coherence of the institution's educational programs;

The college has a sufficient number of core faculty to assure the continuity and coherence of the institution's educational programs. The current student-to-faculty ratio is in alignment with the National Center for Educational Statistics of 17:1 for public 2-year institutions.

Fall Semester	Student-to-Faculty Ratio (IPEDS Methodology)
2024-25	16:1
2023-24	19:1
2022-23	18:1
2021-22	16:1
2020-21	18:1

Table 3.1 Student-to-Faculty Ratios. Source: IPEDS

The following table illustrates that the college is trending toward having more full-time faculty teaching core college students. The college defines "core" students as those that are matriculated into college programs (degree-seeking) and students who are considered non-matriculated (non-degree-seeking). Core enrollment does not include students who are enrolled in high school dual enrollment courses.

Core Credits Taught by Academic Year and Instructor Status (2020-2024)										
	2020		2021		2022		2023		2024	
Full-time Instructor Credits	14,839	52.6%	13,846	54.4%	15,248	58.0%	15,309	64.7%	16,014	68.5%
Part-time Instructor Credits	13,351	47.4%	11,594	45.6%	11,062	42.0%	8,355	35.3%	7,358	31.5%
Total AY Credits Taught	28,190		25,440		26,310		23,664		23,372	

Table 3.2 Core Credits Taught by Year and Instructor Status. Source: IPEDS

All programs are overseen by either a full-time faculty or adjunct faculty program coordinator with experience in the discipline. Program coordinators are charged with providing budget development requests, reviewing curricular changes and program review, overseeing program advisory committees, identifying the course sections to be assessed, analyzing results of common course and program learning outcomes, and providing input into master course schedule development. Discipline coordinators identify common course assessments and analyze results.

d. provided with and utilize sufficient opportunities, resources, and support for professional growth and innovation;

The college provides faculty with a variety of professional development opportunities that can be tailor-made for the individual faculty member or created for the entire faculty. The Faculty Professional Development Committee oversees the funds available for faculty to attend conferences or to take online, program specific professional development courses. The Committee also arranges group learning opportunities for faculty. Faculty receive professional development at the start of each semester as part of the college's start-up activities. Examples include Guided Pathways, AI prompting, and a presentation and conversation with academic researcher and author Scott Van Pelt. Further, the Faculty Forum is a speaker series that takes place at the end of each Faculty Senate meeting. Faculty have access to a weekly webinar series called Monday Morning Mentor, which covers topics related to teaching. Faculty can print out a certificate after each webinar, and faculty frequently submit these certificates as evidence of professional development during the advancement in rank and tenure processes. Finally, faculty can participate in Lunch-n-Learn sessions which are sponsored by the Employee Development Committee of the College Senate.

Faculty are supported by presentations and training by staff from different college departments. Information Technology, the Library, Academic Affairs, Advising, Student Success, and other departments have presented to faculty on relevant topics such as supporting students with ADA accommodations, recognizing students in crisis, assessment, implementing new style guides in courses, and the impact of artificial intelligence in the classroom.

Faculty may also continue their education via tuition reimbursement as provided for in the CBA for college-level coursework. Faculty can apply for these funds using the Faculty Tuition Reimbursement Form.

Faculty are provided with professional development in online instruction. New online faculty complete a 100-level course in Brightspace, the college's learning management system (LMS), designed to introduce them to the college's learning management system and give them practical advice about creating online courses. A Brightspace 200-level course focuses on course design, engagement, course interaction, and feedback. Penn Highlands emphasizes regular and substantive interaction (RSI) in online courses to comply with U.S. Department of Education regulation 34 CFR 600.2. Training sessions on RSI were conducted in 2023 and 2024. The 200-level course mentioned above discusses RSI. And the Online Observation Form has a section exclusively devoted to evaluating faculty on RSI. Faculty have also been provided with training on subjects like creating engaging discussion boards, online course assessment, helping struggling online students, universal design for learning, and more as part of the Monday Morning Mentor webinar series. In addition to these resources, faculty are also provided with one-on-one and group instruction about using the LMS. Utilization of all professional development resources is documented in faculty promotion and tenure portfolios, which include a section on professional development where faculty regularly document their activity.

e. reviewed regularly and equitably based on written, disseminated, clear, and fair criteria, expectations, policies, and procedures;

In addition to reviewing credentials of faculty when hired, the college has ongoing processes to measure faculty effectiveness regarding teaching, assessment of student learning, professional development, and college and community service that align with the college's mission and goals. This evaluation process is outlined in the faculty collective bargaining agreement (CBA) and is designed to measure the performance of essential job duties. The frequency and required evidence for evaluations are determined by a faculty member's rank and tenure status.

Evaluations are built to lead to the promotion and tenure processes, also outlined in the CBA. Advancement of rank and tenure for faculty are based on professional merit in the same categories as the faculty evaluations, and is recommended by the Promotion and Tenure Committee, composed of four tenured professors and three administrators.

3. academic programs of study that are clearly and accurately described in official publications of the institution in a way that students are able to understand and follow degree and program requirements and expected time to completion;

The college ensures that academic programs of study are outlined in official publications and on the website in a way that enables students to understand and follow. Not only does the college use the College Catalog, which is available online, to communicate important information about program requirements, it uses the Jenzabar student information system, J1 Advising, that breaks down these requirements for students in a way that facilitates registration of courses and planning of program completion.

The online college catalog documents degree and program requirements, as well as general education requirements for each degree type. It documents the program's learning outcomes and provides links to each of the courses and course descriptions in the program, allowing students to further explore detailed information about their chosen major. The catalog also contains the recommended sequencing and timeline for completion of each program.

The college's academic programs are further outlined in an Advising Worksheet that serves as a tool for students and advisors to review and discuss courses and requirements. This worksheet is particularly helpful when advising new students as it provides a short synopsis of the courses the student will take within their major and a draft timeline for graduation.

"One thing I love about Penn Highlands is that EVERYBODY wants you to succeed. I have been at two other colleges after high school, and I never received as much support and guidance from them like I do at Penn Highlands."
--Student comment from Fall 2025 Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey

In addition to the above documents, the college has implemented an academic planning module within the student information system that enables advisors to review the requirements of the student's program, and plan when the student will complete the courses across semesters. This provides an interactive and individualized road map that the student can follow to ensure successful completion of the credential. If a student deviates from this plan, the advisor can easily adjust it to meet the needs of the student. For example, if the student decides to move from

full-time status to part-time status, the advisor can adjust the student's plan to accommodate a reduction of credits per semester and extend the time to program completion as needed. Moreover, these individualized plans are tied directly to the student registration portal meaning that the courses decided upon by the advisor and student during their advising meetings are linked directly to the student's course registration each semester. This helps ensure students take the proper requirements in the proper sequence, thus eliminating unnecessary credits and keeping the student on track for a timely graduation.

4. sufficient learning experiences and resources to support both the institution's programs of study and the academic progress of all student populations;

The college provides a variety of learning experiences and resources to support the academic progress of all students. Faculty use Brightspace, the college's learning management system (LMS) to provide a comprehensive assortment of learning resources to students across all course modalities. Such resources include, but are not limited to, textbooks and digital access materials, PowerPoints, handouts, recorded lecture videos, project videos, samples, and project clarification videos.

Faculty support students' learning both inside and outside of the classroom. In class, they develop instructional techniques and activities directly connected to the learning outcomes of the course. Outside of class, faculty advise, tutor, and mentor students, either during office hours or by providing one-on-one assistance, answering questions via email, and meeting through Zoom. One example of the support offered by faculty outside of the classroom can be found in the AST100 Introduction to Astronomy course. The faculty member instructing this course requires students to meet with the instructor before completing major assignments. These meetings, held in person and via Zoom outside of normal class hours, ensure students understand assignments and know how to reach out for assistance when needed.

The library continuously aligns their collection of books, ebooks, and library databases to support both students and faculty. The Instruction & Online Services Librarian provides instruction in classes when requested and has developed an online module to prepare students for research projects. The library has also created subject guides, instructional videos, and MLA/APA/Chicago guides for student use. The library has also developed instructional materials for students on the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI). The library works one-on-one with faculty and students to support them in their research. Assistance is available via email, Zoom, or in-person appointments to support students in all modalities. The library also spreads awareness and supports the adoption of Open Education Resources (OER) in college classes. The cost savings from using these resources support the college's mission to provide affordable education for our students. Currently, 18 classes use OER materials. The IT help desk assists students with a variety of needs, from simple password resets to more complex textbooks and third-party integrations in their online classes.

The Student Success Center offers tutoring assistance either in the Math and Writing Center located on the Richland Campus, through Zoom meetings for individualized tutoring, or online tutoring services through Tutor.com. They also offer workshops throughout the academic year on topics such as study skills, time management, and other academic-related topics. Workshops are

offered both in-person and virtually to enable students across campuses to access them as necessary.

To further support students outside of the classroom, the college offered the Keystone Education Yields Success (KEYS) program. This is a contractual grant program offered through the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services at all community colleges in Pennsylvania to support economically disadvantaged students as they pursue higher education. For students to qualify for the program, they must attend a community college in an academic major aligned with an approved high priority occupation (HPO) and be eligible for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

“The KEYS Office has afforded me peace of mind by ensuring I have transportation to school and a quality education by purchasing textbooks I needed for my courses.”

-Sha’Nya, Liberal Arts and Sciences, Certificate Graduate

The KEYS program endeavors to provide services that help alleviate financial responsibilities outside of tuition and fees so that students can focus on their education and successfully navigate college life. In addition to counseling, connecting students to on-campus resources, and liaising with the County Assistance Office, the KEYS program provides students with:

- Transportation (bus passes, mileage reimbursement, vehicle repairs)
- Books and supplies
- Laptop loan program
- Coverage for test fees

Additionally, the Accessibility Specialist through the Student Success Center manages accommodations to ensure support for students with documented disabilities. Students may leverage an approved accommodation plan to further support their learning and success in the classroom. Additionally, the Accessibility Specialist offers one-on-one counseling support for students on study skills, test taking, and self-advocacy.

Specialized advising and guidance are provided to the students on which academic pathway is right for them through Student Services staff advisors, faculty advisors, and the Career and Transfer Pathways Office. For example, students planning to transfer following graduation work with the Senior Advising Specialist in the Career and Transfer Pathways Office to explore the various articulation agreements in place for Penn Highlands graduates. Additionally, the Senior Advising Specialist works directly with those students who are undecided in their major, leveraging the college’s Simplicity Career Services Management (CSM) software. This software, under the guidance of the specialist, helps students explore their strengths and interests and helps align them with possible career fields.

To further support new students beginning their academic career at Penn Highlands, the college holds New Student Orientation programs, which are offered prior to the fall and spring semesters both in person and online. These programs are designed to provide information on the resources available to students and how to access them throughout the academic year. Additionally, a Brightspace learning management system tutorial is available for students to instruct them on

how to access their coursework, complete assignments, engage with faculty, and access the many resources available to them to support their learning. Moreover, opportunities for support are communicated to students throughout the semester via Brightspace announcements, email, and direct text messages.

Students at all college locations including dual enrolled high school students, and those enrolled online have access to all college services, such as those provided by the Student Success Center, advising, and the library. The college strives to provide these services in a variety of modalities to support students whenever and wherever they need. For example, if a student works during the day, academic advising can be arranged to take place after regular college hours via Zoom.

Tutoring can be accessed at any time through the Tutor.com platform. Further, both the Accessibility Specialist and Counselor travel to each site on a regular schedule to provide their services in person at the college's additional locations. Finally, after a review of student usage statistics, the library staff discovered that students access library resources during the hours the library is not open, demonstrating that students are able to access the resources they require through the library's online database and web services.

The Penn Highlands Bookstore is operated by a third-party provider, Follett. Students can access the bookstore, at the Richland Campus, or make purchases through the bookstore website. Required textbook information is integrated into both the online searchable college course schedule and on the bookstore website.

In 2018, anecdotal faculty feedback revealed that students were not purchasing the textbooks required for their courses. To address this, the college added a "Books and Materials" category to its early alert system, Positive Actions with Students (PAWS). This enabled faculty to formally report concerns about students who were missing textbooks to the Student Success Center for triage. Review of these alerts over time showed that high textbook costs in some disciplines forced students to forgo purchasing required materials. This led to the exploration and adoption of IncludED, an inclusive access program offered through Follett that provides students with below market priced e-textbooks and digital course materials integrated directly into the Brightspace learning management system. Because IncludED digital materials cost significantly less than printed texts and provide access to e-textbooks on the first day of class, faculty increasingly incorporated this option into their courses. By 2025, 34% of courses are using IncludED. The college has been working closely with Follett over the past three years to find ways to improve service and support to students and faculty. Currently, the contract with Follett is year-to-year to determine the best option for the college given the changing landscape of college bookstores.

5. at institutions that offer undergraduate education, a general education program, free standing or integrated into academic disciplines, that:

a. offers a sufficient scope to draw students into new areas of intellectual experience, expanding their cultural and global awareness and cultural sensitivity, and preparing them to make well-reasoned judgments outside as well as within their academic field;

The college offers a general education program that supports students' exploration of new intellectual experiences and enables them to expand their cultural and global awareness. General education courses at the college are integral to all degree programs. General education courses are reviewed and assessed by a faculty subject expert with results being mapped to institutional learning outcomes (ILOs) by the General Education Committee of the Faculty Senate. Results of assessment activities have resulted in general education courses in mathematics, English, and science to be customized to meet the needs of students in specific academic programs such as healthcare, computer science, and business. Examples include technical mathematics, professional writing, and program specific first-year-experience (FYE) courses. These focused approaches to offering general education align with the college's academic pathways principles of making sure that students take courses that will make them successful in their academic programs and enable them to persist to graduation.

b. offers a curriculum designed so that students acquire and demonstrate essential skills including at least oral and written communication, scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical analysis and reasoning, technological competency, and information literacy. Consistent with mission, the general education program also includes the study of values, ethics, and diverse perspectives;

General education at Penn Highlands reflects the conviction that all associate degree graduates must demonstrate proficiency in the following foundational skills as established by the General Education Committee of the Faculty Senate: critical thinking, scientific/quantitative reasoning, information literacy, effective communication, awareness of a diverse world, and technological expertise. These skills are essential for success in both college and career in an increasingly complex global economy, and they will ensure that students are equipped to develop as well-rounded and competent individuals through a lifetime of learning. The college's Institutional Learning Outcomes, which have been adopted as its General Education Outcomes, are listed below:

- *Critical Analysis and Reasoning:* Students must be able to synthesize resources and use higher-level thinking and analytical skills to support their reasoning.
- *Scientific/Quantitative Reasoning:* Students must be able to apply quantitative reasoning and methods, including the experimental method, mathematical formulae, and statistical analysis, to solve problems.
- *Information Literacy:* Students must be able to determine the extent of information needed, access the needed information effectively and efficiently, evaluate information and its sources critically, incorporate the information into their knowledge base, and

"In COM 101 Public Speaking, students work in a computer lab to research their topics and build their outlines. They use AI to help build their outlines based on their preliminary ideas and the research they have done so far. AI does a nice job of limiting them to 3-5 main points and organizing everything nicely. It seems to help some students to get jump-started and not waste time wondering what they should do or how it should be organized".

-Rick, Associate Professor, Communication and Media Studies

understand the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information, and access and use the information ethically and legally.

- *Effective Communication:* Students must demonstrate fluency in both written and oral communications. Students will examine situational, cultural, and personal contexts to compose clear and complete communications.
- *Cultural Awareness and Diverse Perspectives:* Students must explore various cultures to understand a diverse world and compete in the global marketplace.
- *Technological Competency:* Students must demonstrate basic knowledge of fundamental computer operations and software applications.
- *Values and Ethics:* Students should be able to explain their own values and beliefs, as well as to understand the histories and cultures behind those values and understand the complexities underlying moral and ethical questions and the consequences of choices we make as individuals and as members of communities.

To continually measure relevance of student learning in General Education, these courses are reviewed and assessed by subject faculty through the college's course assessment process. Moreover, the college's General Education Committee of the Faculty Senate annually reviews general education outcomes and maps them to relevant courses. Based upon this review, the General Education Committee of the Faculty Senate creates a list of approved courses under each outcome category which program coordinator faculty use to design the general education requirements of their programs.

c. in non-US institutions that do not include general education, provides evidence that students can demonstrate general education skills;

Penn Highlands is a U.S. based post-secondary institution of higher education.

6. in institutions that offer graduate and professional education, opportunities for the development of research, scholarship, and independent thinking, provided by faculty and/or other professionals with credentials appropriate to graduate-level curricula;

Penn Highlands is a two-year, comprehensive community college offering only degrees at the associate level.

7. adequate and appropriate institutional review and approval on any student learning opportunities designed, delivered, or assessed by third-party providers;

The college provides appropriate institutional review and oversight of student learning opportunities delivered by third-party providers including the following: Accelerated College Education (ACE) Dual enrollment programming, partnership programs like Conemaugh Health, and third-party workforce development programs. The College follows the Third-Party Provider Policy.

The Office of School Partnerships oversees the ACE dual enrollment program and ensures adequate and appropriate institutional review of the program. High school faculty teaching Penn Highlands dual enrollment courses within area high schools are approved by the same

procedures and guidelines as the college's adjunct faculty. In order for a Penn Highlands course to be offered at a high school, it must be approved based upon the qualifications of the instructor and the rigor and outcomes of the course. Dual enrollment instructors must use approved college syllabi that outline course learning outcomes, grading policies, course topics, and required textbooks. Regarding textbooks, the college recognizes that it will not be possible for all school districts to use the college's text for a particular course. In that case, the text and supplemental materials used in a dual enrollment course must allow the high school teacher to meet the course learning outcomes at rigor and depth appropriate to college level learning.

The college assigns ACE Faculty Liaisons to support high school teachers as they instruct college courses. High school teachers, who are covered by their own collective bargaining agreements, volunteer to teach in the dual enrollment program. One of the responsibilities of the ACE Faculty Liaison is to ensure that the text and supplemental course materials will allow all course learning outcomes to be realized. During site visits, the ACE Faculty Liaison observes the ACE high school teachers to evaluate the curriculum and compare the quality and rigor to courses taught at Penn Highlands. If appropriate, the ACE Faculty Liaison may also function as a guest speaker, and/or team-teacher during site visits.

The Academic Affairs Office oversees shared academic programs and ensures, in conjunction with the partner entity, adequate and appropriate institutional review of those programs. Examples of such programming include a longstanding partnership with the Conemaugh Health System where the college partners to offer several healthcare-related programs. Each program has its own specific provider agreement that outlines the responsibilities of each party, the ownership of the curriculum, external accreditation requirements, programmatic assessment processes, and any financial obligations. These provider agreements are discussed annually in group meetings between the academic administration of both organizations.

The college partners with Ed2Go, a third-party provider that develops and manages online programming and certification courses. For career training programs such as Phlebotomy, Medical Billing and Coding, Grant Writing, and Six Sigma, the Office of Workforce and Continuing Education monitors program performance by reviewing completion rates for each course and distributing surveys to students. The survey responses, along with completion data, are analyzed by the office to evaluate program effectiveness and ensure quality standards are met. Personal and professional development classes, including poetry writing, accounting fundamentals, Microsoft essentials, and administrative assistant fundamentals, are also reviewed by the Office. This review includes analysis of individual student satisfaction surveys administered by Ed2Go to ensure these offerings meet student expectations and align with institutional goals.

8. periodic assessment of the effectiveness of student learning experiences for all student populations.

Student learning experiences, regardless of modality, are assessed on their effectiveness. Every term, all students are encouraged to participate in course evaluations which are distributed in all course sections. Academic Affairs uses the product Anthology Course Evaluations to gather course feedback. The course evaluation is distributed to students at the end of each term and

focuses on quality of course materials, effectiveness of course modality, and whether the student was satisfied with their experience in the course. Additionally, if the course is in an online modality, questions are designed to learn more about their online learning experience. While most of the questions in the course evaluation are ranked on a four-point Likert scale, there are opportunities for additional/open comments. Faculty receive reports from Anthology Course Evaluations that allow them to compare their results individually, across discipline, and across the college. These evaluations are used in the faculty promotion, tenure, and annual evaluations.

The chart below shows the results of Anthology Course Evaluations over time.

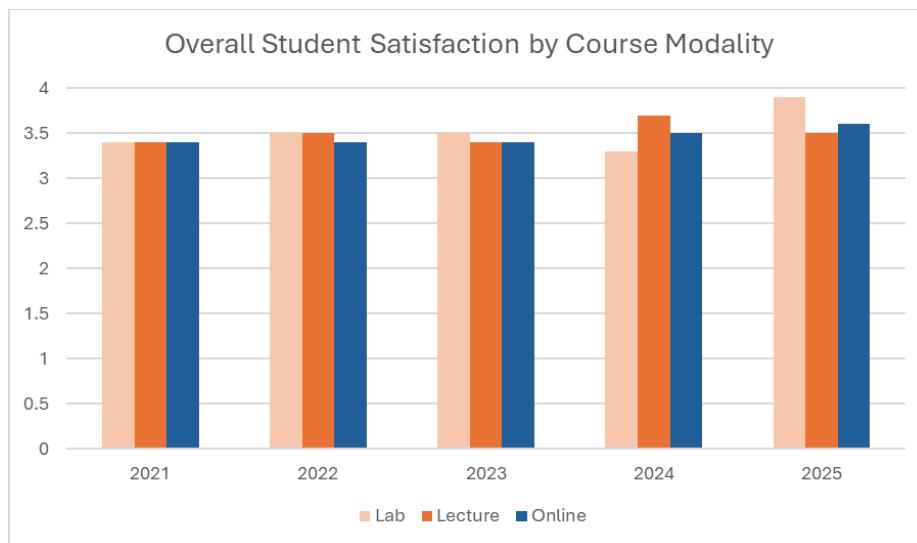
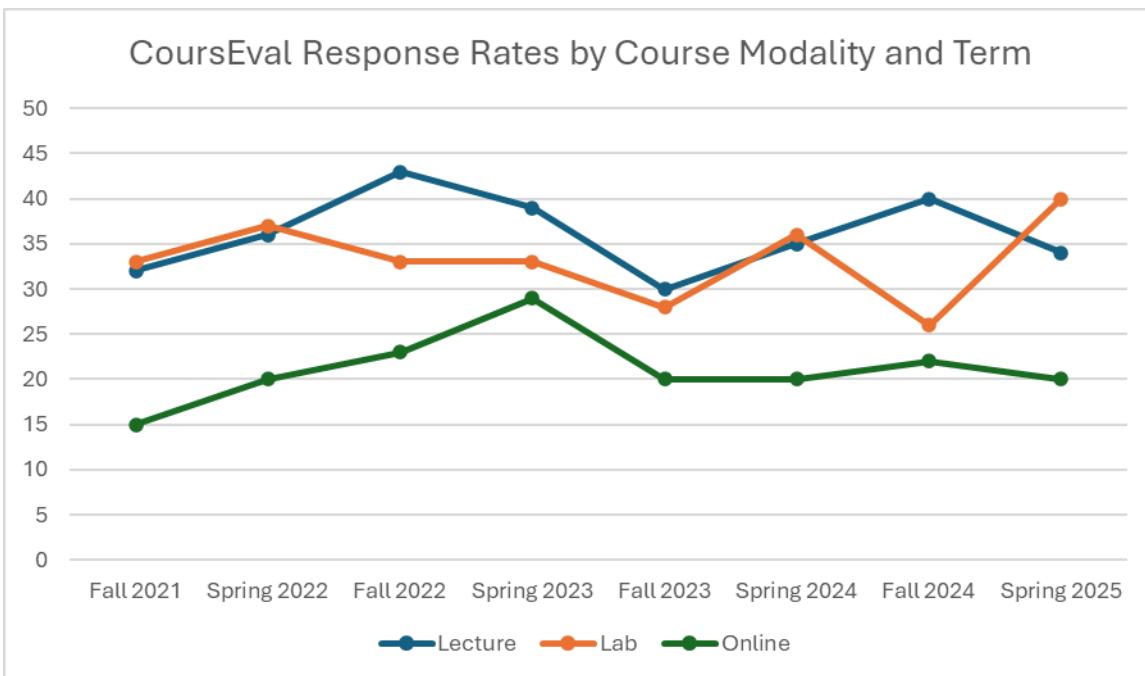


Table 3.3 Overall Student Satisfaction by Course Modality and Year.

Source: Anthology Course Evaluations Survey Intelligence Report, Fall 2021-Spring 2025

As the chart demonstrates, since the 2021 survey year, there have been no significant overall differences in student satisfaction between lecture (in-person) and online modalities. One way in which this data is used is to make improvements in course delivery by course type. For example, in 2023, results from in-person lab sections began to show a slight increase in satisfaction compared to other in-person (lecture) and online courses. The in-person labs were then tracked as a separate category to further analyze the results. After the 2024-2025 academic year, a greater increase in student satisfaction for in-person science labs was noted. Grade distribution reports were reviewed and indicated higher success rates for students enrolled in in-person biological sciences labs. As a result, the number of online BIO 114 Principles of Biology and BIO 212 Human Anatomy and Physiology sections were reduced during the fall 2025 semester. Additionally, the online course satisfaction rate has increased since 2021, a direct result in concerted efforts to improve teaching and learning.



*Table 3.4 Overall Satisfaction and Survey Response Rates by Course Modality and Term,
Source: Anthology Course Evaluation Survey Intelligence Report, Fall 2021-Spring 2025*

Survey response rates for online sections continue to trail those for in-person sections as the chart above depicts. Although the lab section response rate showed an increase from the fall 2024 to spring 2025 semesters, it may have been due to staffing changes. Several initiatives were launched to increase the online response rates, such as additional announcements in the learning management system, outreach to individual faculty, automated emails, and gift card incentives. They have not resulted in a sustained increase in response rates. The college is considering a return to paper-based course evaluations for in-person classes in an effort to increase response rates.

As part of the Student Success Center, the Career and Transfer Pathways Office distributes a report on graduate outcomes through the First Destination Graduate Survey. Multiple years of the report are available on the website under the Consumer Information page. In 2024, there were 241 members of the graduating class who responded, which represents a 70% return rate. The results showed that for transfer-oriented programs (A.A. and A.S.), 4% secured employment, while 90% transferred to continue their education. When looking at A.A.S. degree, certificate, and diploma programs, 18% secured employment and 73% transferred to continue their education. Since A.A.S. degrees are designed to enable students to go directly into the workforce, it shows that more post-secondary schools are accepting the transfer of credits earned in A.A.S. degrees, certificates, or diplomas. For those that secured employment and reported on salaries (7%), 40% reported a salary of more than \$54,000.

The Registrar's Office sends a Student Schedule Survey to students to gauge the effectiveness of the course schedule from a student's perspective and to collect feedback on future course interests. Academic Affairs and Student Services use the survey results to help develop the class schedule. The goal is to ensure that students get the classes they need to graduate or persist in

their programs. This information is used in assessment activities of the Registrar's Office. For example, results of the spring 2024 Registrar's Office Survey indicated that while 100% of respondents were 'happy with the variety of classes and class modalities' offered, specific feedback shared by individual students showed some confusion with finding the course registration portal on myPEAK and searching for available courses. As a result of the feedback, the Registrar's Office created a myPEAK guide to help students navigate the student portal as well as an instruction sheet and video to support students newer to the course registration process.

Institutional Research (IR) conducts a Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey biannually. The results are distributed to the President's Cabinet, which then shares the results with managers. Department managers use the data gathered from this survey to identify areas for improvement in their departments and services. The fall 2025 Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey was developed to determine student satisfaction during their college "onboarding" process. Areas reviewed included Admissions/Recruiting, Financial Aid, Foundation, Academic Advising, Registration, Student Accounts, and IT/Help Desk. Students were allowed to rate services from 1 (lowest) to 7 (highest). Overall, area ratings were all very good and ranged from 6.2/7.0 (B+ grade) to 6.6/7.0 (A grade). Individual student comments were reviewed to identify areas of improvement and of celebration.

The college uses the information collected through the Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey effort to enhance the student experience. For example, feedback from the 2024–2025 Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey led to several improvements. Students expressed disappointment over the Richland campus café closure, so the college introduced a micro market with affordable snacks, sandwiches, and breakfast items, along with rotating food trucks for greater variety. The survey also highlighted challenges in accessing tutoring due to work and life obligations. In response, the college implemented Tutor.com, providing on demand, online tutoring across subjects at any time and location.

Learning experiences are not just evaluated for traditionally enrolled, core students, but also dual enrollment students. As the college's dual enrollment program is nationally accredited by the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP) it is required to survey students each semester taught within the high school. The survey revealed that students enrolled in Accelerated College Education (ACE) courses during spring and full year 2024–2025 generally had a positive experience and perceived the courses as rigorous and well-structured. A total of 1,558 students were surveyed, with a 10.7% response rate. Most respondents were upperclassmen, primarily 11th and 12th graders. Nearly all students (95.78%) confirmed receiving a syllabus, and an overwhelming majority agreed that it clearly outlined learning outcomes and grading practices. Assignments were seen as strongly aligned with course objectives (99.39%), and almost all students (98.80%) found the courses more challenging than their high school classes, with 94.58% reporting they worked harder. Additionally, 85.54% indicated increased interest in the subject, and 96.38% said they would recommend the course to peers. These findings affirm the program's academic rigor and clarity, while highlighting the need to improve survey response rates and continue discussions on assessment and grading during faculty workshops.

ACE dual enrollment high school teachers are provided example assignments, rubrics, and other teaching materials created by college faculty, to illustrate the level of rigor needed to reach the learning outcomes of courses. To further assess dual enrollment courses, high school teachers and college faculty complete identical common assessments in their classes. The results of student work in high school dual enrollment classes can be directly compared with the work of college students to ensure the learning objectives are met. For example, in CHM 120 Scientific Quantitative Reasoning, a Central Cambria High School teacher, William Wagner, had to measure student's comprehension of the structure of the atom and the formation and nomenclature of compounds as evidenced by classifying, naming, and writing formulas for chemical compounds. To measure competency, he administers a quiz that requires students to name compounds from only their chemical nomenclature. Target levels for this measure is 70%, while Wagner's students achieved 100%. He further explained that he conducts labs that allow students to apply what they are learning.

Conclusion

Penn Highlands demonstrates a clear and consistent commitment to delivering a rigorous, coherent, and supportive student learning experience across all modalities. Through the stability and qualifications of its faculty, adherence to nationally recognized standards such as NACEP accreditation, and alignment with state and professional guidelines, the college ensures that students receive high-quality instruction designed to prepare them for both workforce success and transfer opportunities. Comprehensive assessment processes, professional development initiatives, and faculty-driven innovation reinforce the institution's mission to empower students with the knowledge and skills necessary for lifelong learning.

Equally important, Penn Highlands provides student support services including advising, tutoring, library resources, accessibility accommodations, and financial assistance programs—that are accessible to all populations, regardless of modality. These resources, combined with intentional program design and transparent communication of requirements, foster student persistence, timely graduation, and equitable access to opportunity.

The college's integrated approach to teaching, assessment, faculty development, and student support reflects a holistic educational environment that is both responsive to evolving needs and firmly grounded in standards of excellence. This ensures that every student, regardless of background or modality, is positioned to thrive academically, professionally, and personally.

Commendations

- The college's Credit Hour Policy and implementation of the Credit Hour Worksheet for all approved courses well documents course activities and the hours expected to complete each, independent of course modality.
- The college supports student goal attainment by creating an individualized academic plan for the completion of the student's program of study and tying that plan to the course registration process supporting timely completion and minimizing taking extra, unnecessary credits. The Senior Advising Specialist works directly with those students who are undecided in their major, leveraging the college's Simplicity Career Services

Management (CSM) software to help students explore their strengths and interests and helps align them with possible career fields.

- The college provides all student services in a variety of modalities to support students whenever and wherever they need.
- Faculty and academic administration use data collected through the course evaluation process to make changes to course delivery modalities for the improvement of student learning experiences.
- The 70% response rate gathered from the First Destination College Graduate survey is above average.
- The college offers an expansive, nationally accredited dual enrollment program that serves an average of 1500 students annually across 57 high schools within the service area.

Opportunities for Improvement

- The college is considering a return to paper-based course evaluations for in-person classes in an effort to increase response rates.
- Continue to build collegial interaction between high school dual enrollment teachers and college faculty liaisons.

Evidence

Accelerated College Education (ACE) Observation Reports

ACE faculty annual discipline specific workshop agenda

ACE Faculty Guide

ACE Liaison Guide

ACE Student Handbook

Advising Worksheet

Anthology Course Evaluations

Brightspace 100 and 200 syllabi

Course Assessment forms

Credit Hour Policy

Credit Hour worksheets

Faculty Collective Bargaining Agreement

Faculty Credentials Manual

Faculty Professional Development Committee minutes

Faculty Promotion Portfolio – example

Faculty Tuition Reimbursement Form

First Destination Graduate Survey

Graduation Requirements for Certificate, Diploma, and Degree Programs policy

List of ACE liaisons

Lunch-and-Learn examples

Monday Morning Mentor

NACEP accreditation letter statement

NACEP standards
New Student Orientation agenda
Online Observation Form
Pennsylvania's Community College Act of 1963-Chapter 35
Regular and Substantive Interaction
SOAR articulation agreement
Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey
Student Schedule Survey
Third-Party Provider Policy
Transfer Articulation Oversight Committee
Workforce surveys and results

Standard IV: Support of the Student Experience

Introduction

Penn Highlands has dedicated considerable financial, capital, and human resources to ensure that students are recruited, admitted, retained, and achieve the goals for which they entered college, whether that is obtaining a degree, diploma, or certificate, transferring credits to another post-secondary institution, and/or gaining the technical skills to immediately enter the workforce upon graduation. Students are informed of the college's student support resources initially through new student orientation (offered either online or in-person), through conversations with academic advisors or other dedicated student support personnel (e.g. athletic director, counselor, disability services, etc.), or through accessing the information on the college's webpage, which has a dedicated resource page for students that provides information on all of the student support services available at the college.

Once students have enrolled at the college, there are numerous departments devoted to ensuring that students have positive learning experiences, are retained, and persist in achieving their academic goals. Those departments include the Student Success Center, the Keystone Education Yields Success (KEYS) program, the Library, the Information Technology (the IT Help Desk) department, academic advising, the college's Foundation, and, of course, the faculty. Everyone operates under a unified goal, as stipulated by the college's mission, to support students in an inclusive environment that promotes success and lifelong learning. Student support services and activities are offered across all locations in a variety of modalities to ensure that all students receive the guidance and support needed to achieve success.

A candidate or accredited institution possesses and demonstrates the following attributes or activities:

1. clearly stated, ethical policies, practices, and processes to recruit, admit, retain, and facilitate the success of students whose interests, abilities, experiences, and goals provide a reasonable expectation for success and are compatible with institutional mission, including:

Recognizing that enrolling in college can be a challenging and stressful process for many, the college clearly communicates its ethical policies, practices, and processes for recruiting, admitting, retaining, and supporting student success. It ensures that accurate, timely, and well-maintained information is available to prospective students, current students, and their families to support informed educational decision-making.

Maintaining transparency and fostering student success requires clear and ethical communication of the college's policies on admission, financial aid, cost of attendance, academic program requirements, and the awarding of and the transfer of college credit. Regular reviews and updates of communication outlets such as the website, College Catalog, Community Report, and promotional pieces are crucial to maintaining accuracy and transparency.

The college's main informational hub for prospective students, including those engaged in the college's dual enrollment program, is the college's website. The Executive Director of Marketing and Communications regularly works with college faculty and staff to ensure the accuracy of the information found on the college webpages and the College Catalog. Additionally, the Website Review Workgroup, comprised of volunteers from faculty, staff, and administrators, convene biannually to review suggested updates to the website and gather feedback and suggestions for improvement. This process ensures accuracy of posted information. Additionally, the Executive Director of Marketing and Communications meets regularly with the Vice President of Academic Affairs and Student Services and the Executive Director of Recruiting and Admissions to discuss possible promotional materials to meet the needs of the recruiting department. Campaigns from the previous cycle and their results are reviewed to inform future marketing and outreach efforts.

The Executive Director of Recruiting and Admissions, in conjunction with the Executive Director of Marketing and Communications, uses website bounce rates, click-through rates, and navigation path data to provide guidance on future marketing efforts and website improvements. Additionally, one of the reports used regularly by the Executive Director of Recruiting and Admissions is the High School Enrollment Pipeline Report. The college recruiters are assigned to specific high schools and work to develop an understanding of the needs of their students. The admissions and recruitment team uses this report to accurately track and visualize the recruitment success rates across the high schools the college serves. These real-time dashboards allow for the identification of trends and the ability to respond quickly to changing needs. As illustrated in the chart below, which highlights the Richland Campus as a representative example, the report provides a real-time, detailed view of each location's progress toward its recruitment goals. This reporting framework is implemented consistently across all college locations.

Semester-Location-HighSchool	Goal	Inquiry	%	Goal	Application	%	Goal	Acceptance	%	Goal	Enrollment	%
Fall 2025	895	418	47%	660	296	45%	500	270	54%	291	172	59%
Somerset	145	73	50%	103	47	46%	81	45	56%	48	33	69%
Richland	254	150	59%	192	121	63%	150	116	77%	87	66	76%
Bishop McCort	11	7	64%	9	7	78%	7	7	100%	4	4	100%
Chestnut Ridge SHS	12	3	25%	9	3	33%	7	3	43%	4	1	25%
Commonwealth Charter Academy	12	7	58%	8	7	88%	6	7	117%	3	6	200%
Conemaugh Twp Area MS/SHS	14	15	107%	11	12	109%	8	10	125%	5	9	180%
Conemaugh Valley JSHS	11	11	100%	8	4	50%	6	4	67%	4	1	25%
Ferndale Area JSHS	17	6	35%	13	5	38%	10	5	50%	6	5	83%
Forest Hills JSHS	25	14	56%	19	11	58%	15	10	67%	9	7	78%
Greater Johnstown SHS	44	41	93%	33	41	124%	26	40	154%	15	13	87%
Johnstown Christian School	6	1	17%	5	1	20%	4	1	25%	2	0	0%
Portage Area JSHS	11	6	55%	9	4	44%	7	4	57%	4	3	75%
Richland HS	40	15	38%	30	13	43%	24	12	50%	14	9	64%
Shade/Central City	4	5	125%	3	3	100%	2	3	150%	1	1	100%
Westmont Hilltop JSHS	21	9	43%	16	8	50%	13	8	62%	7	7	100%
Windber Area HS	26	10	38%	19	2	11%	15	2	13%	9	0	0%

Table 4.1 High School Enrollment Pipeline Report, Fall 2025 Source: Power BI

Every two weeks, the admissions and recruiting teams meet to review the data, analyze areas of strong performance, identify areas needing improvement, and discuss possible causes and action steps to enhance outcomes. This data-driven approach also informs the annual goal-setting process, as historical performance from previous years is used to establish realistic, strategic targets for the upcoming academic cycle. The same comprehensive practices are followed at all

sites, under the oversight of the Executive Director of Recruitment and Admissions, to ensure consistency, accountability, and continuous improvement organization wide.

As students move through the enrollment pipeline, the admissions and recruitment team evaluates the student experience and efficiency of the process. Results of the annual Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey are used to strengthen the recruitment processes. The insights gathered from the survey are used by staff and serve as key discussion points at the annual recruitment retreat held each June. This retreat brings together all college recruiters across locations for a day of planning and collaboration. During this time, both positive and constructive feedback are reviewed to guide recruitment strategies for the upcoming academic year and to inform any necessary updates to the college's recruitment materials, which include printed literature and PowerPoint presentations.

One example of the above process at work includes updates made during the June 2025 retreat. The admissions and recruitment team identified a pattern in survey responses related to clear communication and consistency, prompting the team to examine areas where these expectations were not met. One notable area of needed improvement was the collection of PowerPoint presentations, which varied in branding, content, and tone across locations and even individual presenters. Using the feedback highlighted in the survey, a more concise, and branded set of presentations were created to strengthen messaging and better serve prospective students. Additionally, the number of total presentations was reduced to six core topics which are now used consistently across all locations.

a. accurate and comprehensive information regarding expenses, financial aid, scholarships, grants, loans, repayment, and refunds;

The college provides accurate and comprehensive information to its students and the community regarding expenses, financial aid, scholarships, grants, loans, repayment, and refunds.

Financial information, including cost of attendance, financial aid eligibility requirements, and scholarship information is comprehensively communicated to students and their families on the college's website. Pertinent links and instructions are provided, including how to apply for financial aid, tuition and fee information, cost per credit/per county, cost of attendance, and a net-price calculator. This information is also provided to prospective students and guests through the Financial Aid Booklet and How-To Checklist/Flyer which are distributed during individual admissions appointments, at school fairs and public events, and in the Admissions and Financial Aid Offices.

The Student Financial Services Department encompasses student billing, student payments, and the awarding of financial aid. This model provides seamless communication and support for students as they navigate the payment of their tuition and fees. Once students are admitted and have submitted a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) they are provided with access to numerous financial resources including loan counseling and their individualized Financial Aid-Portal, which shows their specific cost-related information. As this is a personalized and secure section of the myPEAK portal, students must be logged in to view this information. During the 2024-2025 academic year, Penn Highlands awarded over \$2.95 million in scholarships and grants to qualifying students. Seventy-two percent of enrolled students receive some level of support via scholarships and grants. As with all institutions that award Title IV funding, the Student Financial Services Department's processes and procedures are based on the regulations dictated by the U.S. Department of Education. This serves to ensure fairness and equitable opportunities for each student. This is further documented through annual audits of the department and college by Veteran's Affairs, Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Associate (PHEAA), and the Title IV audit conducted in 2012.

To further support students in making the cost of higher education more affordable, the Pennsylvania Highlands Community College Foundation offers a wide variety of scholarship opportunities funded through private donations from individuals or local businesses. Information about all Foundation scholarships, including availability, eligibility requirements, application processes, and awarding timelines is accurately displayed on the college website and in flyers/booklets which are regularly reviewed and updated (as necessary) by the Director of the Foundation to ensure accuracy of information. Scholarship eligibility requirements are dictated by donors or by the Foundation Board of Directors; these scholarship stipulations/agreements are kept in the Foundation Office. The Director of the Foundation works closely with the Student Financial Services Department to ensure that students are given accurate financial information and how scholarships may impact financial aid and cost of attendance.

During the 2024-2025 academic year, the Foundation provided over \$100,000 in scholarships to students. In addition, the Foundation provided instructional supplies and support to students of the Police Academy and culinary programs, thereby reducing the cost of attendance for students in those programs.

"I have had nothing but positive interactions with the entire staff from the day I decided to first apply. Everyone welcomes questions, offers advice, explains things clearly. I have never felt rushed or passed off, I have told everyone I know about how much I have enjoyed my entire experience here."

--Comment from Fall 2025 Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey

The Foundation scholarship programs have had a large impact on students over time, enabling them to achieve their career and educational goals while mitigating the concern of student loan debt and financial obligations outside of the classroom. For example, Emily used her scholarship award to complete the prerequisites for her Speech Pathology career, ultimately earning an invitation to Indiana University of Pennsylvania's accelerated doctoral program. Next, Grant, now a Pennsylvania State Police officer, was able to devote the necessary time to excel both academically and on the basketball court thanks to his scholarship. Further, Nathan earned his degree in criminal justice, graduated, and then enrolled in the Penn Highlands Police Academy. He is now proudly serving his local community as a patrol officer. Finally, Bella, an education major, is graduating from the University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown and has already been offered a second-grade teaching position.

Sadie, a Foundation Scholarship Awardee, is now completing her medical school residency. Sadie was able to use her scholarship to launch her long academic journey.

Providing accurate and timely information to prospective students is critical to allow for a full understanding of the benefits and costs related to college enrollment. Prospective students are provided with the college's standard admissions packet, which includes the Viewbook and booklets for transfer, athletics and activities, and financial aid. These materials highlight valuable information about the admissions and enrollment processes, cost of attendance, the types of academic programs offered at the college, and student support services.

To ensure the recruiting, admissions, registration, and financial services processes of the college meet the needs of students, a Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey is conducted biannually. In fall of 2025, this survey focused largely on the onboarding experience of new students and the student services the college provides. Students rated their experience with the Recruiting/Admissions Department as a 6.62 on a 7.0-point Likert scale. Comments shared include the kindness of the staff, helpfulness of the information provided, and ease of the application and registration processes.

The following chart provides additional ratings from the most recent survey of fall 2025.

Service Area	Student Ranking on a 7.0-Likert Scale
Recruiting and Admissions	6.62
Financial Aid Support Services	6.20
Academic Advising	6.34
Registration	6.49

Table 4.2 Excerpt from the Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey

Moreover, the survey shows that overall, students feel confident about beginning and continuing their education at Penn Highlands. One area of improvement identified through the survey was the need to simplify and streamline the information provided for students through the student and employee web portal (myPEAK). In fall 2025, a team of student services offices worked together to review and ensure the accuracy of the information on myPEAK, reorganize and simplify the information, and create a Student Hub which now serves as a 'one-stop' digital hub for students to access the support and information they need. This work was completed in the fall semester of 2025.

b. a process by which students who are not adequately prepared for study at the level for which they have been admitted are identified, placed, and supported in attaining appropriate educational outcomes;

Penn Highlands provides the necessary support for students who are not adequately prepared for college-level study. The college is an open admission institution, meaning students with varying levels of academic preparation are admitted as long as they have a high school diploma or equivalent. All degree seeking students and any non-degree seeking student, including those in the high school dual enrollment program, interested in enrolling in a math or English class have their mathematics and writing skills reviewed using multiple measures as dictated in the Placement Testing and Waiver Policy. The measures used include review of high school coursework and grades, SAT/ACT scores, and Accuplacer placement exam results, where applicable. Courses completed at other colleges and universities are also reviewed to determine equivalence to Penn Highlands courses. Once this review is complete, students are placed into the math or English course appropriate to their skill level and chosen major. Preparatory level English and mathematics classes are offered to support students as they prepare for college-level work.

This evaluation process is monitored for effectiveness each year by tracking the number of students placed in preparatory work and their success in subsequent coursework. The Volunteer Framework of Accountability, which is a data reporting effort conducted by the Pennsylvania Commission of Community Colleges, enables all community colleges in Pennsylvania to report on the same metrics so that comparisons can be drawn across institutions. One metric studied in this effort is the effectiveness of preparatory education. For example, the most recent comparison conducted in 2024 indicates that of the matriculated (credential-seeking) students placed into remedial coursework to support English and reading deficits, 87.5% successfully completed the developmental Introduction to English Composition course with a grade of C or higher, and then subsequently, 83% completed the next college-level course, English Composition 1, with a grade of C or higher.

The success of students at Penn Highlands is further facilitated through personal, one-on-one support services offered by faculty and staff, specifically those working within the Student Success Center. One method used by the college to connect with struggling students early in the semester is non-attendance reporting. Per Title IV regulations, the college identifies students who have not begun classes early into the semester to substantiate the awarding of financial aid. During week three of the term, faculty report on any student who has not begun class to the Registrar's Office through an electronic reporting process within the student information system. The college uses this reporting to identify students with early attendance concerns and to reengage them in class.

Additionally, faculty and staff leverage the Positive Action with Students (PAWS) early alert system to identify students who are struggling with issues and barriers that can impact their persistence and success. Alerts are submitted by faculty and staff within myPEAK, the college's information and data hub, to identify student academic, financial, counseling, and/or behavioral concerns that can negatively impact their progress.

Once a PAWS alert is submitted, the student services staff follows up with students to address the reported concern in an effort to triage barriers and re-engage students in class. Students are then connected with additional services as necessary. The chart below demonstrates the types of PAWS alerts submitted by faculty during of the 2024-2025 academic year and the percent that were resolved through student services staff follow-up:

2024-2025 academic year total PAWS alerts

Alert Concern Type	Number of Alerts	Percentage
Academic - Grades & Assignments	539	77.67%
<input type="checkbox"/> Resolved	377	54.32%
<input type="checkbox"/> Not Resolved	157	22.62%
<input type="checkbox"/> No resolution required	5	0.72%
Academic - Attendance	143	20.61%
<input type="checkbox"/> Resolved	112	16.14%
<input type="checkbox"/> Not Resolved	28	4.03%
<input type="checkbox"/> No resolution required	3	0.43%
Personal - Behavioral Concern	6	0.86%
<input type="checkbox"/> Resolved	5	0.72%
<input type="checkbox"/> No resolution required	1	0.14%
Missing Books/Materials	4	0.58%
<input type="checkbox"/> Resolved	4	0.58%
Financial - General Concern	1	0.14%
<input type="checkbox"/> Not Resolved	1	0.14%
Personal - Counseling	1	0.14%
Total	694	100.00%

Table 4.3 2024-2025 PAWS alerts. Source: Power BI

The PAWS system helps facilitate partnership between faculty and the Student Success Center team to support struggling students. For example, during the past academic year an instructor noticed an online student was not completing coursework and submitted an Academic Attendance PAWS alert. Follow-up from the Student Success Center team revealed that the student did not realize the class had begun. After being contacted, the student joined class and successfully caught up with the coursework. Another instructor noticed a student had stopped completing work and submitted Academic Grades and Assignments PAWS alert. Upon staff follow-up it was discovered that the student's uncle had died. The team and instructor worked together to get the student caught up so they could successfully complete the course. Finally, upon follow up on another PAWS alert for a student not completing class work, the team discovered that the student did not know how to install the necessary software for the course. The student was successfully connected with the Information Technology Help Desk for assistance with installing the software necessary for completing the course.

Furthermore, faculty surveys are conducted to monitor the effectiveness of the PAWS early alert process and to identify areas for improvement. The 2023 Faculty PAWS Feedback Survey

indicated that 84% of students who were reported returned to class following intervention, with 92% of faculty reporting that the alert prompted the student toward corrective action. Factors impacting student success following reporting include lack of class attendance, missing assignments, and continued disengagement in class. The college used this data to improve its PAWS early alert system. For example, the Student Success Center, who facilitates the PAWS early alert process, found that alerts submitted early in the semester have a higher rate of resolution as there is more time for intervention and follow-up. Additionally, a large percentage of adjunct faculty reported being unaware of the process. As a result, the department has created a short instructional video on how to submit an alert, sends reminders to faculty and staff at the beginning of each semester, and encourages faculty to submit alerts as early as possible. Training on using the PAWS alert system has been incorporated more thoroughly in Adjunct Faculty Orientation programs. Additionally, the PAWS system has been adjusted to allow for ongoing follow-up with students over a period when situations warrant continued and prolonged communication.

Another way students at the college are supported is through the Behavioral Intervention Team (BIT). The BIT is comprised of the Director of the Student Success Center, the Dean of Enrollment Services and Registrar, the Director of the Policy Academy and Campus Security, the Director of Activities and Athletics, and two full-time faculty members. The BIT meets every other week throughout each semester to review behavioral concerns presented through the PAWS system and the Student Code of Conduct processes. The BIT provides immediate intervention for students, faculty, and staff to address emerging student behavioral issues and concerns. It serves as a central network focused on preventive and timely intervention before crises arise and, when needed, following a crisis.

Moreover, enrolled students across the college's locations are offered a wide variety of support services either via in-person meetings or through virtual modalities, including tutoring, accessibility accommodations, personal counseling, academic success planning, curriculum advising, career planning, and transfer preparation.

Tutoring is available in-person at the Richland campus, at college locations upon request, and via Zoom. Tutoring is primarily provided for English to support research paper and essay writing and for math classes; however, students can request tutoring for any subject area. As the college does not employ full-time tutors, instead relying upon part-time professional and student tutors, coverage of the necessary subjects and the synchronous delivery of tutoring services across locations can pose a challenge. To combat this, the college offers online tutoring support through Tutor.com. This program enables the college to provide academic support in a wide range of subjects to students enrolled in online or in-person classes across locations. Additionally, Tutor.com tutors are available in the evening hours, which is more convenient for many students, including those taking college courses while still in high school.

While many factors contribute to student success in class, the college is pleased with how the addition of Tutor.com has improved outcomes for those who sought tutoring support. A review of usage statistics showed that 84 students used Tutor.com for support during the fall 2024 semester, when the program was first made available. As documented in the chart below, 89% of those students passed their class. The college continues to communicate the availability of

tutoring services, normalizing seeking help when needed, and providing access to support across locations.

Pass Rate of Students Using Tutor.com: 2024 –2025 Academic Year

Semesters	Pass Rate for Tutored Course in Tutor.com
Fall 2024	89%
Spring 2025	88%
Summer 2025	100%

Table 4.4 Pass Rate of Students Using Tutor.com. Source: Tutor.com Analytics

Student Accessibility Services is another resource available that provides support to students with a documented disability. These services include access to assistive technology, extended testing time, quiet testing environment, and other accommodations as decided upon by the Student Accessibility Specialist. Assistive technology (i.e., Kurzweil Reader) is available to support student needs. The chart below shows the number of students receiving accommodations during the 2024-2025 academic year, their final term GPA, and if they enrolled in subsequent semesters. In fall 2024, 87 students were served by the Accessibility department, 73% of which earned a 2.0 or higher term GPA. Moreover, 73.5% persisted to the next term.

Students Receiving Accommodations with Outcomes: 2024-2025

Semester	Students Receiving Services	Achieved GPA of 2.0 or Higher	Students Retained to Next Semester	Students Retained to Fall 2025
Fall 2024	87	64 (73.5%)	64 (73.5%)	46 (52.87%)
Spring 2025	78	66 (84.6%)	50 (75.75%)	50 (75.75%)
Summer 2025	30	22(70%)	19 (63%)	19 (63%)

Table 4.5 Students Receiving Accommodations with Outcomes. Source: Simplicity Accommodate

Personal counseling support is offered to students at all locations through the college's counselor. The counselor has a schedule of office hours at most college locations and via Zoom appointments for students who are unable to travel to a campus. In November 2025, Penn Highlands was one of 11 institutions recognized by the Governor of Pennsylvania as a PA CARES (Connect, Assess, Respond, Encourage, Support) campus. This recognition is for postsecondary institutions which have implemented Act 110 mental health and suicide prevention plans, enabling school staff to engage with the campus community and empowering students to seek help when they need it.

The Writing/Math Center, a tutoring hub on the Richland Campus, is available for drop-in tutoring support as well as Zoom appointments for those students who need support in the areas of writing, reading, and mathematics.

To meet students' needs at all locations, Student Services staff members visit all locations throughout the academic year to meet students in-person. Services, such as personal counseling, accessibility services, transfer support, etc. are also available via Zoom and phone appointments. To make all students aware of the availability of services, they are promoted on the website, at

New Student Orientation, on flyers located around campus, and on myPEAK. Faculty also promote tutoring and support through word of mouth and via their syllabus addendum and on Brightspace course pages.

c. orientation, advisement, and counseling programs to enhance retention and guide students throughout their educational experience; d. processes designed to enhance student achievement including certificate and degree completion, transfer to other institutions, and post-completion placement;

Orientation, advisement, and counseling services are offered to enhance retention and guide students throughout their educational journey. Students have access to a variety of different programs and information sources that provide necessary guidance. The College Catalog, which outlines degree, certificate and diploma requirements, general education requirements, pre- and co-requisites, college policies, and more, is the first formal resource for students. The catalog is easily accessible through the college website, and much of the information within the catalog is dispersed on appropriate pages of the website for quick and easy reference. From this document, the advising, prerequisite monitoring, and registration processes find their foundation.

During the 2021-2025 strategic planning process review of enrollment, retention, and completion data, the Guided Pathways Model was identified as an opportunity for the institution to advance student access, focus, and success, and to improve educational outcomes for all students. The Guided Pathways Model is an integrated, institution-wide approach to student success based on intentionally designed, clear, coherent, and structured educational experiences, informed by available evidence, that guide each student effectively and efficiently from their point of entry through to attainment of high-quality post-secondary credentials and careers with value in the labor market.



Table 4.6 Guided Pathways Model. Source: Community College Research Center

The Guided Pathways Model implementation led to several process and programmatic improvements over the course of several years. First, to support the college's desire to implement

the Guided Pathways Model, a Guided Pathways Implementation team was created comprised of a cross-section of college employees including faculty, staff, and administrators. As a first step, the Team applied to and was invited to participate in the Guided Pathways Summer Institute, a 30-hour immersive training program designed through the Community College Research Center (CCRC). The program helped the college create an implementation plan which started in fall 2022 and included efforts such as reimagining the new student onboarding process, embedding career exploration in New Student Orientation, analyzing completion rates to identify academic program improvement, and creating a Career and Transfer Pathways Office to proactively support students as they explore majors as well as plan their future education following Penn Highlands.

The analysis of completion data also helped shape several further improvements to the student experience. Data showed that the top ten enrolled programs offered at the college were not leading to a direct, structured outcome, such as a program articulation to a bachelor's program or industry employment. As such, retention of students within these programs was much lower when compared to others. The programs of concern were high school dual enrolled/accelerated college education (ACE), Liberal Arts and Sciences A.A., and Pre-Healthcare Professions A.S. These programs accounted for 74% of enrolled students during the fall 2021 semester.

To offset attrition and transfer prior to degree completion for Liberal Arts and Sciences majors, the college designed specific transfer tracks tied to college and university articulation agreements. For example, transfer focused tracks are now available within the Liberal Arts and Sciences, A.A. program, allowing for students to follow a well-defined course plan in the areas of history, communication, biology, and English. These plans align with specific articulation agreements with colleges, such as the University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown, Juniata College, and Point Park University that lead to parallel bachelor's degrees.

"I enjoy my time at Penn Highlands Community College because of its outstanding atmosphere at my campus."
--Comment from Fall 2025 Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey

Additionally, for students who do not find a Penn Highlands major that aligns with their specific transfer goals, a self-design track was created to provide a specialized transfer plan to meet the student's goal. And finally, to identify and provide support to those students who are unsure of their major, an exploratory track was created to support a career exploration process that leads to the selection of a major that matches the student's goals and interests.

Further, the college enhanced the Pre-Healthcare Professions program to support student completion. The college, through its program review process and analysis of program completion data, found that students were not completing the associate of science degree in Pre-Healthcare Professions before moving on to a nursing program. The associate degree program had a very low graduation rate of 4% in 2022 and 9% in 2023. After a review of the prerequisite and general education requirements of area nursing programs, a new certificate-level program, Pre-Healthcare Professions: Nursing was created. The new certificate program now enables students to take the prerequisite math and science classes required for area nursing programs as well as to complete most of the general education components prior to entering the clinical program while

reducing the need for completing unnecessary credits. Today, the graduation rate of the Pre-Healthcare Professions: Nursing certificate program is at 14%. Graduating students have the option of entering into five different nursing programs via currently available articulation agreements.

Moreover, the Guided Pathways implementation plan addressed early intervention through the advising process. To support new students and their need to connect with institutional resources, as well as their chosen academic major, staff advisors are organized by academic and career pathways (i.e. Business & Communication, Computer Technology, Education, Social Sciences & Criminal Justice) to help them 1) develop an individualized academic plan through the college's advising module—a component of the student information system, 2) connect with college resources when the need arises, 3) follow up with any early alerts submitted by faculty, 4) plan for registration, and 5) connect with their faculty advisor for career and major specific counseling.

By year three of implementation, the college experienced early signs of success. For example, the chart below shows that the percentage of students transferring without completing their program has decreased by 7% since 2019-20, prior to the Guided Pathways Model implementation. Additionally, the retention rate of first-year students has increased by 7% since implementation.

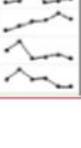
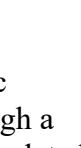
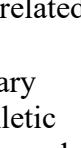
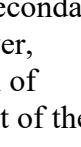
Excerpt Core Indicators of Effectiveness								Trend	
		2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25		
Strategy #1 – Advance Student Access, Focus, and Success.									
Performance									
7	First-Year Retention Rate (%)	52%	57%	56%	55%	54%	59%		
8	Three-Year Completion Outcomes (%)	29%	32%	38%	38%	41%	38%		
9	Transfer w/out Completion Outcomes (%)	24%	22%	23%	15%	13%	17%		
10	Overall Success Rate [Completion Rate + Transfer Rate] (%)	53%	54%	61%	53%	54%	55%		
11	Full-Time, Six-Year Completion Outcomes (%)	24%	29%	34%	35%	42%	36%		
12	Part-Time, Six-Year Completion Outcomes (%)	22%	26%	18%	19%	20%	18%		
13	Credentials Awarded (#)	310	359	310	317	273	271		

Table 4.7 Core Indicators of Effectiveness. Source: Strategic Plan

The improvement of retention can, in part, be attributed to improvements to the academic advising structure at the college. Academic advising at Penn Highlands is executed through a team approach that includes a primary, faculty advisor who focuses on major and career-related guidance, a secondary, staff advisor who focuses on first semester course selection and connecting students with the people and offices necessary for student success, and a tertiary advisor that is typically assigned for special program support such as a scholarship or athletic program. For example, the Director of Student Activities and Athletics is assigned as a secondary advisor for student athletes to monitor academic progress and athletic eligibility. Moreover, athletic program coaches leverage team study halls and one-on-one support with the goal of developing the academic and life skills necessary to achieve high-level success in and out of the classroom.

Another example of the team approach leveraged for academic advising is the work of the Career and Transfer Pathways Office, which provides support for students who are unsure of their career goals and interests. The Senior Advising Specialist supports students as they explore their aptitudes and interests through the Simplicity Career Services Management (CSM) software system. Additionally, this person helps students leverage articulation agreements to ensure a successful transfer to a bachelor's level program. Early outcomes of this work are promising, with 50% of the students who changed their major after engaging with the Career and Transfer Pathways Office graduating with a degree in their new major between the Fall 2024 and Summer 2025 semesters. Several students are on track for degree completion in 2025-2026, further improving graduation metrics.

The exploration of academic and career pathways is also facilitated within the high schools through the college's Careerfest program. This program, entering its fifth year, invites high school students to campus so they can explore the careers available within the college's service area and the education necessary to access those careers. Penn Highlands faculty and regional business professionals present hands-on, career-focused exploration opportunities to over 300 students each year. Careerfest helps to facilitate the career exploration necessary for high school students to identify careers and majors that match their interests and abilities, a hallmark of the Guided Pathways Model.

Overall, the college is happy with the early results of not only the Guided Pathways Model implementation, but with the changes the model has helped to implement in support of the student experience. In the 2025 Student Engagement and Satisfaction Survey, students rated academic advising a 6.34/7.0 with comments such as, "my advisor made sure that I was completely informed and helped me know what steps I needed to take to reach my goals," and "very helpful in getting me where I need to be."

Keystone Education Yields Success (KEYS), another service available to students, is a contractual grant program offered through the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services at all community colleges in Pennsylvania to support economically disadvantaged students as they pursue higher education. For students to qualify for the program, they must attend a community college in an academic major aligned with an approved high priority occupation (HPO) and be eligible for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

The KEYS program endeavors to provide services that help alleviate financial responsibilities outside of tuition and fees so that students can focus on their education and successfully navigate college life. In addition to connecting students to on-campus and off-campus resources, and liaising with the County Assistance Office, the KEYS program provides students with:

- Transportation (bus passes, mileage reimbursement, vehicle repairs)
- Books and supplies
- Laptop loan program
- Coverage for test fees

As part of the requirements of the program, the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services conducts an annual monitoring report and audit to ensure the program is meeting expectations and to identify areas of improvement when necessary.

The KEYS program serves Penn Highlands students across Cambria, Somerset, Blair, Huntingdon, and Centre counties. Enrollment in the program grew over 147% from fall 2020 to fall 2024. This growth can be attributed to the college's expansion into Blair and Centre Counties. Additionally, increased eligibility of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, which are a requirement of the KEYS program, resulted in more student participation. As a result of this growth, additional staff were added to the Blair Center, which also serves Huntingdon and Centre County students.

The 2024–2025 KEYS program analysis explored the impact of program services on student GPA through a multivariate regression approach using data from the fall 2024 and spring 2025 semesters. The study evaluated four key support areas, academic support, technology, basic needs, and social capital, across a combined sample of 120 students. The results showed that in fall 2024, 25% of GPA variation was explained by these supports, with academic support and social capital having positive impacts, while technology had a negative effect, possibly due to digital literacy challenges. Basic needs showed no measurable influence. In spring 2025, the model explained only 10% of GPA variation and lacked overall significance, though academic support remained beneficial. Differences between semesters were attributed to variability in service usage. Overall, academic support consistently improves GPA, while technology-related challenges prompted KEYS to partner with Study.com and NorthStar Digital Literacy to enhance student readiness.

e. processes to disaggregate and analyze student achievement data to inform and implement strategies that improve outcomes for all student populations;

The college regularly analyzes disaggregated student achievement data to inform its processes and support for all student populations. As a rural college, Penn Highlands serves a socio-economically diverse student population, with 75% of students receiving some form of financial aid. Creating and implementing a plan that supports a diverse, equitable, and inclusive culture at the college was identified as a priority through the strategic planning process. To that end, the college compiled and began reviewing disaggregated student success data (e.g., completion, transfer out, retention, and credit momentum) to identify equity gaps. The college monitors this data as part of the strategic planning progress report given to various groups, including the Board of Trustees and the President's Cabinet. At the departmental level, this data is used to track initiatives, gauge effectiveness, and inform improvements to the student experience. For example, student achievement data collected through the PAWS early alert system indicates that staff interventions influence student actions. Among students who were reported through the PAWS alert system during the 2024–2025 academic year, 26.8% successfully completed the

"I have been in other colleges before, and I can say this one has me surprised!!! The amount of attention they put to students, to help them succeed and archive their goals is amazing!"
--Comment from Fall 2024 Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey

course for which they were alerted, while 39.91% earned a failing grade. An additional 26.22% dropped or withdrew from the course.

Although not all students ultimately complete the course successfully, the data shows that 26.22% of students either dropped, withdrew or through the intervention of staff, remained in class, demonstrating the impact of staff outreach. To further improve success rates of students who are reported through a PAWS alert, staff assigned to PAWS outreach have been directed to provide ongoing, case-management follow-up after the initial contact to ensure students are utilizing academic and student support services, attending classes consistently, and maintaining communication with their instructors. Moving forward, the goal is to increase the course success rate for students who receive PAWS alerts by strengthening the outreach process and reinforcing early, continuous support.

To further evaluate the gaps in student achievement, the President implemented a Design Team to review disaggregated achievement data, determine the priorities of focus for the institution, and to explore programming and interventions to further support vulnerable students. Data from the Design Team recommendations was reviewed using a forest plot of attrition hazards to determine the characteristics of students who demonstrate retention issues. The team identified characteristics such as students with high school GPA under 2.0, first-time college students, economically disadvantaged students, part-time students, and students for whom early alerts are received as contributing factors shared by lower achieving students. Conversely, characteristics such as engagement in clubs, activities, and athletics, participation in tutoring services, connections with a specialized advisor, such as an ADA Specialist or KEYS program specialist, and early intervention programs seem to positively impact student persistence.

Using the information collected through data analysis and review of best practices across higher education, the Design Team created recommendations for process enhancement, communication innovation, and student engagement opportunities for the common goal of improving student outcomes like graduation and retention. Many of these recommendations are integrated into the next strategic plan. While the entire report on findings and recommendations can be found in the evidence inventory, an excerpt from the Design Team report is as follows:

Communication Strategies

- *Engage parents and guardians to encourage student registration and degree completion by leveraging AI and technology*
- *Implement text messaging campaigns using AI chatbot prompts and responses.*
 - *Example: Use conditional messaging (e.g., “If student responds to a message that they are having a difficult time in a class, then send a text about tutoring.”)*
- *Evaluate options for communication tools:*
 - *Utilize existing in-house technology.*
 - *Consider purchasing external services like EdSights.*

Student Engagement

- *Align student clubs with academic majors (e.g., Education Club, Business Club).*
- *Collect, track, and analyze data on student engagement in clubs and athletics.*
- *Research the possibility of adding college hour for Monday and Wednesday, in addition to the current Tuesday and Thursday schedule.*

Student Success/Early Alerts

- *Expand training for new full-time and adjunct faculty:*
 - *Emphasize the importance of timely early alerts for student success.*
- *Revisit the use of Intelligent Agents for automated early alerts.*

Additional Retention Efforts

- *Improve onboarding for new employees:*
 - *Foster a deeper understanding of college responsibilities and procedures.*
 - *Continue analysis of at-risk students to guide data-driven retention strategies.*
 - *Implement 'Maria Strategy' to audit internal processes to ensure they are student focused.*
 - *Establish a dedicated Retention Team for oversight and advocacy.*

The results of the Design Team's report have led to improvements in follow-up practices with PAWS early alerts. A case-management approach is now in place for students who require additional follow-up to get back on track with their studies. Additional training materials are available for faculty in submitting PAWS including an instructional video. With opportunities to leverage existing AI chat bot functionality in the college's customer relationship management (CRM) system, Element451, are being explored to help connect with and offer support to struggling students via text message. Opportunities for incorporating this AI-supported outreach to connect with parents and families of students are also being explored.

2. fair and transparent policies and procedures regarding evaluation and acceptance of transfer credits, credits awarded through experiential learning, prior non-academic learning, competency-based assessment, and other alternative learning approaches; Recognizing Prior Learning

The college has fair and transparent policies and procedures regarding the evaluation and acceptance of transfer credits, including those awarded through experiential learning. At Penn Highlands, transfer of credit for potential students falls into four categories: 1) credits earned from another accredited institution, 2) credit by examination, 3) credit awarded from a completed career and technology program, or 4) credit for life experience. All policies and procedures pertaining to transfer of credit are visible to the public on the college's website. Credits are awarded in adherence to the best practices and guidelines set forth by the American Association of College Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) as well as regulations established by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

Students wishing to transfer credit from another accredited institution must provide an official transcript directly from the institution to the college's Registrar's Office. Credit transfer is evaluated based upon a historical listing of faculty approved equivalencies, existing articulation agreements, and course equivalencies established by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania through the Transfer and Articulation Oversight Committee (TAOC). TAOC is comprised of faculty and staff evaluators across Pennsylvania's community colleges and state system of higher education universities with the goal of establishing standard course equivalencies across institutions. This ultimately provides ease of transfer between state-owned and state-related institutions. When new courses not previously evaluated are received for transfer consideration, faculty within the academic discipline are asked to review the courses for

equivalency and the results are tracked for future evaluations. This ensures credits are transferred in a consistent and efficient manner across institutions and disciplines.

Currently, the college has five state-approved occupational and technical training programs offered through the Pennsylvania Department of Education's Career and Technical Education program called SOAR, Students Occupationally and Academically Ready. This offers a succinct program-to-program pathway for secondary students enrolled in Career and Technical Centers who wish to continue their education at the post-secondary level within their chosen discipline. Further, the college maintains 21 program-to-program agreements in place for a wide array of secondary level technical training programs. For students who have completed an approved career and technology program at the secondary level, Penn Highlands will accept up to 15 credits of technical electives to be applied to Entrepreneurship Associate of Applied Science program, which is perfect for those interested in starting their own business. During the 2024-2025 academic year, 13 students transferred work from a Career and Technology Center toward the completion of a Penn Highlands associate degree.

The college regularly monitors feedback in the way of appeals from students to make improvements to the credit transfer process. In 2024, following a student's appeal regarding the transferability of older credits, the college's transfer policy was reviewed to allow for more flexibility for the transfer of older college credits. The college leveraged the shared governance process to vet a new policy that enables credits older than ten years to be considered for transfer. Before the change, credits older than ten years were ineligible for transfer. Following discussion by the college's senates and through feedback gathered from discipline faculty, new limits were established for an acceptable age of transfer credit. For example, courses taken within the humanities and social sciences have no age limit for transfer, whereas credits completed within the health sciences and computer technology disciplines are restricted to 10 years. The new policy aligns with best practices within the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education and the community colleges.

"I absolutely love this college! I was thinking the other day about how welcoming and comfortable it is here. I often recommend it to other potential students. I will really miss this college when I transfer."
-Comment from Fall 2025 Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey

Additionally, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania allows for the awarding of credit for life, work, or military experience. At Penn Highlands, students who have broad and deep experience with business, industry, organizations, and/or the military can leverage the college's Credit for Life Experience process. By using the College Credit FastTrack online platform, the student can build a portfolio for review after paying Penn Highlands a small evaluation fee. A Penn Highlands advisor

shepherds the student through the process and connects them with a Penn Highlands faculty assessor who evaluates a professional portfolio to determine if credit is appropriate. If necessary, the faculty assessor will meet with the prospective student to gather additional information and make the final recommendation regarding the awarding of appropriate credit.

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania also allows for awarding credit by exam. Advanced Placement (AP) exams, College Level Examination Program (CLEP) exams, Dantes Subject

Standardized Tests (DSST), and International Baccalaureate (IB) exams are accepted in a wide range of content areas. The scoring requirements for credit are coordinated across Pennsylvania's community colleges and the state system of higher education's universities.

3. policies and procedures for the safe and secure maintenance and appropriate release of student information and records;

The college follows the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) guidelines for the release of all student information. Employees, both full-time and part-time, receive FERPA training during the onboarding process and periodically through the KnowB4 training platform. Training videos and programs include a review of the FERPA policy, a quiz following the review to verify content comprehension, and the distribution of a Penn Highlands specific FERPA brochure.

Annual notification regarding the college's Student Record Rights and Privacy Policy is sent to the students during the fall and spring semesters after mid-term. All physical student records are kept in a secure, climate-controlled storage area. Electronic record access through the college's student information system is granted to employees based upon individual job-related responsibilities and an educational need-to-know philosophy. Electronic records are accessible to the student and/or employees through different platforms including Jenzabar Desktop, Jenzabar One, and myPEAK these platforms are only accessible through a multi-factored authentication process to ensure the security and safety of records.

4. if offered, athletic, student life, and other extracurricular activities that are regulated by the same academic, fiscal, and administrative principles and procedures that govern all other programs;

Extracurricular activities and athletics at Penn Highlands must follow the same budgeting policy and guidelines set forth for all other departments of the college. An annual budget is drafted, vetted, and approved through the President's Cabinet with expenditures funded through the student comprehensive fee. Clubs, organizations, and athletics follow the college's established purchase order system and guidelines. Funds allocated for student activities are managed and distributed to approved organizations through the Student Senate. Funds up to \$500 are allocated to each registered and active organization, the Student Senate may allocate additional funds as needed and as budget allows.

A variety of extracurricular activities including clubs, organizations, and athletic programming, are available to all students at the college regardless of their campus location. As of the 2025 academic year, the college recognized [19 clubs and organizations](#) which are governed by the Student Senate and follow the guidelines set forth in the Student Club Handbook.

Under the guidance of dedicated club advisors—whether faculty, administrators, or staff—student clubs have created opportunities that benefit not only college students but also the wider community. Through these activities, students develop leadership abilities, strengthen their networking skills, and gain valuable experiences that prepare them for future success.

For example, Caring for Cubs offers a Children's Literacy Night that is free for children ages birth through nine. During the event which is led and organized by the program coordinator of Penn Highlands' education program, current education students present various literacy stations to participating school-age children. Every literacy station offers a hands-on activity that suits the children's developmental stage, encouraging active engagement, optimal learning, and enjoyment.

Further, the Media Production Club earned first place in a statewide short film competition with its entry, "Secret in the Pines." The competition included entries from independent filmmakers and school groups throughout the state. The competition was held and judged by the Greater Erie Film Office, and looked at creativity and innovation, cinematography, acting, sound design, and editing within each film.

"Thank you for making Fantasy Sports, and every day, enjoyable at Penn Highlands."

--Shane, 2024 graduate of Computer Technology: Cybersecurity

All clubs are student-led, assigned to a staff or faculty advisor, and are formally approved through the Office of Student Activities and Athletics and the Student Senate through an annual registration process. Club expectations for operation are outlined within the Student Club and Activities Handbook, which provides structure to the groups as they implement their initiatives each year.

All clubs are required to complete community service each semester as part of their charter. Most participate in the campus-wide community Trick-or-Treat event that takes place during the fall semester. Spring service varies by club and includes activities such as cleaning playgrounds, packing food bags for the local backpack project, and volunteering at the Women's Help Center.

Along with clubs, the college recognizes two national organizations, both of which are available to matriculated and high school dual enrollment students. Sigma Alpha Pi, the college's chapter of the National Society of Leadership and Success (NSLS) is the nation's largest leadership honor society. Phi Theta Kappa is a national honor society for community college students. An award given by Phi Theta Kappa is the New Century Transfer Scholar. New Century Transfer Scholars are selected based on their academic accomplishments, leadership, activities, and how they extend their intellectual talents beyond the classroom. Over 2,200 students were nominated from more than 1,200 college campuses across the country. Only one New Century Transfer Scholar is selected from each state. In 2022, Penn Highlands student Matthew Gaul was named a New Century Transfer Scholar and received a \$2,250 scholarship with which to pursue a bachelor's degree.

Furthermore, students Madison Piatak and Sydney Wells were named 2020 Coca-Cola Leaders of Promise Scholars. Each was one of 207 Phi Theta Kappa members to receive this honor and received a \$1,000 scholarship. The Coca-Cola Leaders of Promise Scholarship Program helps new Phi Theta Kappa members defray educational expenses while enrolled in associate degree programs. Scholars are encouraged to assume leadership roles by participating in Society programs and are selected based on scholastic achievement, community service, and leadership potential.

Five men's, five women's and one co-ed National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA) Division III programs are also offered to interested students at Penn Highlands. Athletic program participation at the college is based on student interest and the sports available through other institutions in the Western Pennsylvania Collegiate Conference (WPCC) and Region 20 that are feasible for the college to offer. Student-athlete participation and eligibility are governed by NJCAA Guidelines with conduct and program expectations outlined in the Student Athlete Handbook.

Over the past four years, 121 Penn Highlands student-athletes have been named to the All-Western Pennsylvania Collegiate Conference (WPCC) Academic Team; 28 have received Region 20 All-Academic Honors, and 22 have earned NJCAA Academic Team honors. In addition, student athletes have earned numerous playing accolades at both the conference and Region 20 levels, including 39 All-WPCC selections and 26 Region 20 honors.

The college serves as a transfer hub for athletes seeking to compete at the baccalaureate level. Two men's basketball players transferred to the NJCAA Division I level at Allegany College of Maryland, where they helped the team win a District Championship. Both were named to the All-Tournament Team, and one was selected as the Tournament MVP as the team advanced to the NJCAA National Tournament. Both players have since transferred to NCAA Division II college programs.

In 2024, another basketball team member used his academic achievements and athletic ability to earn a starting spot on the University of Pittsburgh at Greensburg basketball team. Another player received academic scholarship support to pursue an advanced master's degree in Exercise Science at the University of Vermont–Castleton while continuing to play the game he loves.

The college gauges students' interest in extracurricular involvement on campus through various approaches. Students indicate their interest in athletics and clubs on the college's application for admission offered through Element451, the college's customer relationship management software system (CRM). The Office of Student Activities and Athletics uses this information to notify club advisors and coaches about new students who are interested in joining their clubs or teams. Information is also gathered at New Student Orientation, and the college's Club and Activities Fair held each semester. At these events, students are asked to complete a Student Interest Survey, the results of which are shared with club advisors and coaches to help recruit students for their respective clubs or teams. Finally, each campus location informally surveys students annually to identify the activities in which they would like to participate, and activities are tailored accordingly.

5. if applicable, adequate and appropriate institutional review and approval of student support services designed, delivered, or assessed by third-party providers;

To guide the college's contracts with third-party providers, the college adopted a Third-Party Provider Policy which aims to define the College's expectations and requirements for entering into written agreements or contracts with third-party providers. The policy also defines how these agreements will be assessed annually.

College bookstore services are provided through a contractual agreement with Follett Bookstores. The Associate Vice President of Finance oversees bookstore operations and monitors service quality through feedback gathered from the Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey and conversations with faculty and staff. The contract is formally reviewed at each renewal period.

Additionally, the college provides online tutoring services through a third-party contractual agreement with Tutor.com, overseen by the Director of the Student Success Center. Service quality and student engagement are monitored through monthly reports from Tutor.com, which include feedback on student satisfaction and subject areas accessed. The Director regularly reviews participation data and has found that students who use Tutor.com generally succeed in completing the courses for which they sought support. This contract is also formally reviewed at each renewal period.

6. periodic assessment of the effectiveness of student support services for all student populations with appropriate metrics and evaluation

The college regularly assesses the effectiveness of the support services offered to students. A Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey is conducted biannually in the fall semester and compiles feedback from students on various aspects of the student experience, from inquiry and application, through advising and registration, and the services students interact with through their journey at Penn Highlands. This survey assesses how effectively students were recruited, admitted, counseled on financial aid, registered, and advised. The results of the fall 2025 survey showed the college has done very well in all these areas, scoring an average rating of 6.2 or higher on a 7.0 Likert scale for all surveyed areas.

Further, each department of the college is charged with assessing its effectiveness and impact on students annually. Through the work of the Administrative Senate, an assessment timeline is created and distributed to all administrative units annually. This timeline describes how and when assessment overview reports are provided to the Administrative Senate. Assessment presentations on assessment activities, findings, and departmental improvements are shared with senate members for feedback and comment.

To facilitate the assessment process, the college previously used the Trac Dat platform to organize and house assessment activities across administrative units and academic departments. The college migrated away from this platform in 2022, moving toward a more robust, user-friendly option, Weave. Weave allows for greater mapping and connections between assessment items and the college's strategic initiatives. For example, now departmental goals and targets can be directly linked to the college's strategic initiatives, institutional learning outcomes, enrollment management plans, or various strategic priorities of the college.

Upon implementing the Weave platform, the Student Services team met to discuss the departmental assessment process, how to incorporate the college's Strategic Enrollment Management Plan into departmental initiatives, and opportunities to assess progress of student learning and engagement related to individual offices. Each department not only plans

assessment activities, improvements, and projects annually in the Weave platform, but each initiative is mapped directly to either the Strategic Enrollment Management Plan, the Strategic Planning Priorities, or institutional values. Moreover, departmental assessments prior to AY2023-24 are archived in a repository housed in myPEAK. Assessment reports after AY2023-2024 are housed in Weave. A review of this repository yields many examples of institutional improvement over the years.

A recent example of such an improvement was experienced in the Registrar's Office. As a follow-up to the implementation of the Register by Plan functionality in myPEAK which formally links student degree requirements to the course registration process, the office deployed the Registrar's Office Survey to students. The results showed overall acceptance and positivity with the new registration process; however, concerns on navigating the myPEAK portal was provided. As a result, improvements to portal navigation were implemented in 2025 including a myPEAK instruction sheet and a reorganization of the Registrar's Office portal page to simplify navigation. This initiative was mapped to the strategic initiatives of "advance student access, focus, and success" as well as "improve the student experience from inquiry to completion."

Data collection and analysis is also used to inform college wide policy and training opportunities. For example, the 2023 College Climate Survey indicated that 24% of students knew of an incident of sexual misconduct/harassment that occurred at the college and was never reported. Additionally, 50% of student respondents stated that the college was not transparent to the community about who is responsible for coordinating the program to address sexual/gender violence and discrimination.

As a result, in June 2023, the Board of Trustees reviewed the results of the College Climate Survey and supported the college's recommendation to address such as a need for additional training for employees and students on who is responsible for coordinating the program to address sexual/gender violence and discrimination and a need to ensure that information on these policies is easier to locate on our webpage.

These issues were addressed by offering additional training for both students and staff. This training was conducted by the Title IX Coordinator, with representatives from local organizations specializing in sexual violence awareness and response.

The results of these efforts are evident in the 2025 College Climate Survey results where 7% of students indicated that they knew of an incident of sexual misconduct/harassment that had occurred at the college and had never been reported. Additionally, the 2025 survey indicated that 79% of students agree that the college is transparent to the community about who is responsible for coordinating the program to address sexual/gender violence and discrimination.

Departmental assessment has also led to collaboration across departments for the improvement of college processes. In 2022, the responsibility of conducting the First Destination Graduate Survey, a survey conducted of all graduating students to determine job and transfer placement outcomes, transferred to the Senior Advising Specialist within the Career and Transfer Pathways Office. At that time, the survey response rate was 28%. Through reviewing feedback provided by students on their preferred communication method, the survey distribution method was adjusted

to include text messaging and the incorporation of a QR code. As a result, the response rate improved from 28% in 2022, to 55% in 2023, and 70% in 2024. Additionally, through partnering with the college Foundation and a newly established alumni association, the data is now leveraged to better access Penn Highlands alumni to engage them in volunteer and service opportunities at the college. This has led to alumni participation in new student orientation, alumni panel discussions, the creation of an alumni Facebook page, and athletic team events.

Conclusion

Penn Highlands demonstrates a strong and consistent commitment to supporting the student experience from recruitment through graduation. The institution has invested significant resources in personnel, technology, and student-centered initiatives to ensure that students are recruited ethically, admitted transparently, retained effectively, and guided toward meaningful educational and career outcomes. The integration of data-driven practices, such as the High School Enrollment Pipeline Report and the Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey, reflects a culture of accountability and continuous improvement. Furthermore, the implementation of the Guided Pathways Model has strengthened advising, clarified academic and transfer pathways, and contributed to measurable gains in retention and completion.

Recommendations

- Ethical recruitment and transparency: Clear communication of admissions, financial aid, and program requirements through multiple channels.
- Data-informed decision making: Use of Power BI dashboards, surveys, and annual retreats to refine recruitment and student services.
- Financial support for students: Significant scholarship and grant funding including impactful Foundation programs that directly support student success.
- Early intervention systems: Effective use of PAWS alerts, non-attendance reporting, and the Behavioral Intervention Team to re-engage struggling students.
- Accessibility and inclusivity: Strong support for students with disabilities, including assistive technology and accommodations that promote persistence.
- Tutoring innovations: Expansion of academic support through Tutor.com, ensuring access across modalities and locations.
- Guided Pathways implementation: Structured advising, transfer tracks, and certificate redesigns that align programs with student goals and workforce needs.

Opportunities for Improvement

- Adjunct faculty engagement: Expand training and awareness of the PAWS early alert system to increase timely interventions.
- Program completion rates: Monitor and further strengthen outcomes in programs with historically low graduation rates, such as Pre-Healthcare Professions.

Evidence

Adjunct Faculty Orientation agenda
Admissions packet

BIT minutes
Careerfest agenda
College Catalog
Community Report
Design Team recommendations
FERPA brochure
Financial Aid Booklet
First Destination Survey
Follett bookstore agreement
Foundation scholarship booklets
Guided Pathways Implementation Plan
High School Enrollment Pipeline Report
How-to Checklist Flyer
KEYS analysis (2024-2025)
Liberal Arts Articulation Agreement
MyPEAK instruction sheet
New Student Orientation agenda
PHEAA audit
Placement Testing and Waiver Policy
Pre-Healthcare Nursing advising worksheet
Recruiting Retreat agenda
Registrar's Office Survey
SOAR agreement – example
Strategic Enrollment Management Plan
Strategic Plan
Student Athlete Handbook
Student Club Handbook
Student Records and Rights Policy
Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey
Third-party Provider Policy
Title IV audit
Transfer Policy
Tutor.com agreement
Veteran Affairs annual audits
Viewbook
Voluntary Framework of Accountability
Website Review Workgroup agendas

Standard V: Educational Effectiveness Assessment

Introduction:

At Penn Highlands, the assessment of student learning and achievement is a cornerstone of the mission to provide students with the skills necessary to be “successful in work, life, and the pursuit of lifelong learning.” This process ensures that students accomplish educational goals that are consistent with their program of study, degree level, and the institution’s mission, while also meeting the high expectations set for institutions of higher education. Assessment activities are aligned with the college’s mission, institutional learning outcomes, program outcomes, and strategic plan’s imperatives, goals, and objectives. This alignment guarantees that every assessment initiative directly supports the college’s purpose and overarching goals. The organization and systematization of these activities are informed by the expertise of faculty and staff, ensuring that assessments are both effective and efficient.

Faculty conduct assessment activities across all modalities and college locations including dual enrollment courses. The college’s dual enrollment program, known as Accelerated College Education (ACE), is the only community college program in the commonwealth accredited by the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP). It received initial accreditation in 2014 and was re-accredited in 2022 for seven additional years. NACEP establishes standards to ensure that dual enrollment courses maintain the same academic rigor, learning outcomes, and assessment practices as equivalent on-campus college courses. Assessment under NACEP is guided by standards related to curriculum, assessment, and faculty oversight.

NACEP guidelines stress the role of discipline-specific faculty leadership in curriculum assessment. Designated ACE Faculty Liaisons, who are either full-time or part-time college faculty, conduct site visits and meet with high school instructors to verify that high school-based offerings meet institutional expectations for college-level work. Liaisons are responsible for reviewing syllabi, major assignments, exams, and grading practices to confirm that student learning outcomes are being assessed at an equivalent level of rigor. Common assessments or shared evaluation criteria are used to support consistency and comparability across sections.

The college utilizes assessment results to drive continuous improvement, particularly in areas critical to the strategic plan objectives. This includes improving student learning and achievement outcomes such as retention, graduation and transfer rates, and curricula. By systematically analyzing assessment data, the college makes informed decisions that foster an environment of academic excellence and student success. Moreover, Penn Highlands promotes a culture of assessment and continuous improvement. The college periodically evaluates the effectiveness of institutional assessment processes to ensure they remain aligned with the mission and educational goals. This culture of ongoing evaluation and enhancement underscores dedication to maintaining high standards of educational effectiveness and achieving the institutional mission.

A candidate or accredited institution possesses and demonstrates the following attributes or activities:

1. clearly stated student learning outcomes at the institution and degree/program levels, which are interrelated with one another, with relevant educational experiences, and with the institution's mission;

At Penn Highlands, Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs) function as the General Education Outcomes. The alignment between assessments and ILOs is annually reviewed by the General Education Committee of the Faculty Senate and then distributed to all faculty through a curriculum mapping spreadsheet, where every general education course is connected to at least one ILO. General education courses are assessed regularly (spring, fall, and occasionally summer—depending on course scheduling) to ensure they meet the desired institutional outcomes. Overall, the structured approach helps ensure students develop the essential knowledge and skills, as defined by faculty, at the institutional level, which fosters effective citizenship and life-long learning.

In 2023, the General Education Committee reviewed all courses which were mapped to the ILOs. A new list of general education courses was created and was distributed to faculty. Program coordinators reviewed their programs to ensure alignment of the program requirements to the ILOs.

During the fall 2025 semester, the General Education Committee revised the college's general education statement. The revised general education statement reflects a move toward greater clarity, consistency, and integration while narrowing and refocusing several outcomes. Overall, the revisions reflect a shift from prescriptive, detailed descriptions to more streamlined and outcomes-oriented language. The following new descriptions align the outcomes more clearly with assessable learning expectations.

- **Scientific/Quantitative Reasoning** was simplified by removing explicit references to specific methods (e.g., experimental method, mathematical formulae, statistical analysis) and instead emphasizing the broader application of scientific and quantitative reasoning to problem solving. This allows for greater flexibility across disciplines while maintaining the core intent.
- **Information Literacy** was condensed, focusing on identifying, accessing, and evaluating information and understanding ethical and legal use, while reducing emphasis on operational details. The revision prioritizes essential competencies most directly tied to academic inquiry.
- **Effective Communication** remains largely consistent, though the revised version slightly narrows contextual considerations by emphasizing situational and personal contexts.
- Two areas reflect structural consolidation. The previous outcomes, Cultural Awareness and Diverse Perspectives and Values and Ethics, have been combined into a single outcome titled Cultural Diversity and Ethical Perspectives. This new outcome integrates cultural understanding with ethical reasoning. This change highlights the interconnected nature of culture, values, and ethical decision-making in diverse communities.
- **Technological Competency** was updated to reflect contemporary expectations. The revised statement shifts from basic computer operations to the purposeful use of tools

relevant to an academic subject and explicitly acknowledges emerging and evolving technologies, signaling responsiveness to changing technological contexts.

The revised statement demonstrates a more cohesive and streamlined general education framework while supporting the college's mission and values. This will also allow for ease of aligning assessment activities across disciplines.

Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) are developed by faculty with consideration given to discipline-specific professional standards and input from the program advisory and review committees. For example, the Psychology program's outcomes were revised to reflect the 2023 changes to the American Psychological Association (APA) Guidelines for the Undergraduate Psychology Major Version 3.0 *Empowering People to Make a Difference in Their Lives and Communities*. An example of how the program review process impacts program outcome development is the recommendation to update the Pre-Healthcare Professions: Nursing certificate outcomes to include mental processes and behavior associated with human psychology and development.

PLOs are communicated to students and stakeholders in the college catalog and on the website. Program Coordinators map the PLOs to program course requirements. These outcomes are assessed on a five-year cycle. Mapping is achieved in two ways, 1) they are reviewed during the program review process and 2) they are updated based upon changes in the program's curriculum. Curriculum mapping and the PLO assessment schedules are available in Teams.

Relevant educational experiences are designed to support student learning. These include but are not limited to projects, guest speakers, industry tours, internships, and clinical experiences. Students have opportunities to collaborate with local businesses on projects. For example, marketing students recently had the opportunity to present ideas for leveraging social media and event-based strategies to the Somerset County Chamber of Commerce. Additionally, program advisory committees may present ideas for educational experiences, as in the case of the Culinary program. Students participate in a competition in which they are provided with a list of ingredients to prepare a dinner for a panel of judges, simulating the interviewing process used by regional employers.

2. organized and systematic assessments, conducted by faculty and/or appropriate professionals, evaluating the extent of student achievement of institutional and degree/program goals. Institutions should:

a. define student learning outcomes that are appropriate to higher education with defensible standards for assessing whether students are achieving those outcomes;

Assessment at Penn Highlands plays a vital role in curriculum development and mission alignment. Across programs, periodic evaluations by faculty of Student Learning Outcomes (SLO) which are defined in the course syllabi are reviewed prior to the start of each semester. This serves as a mechanism for identifying learning gaps, refining instructional strategies, and ensuring that students develop critical competencies. As articulated by faculty program coordinators within the largest program on campus, Liberal Arts & Sciences (LAS), the college

demonstrates high educational standards. For example, in 2023 the Discipline Coordinator in English began tying all SLO assessments within the discipline to National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Standards for the Assessment of Reading and Writing. This connection to the nation's oldest and most prestigious organization of literacy educators affirms the college's dedication to maintaining standards of higher education. Also, the cybersecurity programs have been designated by the National Security Agency (NSA) as a Center for Academic Excellence in Cyber Defense (CAE-CD). The designation recognizes academic excellence in the college's cybersecurity curriculum, faculty professional development, community outreach, and leadership in the discipline. The college is also a member of the Pennsylvania Community College Consortium Cooperative Agreement (PC4A), where six community colleges work in partnership with Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP) to increase transfer and certification rates and prepare students for employment within the Department of Defense.

Learning outcomes such as those in the Accounting program, address current industry demands, with students gaining proficiency in software such as QuickBooks Online, a leading tool in the field. The Media Production program emphasizes creative problem-solving and technical expertise with a unique blend of three major communication fields: television production, radio production, and e-based technologies. Having this range of knowledge and experience, students will be prepared for any number of jobs in radio, television, and emerging media (i.e. social media). These efforts, collectively with the work of the program advisory committees, ensure that learning outcomes at Penn Highlands are both rigorous and relevant to the marketplace, preparing students for success beyond graduation.

The college's dual enrollment program, ACE, meets NACEP standards when assessing all dual enrollment courses. All high school instructors must meet the minimum qualifications for college faculty teaching the course on campus and must teach to the standardized learning outcomes found in the course syllabus. All new dual enrollment instructors receive specific training in course philosophy, curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment prior to teaching the course. Further, they participate in annual discipline-specific professional development to enhance their breadth of knowledge in the discipline. This adherence to NACEP is another example of the work done across the college to ensure a rigorous education consistent with national standards.

b. articulate how they prepare students in a manner consistent with their mission for successful careers, meaningful lives, and, where appropriate, further education. They collect and provide data on the extent to which they are meeting these goals;

A core outcome of Penn Highlands' programs is the preparation of students for successful careers, continued education, and meaningful lives. Each program integrates theoretical knowledge with practical experiences to ensure that students are well-rounded and workforce ready. Internship and field placement opportunities are incorporated in multiple programs across the college, including but not limited to business, computer technology, and healthcare. These efforts align with the college's mission to support lifelong learning and student success.

To support students looking to advance their education beyond Penn Highlands, the college has a dedicated transfer coordinator and maintains 250 individual articulation agreements with 34

colleges and universities to help students transparently understand their opportunities. Students regularly take advantage of these agreements.

Program reviews are mandated by the Pennsylvania Community College Act-Chapter 35 and are conducted every five years. The review process involves various individuals and multiple offices within the college including a program faculty member, Academic Affairs Department, Marketing Department, Registrar's Office, Admissions, and Institutional Research (IR). IR provides a data foundation for the review including student program data, enrollment/withdrawals numbers, program-specific courses and enrollment, comparative program analysis, and financial and margin analysis.

The Program Coordinator, External Reviewers, and the Program Advisory Committee review program data and make recommendations. The summary and recommendations are presented to Curriculum Committee of the Faculty Senate and further reviewed and acted upon by the Board of Trustees. Membership in Program Advisory Committees is updated as needed to reflect changing needs of industry partners. An example that illustrates how the program review process informs decision-making can be seen in the Medical Assisting Technology (MAT) program. This program was restructured from a two-year associate degree to a one-year diploma based on program review feedback and demographic studies which indicated a higher demand for shorter, skill-focused programs in underserved areas like Somerset County. These changes align with the college's strategic goals of accessibility and workforce readiness.

c. support and sustain assessment of student learning outcomes and communicate the results of this assessment to stakeholders;

Support and sustainability of assessment practices at Penn Highlands are achieved through the direction of the Faculty Resource and Design Center, located on the college's learning management system (LMS), Brightspace, which contains assessment resources for faculty. The college further supported its assessment efforts by hiring an Academic Operations Specialist whose responsibility is to coordinate and assist in the collection and recording of faculty assessment data.

Communication of assessment results is another critical component of the college's accountability and transparency. Assessment results are entered into and available for review in Weave assessment software. There are several other vehicles through which faculty share assessment results, for instance, division meetings conducted at the start of each semester, within departments, faculty assessment days, and annual discipline meetings with dual enrollment faculty. Additionally, assessment information is shared as part of the program review process. Program review recommendations are shared with the Faculty Senate prior to presentation to the Academic Affairs and Student Services special committee of the Board of Trustees.

3. consideration and use of disaggregated assessment results for all student populations for the improvement of student learning outcomes, student achievement, and institutional and program-level educational effectiveness;

The college's commitment to equity is evident in its use of disaggregated data to identify and address disparities in outcomes among student populations. The college also has begun creating specialized design teams as introduced in Standard IV. As an example, a Design Team focused specifically on identifying and addressing equity gaps in retention, graduation, and achievement rates. This team analyzed disaggregated data to determine where disparities existed and devised strategies to mitigate these gaps. An initial finding of the Design Team in regard to student performance across ethnicity showed no statistical difference in academic achievement. A more significant factor impacting achievement is socio-economic status. For example, students that are federal Pell grant eligible and lower income persist at a lower rate than non-Pell-eligible students. To address socio-economic disparity and improve retention, the college implemented student support services to meet student needs; like, the Keystone Education Yields Success (KEYS) program, student food pantry, and the Foundation's student emergency fund.

4. if applicable, adequate and appropriate institutional review and approval of assessment services designed, delivered, or assessed by third-party providers;

The college does not partner with third-party providers for assessment services.

5. periodic assessment of the effectiveness of assessment policies and processes utilized by the institution for the improvement of educational effectiveness.

The college periodically assesses the effectiveness of its assessment policies and processes. A thorough review of academic assessment practices was most recently conducted during the 2024-2025 academic year. Beginning with a Faculty Assessment Survey in the fall 2024 semester, the college identified a need for faculty to provide more input on the assessment process. Survey findings identified that communication with colleagues has improved assessment practices and assessment results were being used to make changes in courses. The findings also identified opportunities for continuous improvement by strengthening the consistency of assessment practices and further embedding faculty leadership in the development of the course assessment schedule. During the spring 2025 semester, the Faculty Senate engaged in a review of the institutional assessment workflow and the role of the General Education Committee to clarify assessment expectations and strengthen a shared understanding of assessment practices. Building on this work, in fall 2025 the newly appointed Vice President for Academic Affairs and Student Services initiated a collaborative revision of the Academic Assessment Plan by actively soliciting faculty input. The plan is in place for the spring 2026 semester.

The program review documents and processes are reviewed on an annual basis at the end of the program review cycle by administration and Program Coordinators who completed program reviews during the academic year. For example, during the 2023-2024 review cycle, updated templates for the program review report and PowerPoint presentation for the Faculty Senate and Board of Trustees were created to provide uniformity of the reports and data submissions. Program review documents, including the timeline, instructions for faculty, and supporting documents are evaluated and the revised documents are available in Teams. A training session is held each spring semester for faculty completing program reviews in the upcoming academic year. Completed program reviews are available to the college community on the IR tab in myPEAK.

Conclusion

The college demonstrates a sustained commitment to educational effectiveness through clearly defined assessment processes, shared governance, and the systematic use of evidence to inform decision-making. Ongoing faculty engagement in reviewing assessment workflows, clarifying roles, and revising the Academic Assessment Plan reflects an institutional culture that values reflection, transparency, and improvement. These efforts ensure that assessment practices are meaningful, integrated into academic planning, and focused on enhancing student learning outcomes. Through continued collaboration, leadership support, and regular evaluation of assessment practices, the institution remains well positioned to use assessment results to strengthen academic quality and advance its mission.

Strengths

- Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs) are clearly defined, mapped to General Education courses, and regularly reviewed by the General Education Committee of the Faculty Senate.
- Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) are aligned with disciplinary standards and updated through program review and advisory committee input.
- Assessment practices are organized, consistent, and faculty-led across all modalities, including dual enrollment.
- The NACEP-accredited ACE program ensures dual enrollment courses maintain equivalent rigor, outcomes, and assessment practices.
- Assessment findings and program review data directly inform curricular revisions, program restructuring, and new program development.
- Program review processes incorporate internal and external stakeholders and align with state requirements.
- The college provides strong infrastructure for assessment, including the Faculty Resource and Design Center, Weave software, and an Academic Operations Specialist.
- Assessment results are shared widely through division meetings, faculty assessment days, advisory committees, and governance structures.
- The college analyzes disaggregated data to identify equity gaps, particularly related to socioeconomic status.
- Evidence-based supports—such as KEYS, the food pantry, and emergency funds—demonstrate responsiveness to student needs.
- Program review templates and processes are updated annually to improve consistency and clarity.

Opportunities for Improvement

- More intentional communication would strengthen transparency and demonstrate the impact of assessment on student learning and institutional effectiveness.

Evidence

Academic Assessment Plan

Accelerated College Education (ACE) Observation Reports
ACE faculty annual discipline specific workshop agenda
ACE Faculty Guide
ACE Liaison Guide
ACE Student Handbook
Design Team recommendations to Cabinet report
Faculty Senate assessment meeting minutes
General Education Committee minutes
Job description Academic Operations Specialist
List of advisory committee members
Program Curriculum maps and assessment schedules
Program review – Medical Assisting Technology, Psychology, Pre-Healthcare Professions: Nursing
Program review template

Standard VI: Planning, Resources and Institutional Improvement

Introduction:

Penn Highlands has a comprehensive planning and budgeting process, linked to the mission and vision of the institution, that it uses to drive operational efficiency and effectiveness. As a small institution of higher education, strategic planning and financial management are critical to the continued support of the college's mission and the improvement in efficiency and effectiveness of the college for all stakeholders, both within the institution as well as the region.

A candidate or accredited institution possesses and demonstrates the following attributes or activities:

1. institutional and unit goals that are clearly stated, assessed appropriately, linked to mission and goal achievement, reflect conclusions drawn from assessment results, and are used for planning and resource allocation;

The college is committed to effectively communicating its goals and objectives through structured planning and regular operational effectiveness assessments. By aligning both institutional and departmental objectives with its mission, the college ensures that all planning efforts focus on continuous improvement and student success. The college's strategic planning dashboard is regularly updated and presented to the Board of Trustees (BOT) at regular quarterly meetings. Further, resource allocation is prioritized for initiatives that directly support mission-driven goals, guided by assessment findings. Through transparent communication and a strong commitment to accountability, the college consistently links its objectives to its mission, demonstrating a dedication to effectiveness at all levels. All institutional planning documents are available on the college's portal for easy access. Updates are given at all college semester start-up activities, and the mission is ever present in documents, in all departments, and in the weekly President's Cabinet minutes.

2. clearly documented and communicated planning and improvement processes that provide for inclusive constituent participation;

The framework for the Strategic Plan 2021-2025 was based on a collaborative strategic planning methodology, which required the involvement of the greatest possible number of stakeholders, both internal and external. The team relied on the strengths of the previous strategic plan, the concept of maximizing student success, an extended evidence-based data analysis of the college, and community and industry needs in order to align the strategic plan with Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) accreditation standards.

The cross-functional team was formed in January 2020 and worked through December of that year to complete the Strategic Plan 2021-2025. The team relied on input from a variety of sources including: 1) an environmental scan of the college's service area conducted to assess and analyze new developments and trends important to the College. This included exploring

demographic, educational, economic, social, and technological trends. 2) a series of focus groups, interviews, and surveys were administered to gain input from the College's internal and external stakeholders.

The Strategic Planning Team evaluated the information obtained through the environmental scan as well as from stakeholders and conducted a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis when crafting the new strategic plan. The draft plan was then shared with the President's Cabinet, and college community for feedback. Modifications were then made based upon the feedback received. Finally, the plan was presented to the President's Cabinet, Board of Trustees, and all college governance senates structure in January 2021. The 2021-2025 Strategic Plan was approved by the Board of Trustees in February 2021.

"Penn Highlands really shaped me into who I am today. Being able to give back to students the same way that Penn Highlands helped me when I was a student is an amazing feeling. I love being a part of the Black Bear Family."

-Ben, Senior Advising Specialist

The Strategic Plan 2021-2025 lead to the creation of several operational plans, such as the Strategic Enrollment Management Plan, Academic Master Plan, and Staffing Plan. These operational plans are owned by individual departments and shared with appropriate stakeholders. Ongoing efforts made in regard to the strategic plan are regularly communicated in two ways; first, the President's Cabinet reports progress made toward completion of the Strategic Plan through a progress dashboard. An enrollment dashboard is reviewed weekly by the President's Cabinet and regularly with the Board of Trustees. Further, regional advisory committees comprised of community members are presented with progress dashboards and other information throughout each year.

The college's current strategic plan concluded in 2025. Beginning fall 2025, the college began the process of developing a new strategic plan. Building on the self-study process as an information gathering exercise, the college developed a new strategic plan in spring 2026. One significant change over the previous planning effort is that the college reduced the planning horizon to three years instead of five. This decision was based on the current plan length and the dynamic environment in higher-education, such as technology changes, including artificial intelligence, government regulatory compliance mandates, demands for cost and student outcome accountability and transparency. A shorter planning horizon would make the resulting plan more viable and accurate.

3. planning that integrates goals for institutional effectiveness and improvement, including a focus on student achievement, educational outcomes, overall institutional improvement, and the results of institutional assessments;

The college's strategic plan and its related operational plans are integral to supporting the College's mission and are focused on student achievement, educational outcomes, and overall institutional improvement. Operational plans include the Academic Master Plan, Three-year Budget Worksheet, College Training Plan, Institutional Effectiveness Plan, Strategic Enrollment Management Plan, Staffing Plan, Information Technology Plan, and Integrated Marketing and Communication Plan. Summaries or crosswalks of division and department goals with key assessment results provide evidence of a responsive assessment cycle that supports continuous improvement.

"My favorite part of my job is Commencement Day. It's the one day every year where we as the staff of Penn Highlands get to really witness what our hard work has accomplished."
-Thomasa, Student Records Coordinator

The goals of the academic divisions and college departments are derived from the college's Strategic Plan. Often annual individual performance evaluations of college leaders will have goals tied directly to the strategic plan or one of the related operational plans. Furthermore, assessment data is used to improve both overall college operations and individual department performance. Department assessments, reported through the Weave Department Assessment report, set measures, targets, and results, showing goals alongside key findings and actions taken. For example, in the Strategic Enrollment Management Plan a goal is to, "review and improve processes for following up and supporting financially and at-risk students." This is be assigned to the Student Success Center – KEYS program coordinator as part of an annual performance goal.

4. planning for diversity, equity, and inclusion that is aligned with the institution's mission and goals, maintains sufficient resources, and leads to institutional improvement;

The college's mission ensures that all institutional planning is done through the lens of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Planning teams are comprised of members of the college community from various departments and from various levels of the organization and often include external input from constituents that mirror regional demographics. These regional demographics encompass both urban centers such as Altoona and Johnstown, and the numerous rural pockets of population that have vastly different educational needs. Additionally, each of the counties served by the college has a regional advisory council comprised of community members who provide feedback on the types of programs and services needed in their areas.

5. a financial planning and budgeting process that is aligned with the institution's mission and goals, evidence-based, and clearly linked to the institution's and units' strategic plans/ objectives;

The college has a financial planning and budgeting process that is aligned with and provides appropriate resources to support the institution's mission and strategic plan. Preparation of the annual college budget formally begins six months prior to presentation and adoption of the budget by the Board of Trustees. In January of each year, the Associate Vice President of Finance and College President present to the budget managers and to President's Cabinet

members the Budget Planning Packet which includes a budget development schedule and instructions. This document identifies the various steps in the process of developing the annual budget, the dates related to budget tasks, and college employees involved.

Further, important information regarding revenue projections for the upcoming year is gathered as part of the college's budget development process. Revenue projections are established through a process involving a review of historical receipts, an assessment of current year receipts, and a forecast for every revenue item, including enrollment. The Vice President of Academics Affairs and Student Services, Associate Vice President of Technology and Analytics, the Dean of Academic Affairs (including dual enrollment) and the Dean of Enrollment Services and Registrar review enrollment trends, new programs and partnerships, and new marketing initiatives to arrive at an enrollment projection for each college location. These projections are aggregated into a total enrollment and revenue projection for the college's next fiscal year. This projection is shared with all members of the President's Cabinet and discussed to provide clarity and consensus. Enrollment and revenue projections for non-credit workforce development, community education, and the Police Academy are provided by their respective managers and their supervisors.

To determine expenses, individual cost center managers develop draft cost center budgets. Cost center managers throughout the college oversee and manage expenditures and in their assigned area of operation. Justifications for increased budgets must include a link to a strategic imperative/goal, an operational planning document, or an assessment finding. All requests from cost center managers are reviewed by a Cabinet member who oversees the cost center, and, if warranted, the request is revised. Once these requests have been finalized, they are forwarded to the Associate Vice President for Finance who reviews this information with the College President.

As the budget is developed, the Associate Vice President for Finance and the College President review revenue and expenditure projections received from the President's Cabinet. Finally, costs related to capital projects are pulled into the budget along with repayment schedules and lease agreements. At Penn Highlands, such capital projects have included the purchase of the Richland Campus, renovating the Blair Center, and the acquisition and renovation of the Centre County education center. The college typically enters into lease agreements and renovates the leased space to meet its specific needs. To date, most of the debt-service and lease agreements the college has signed are supported by a 50% reimbursement from the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

Each year in late March, once the draft budget is completed, the President and the President's Cabinet review both the draft budget for the upcoming fiscal year and the Three-Year Budget Projection worksheet. This review provides Cabinet members with the opportunity to offer input on the draft budget, including recommendations for funding supplemental budget requests and assessing the budget's alignment with the college's strategic plan. As a final step, the President's Cabinet determines any proposed changes to tuition and fees. Once completed, the draft budget is presented in April of each year to the Finance and Facilities Committee, the Executive Committee, and finally the full Board of Trustees for discussion. Additionally, in April, the Board reviews the proposed changes to the tuition and fees for the upcoming fiscal year and may

approve or reject the administration's proposal. Only the Board has the authority to change tuition and fees for credit classes at the college.

Until the June Board of Trustees meeting, the draft budget undergoes further review following its presentation in April. During the subsequent two months, any information that might cause the budget to change is integrated into the final proposed budget. These changes could include a clarification of revenue associated with the passage of the Pennsylvania state budget, an update on a benefit rate increase, or a variety of other factors. Any such changes are reviewed by all Cabinet members and ultimately forwarded for review by the Finance and Facilities Committee and Executive Committee of the College Board of Trustees. Following this thorough committee review, the final budget is presented to the Board of Trustees for adoption at its meeting in June and then sent to the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

6. fiscal and human resources as well as the physical and technical infrastructure adequate to support its operations wherever and however programs are delivered;

While tuition and fees from for-credit enrollment remain the largest revenue source, the college benefits from a diverse array of funding streams that help offset any enrollment-related revenue gap. These include a substantial annual multi-million-dollar operating and capital appropriation from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and from Cambria County, the college's local sponsor. The county has dedicated one millage of real estate tax averaging over one million dollars annually. In addition, the college leverages recurring grant funds—within the parameters of each award—to support both general operations and specific initiatives.

A budget surplus was achieved over the past five years, which is reflected in the improved net position as evidenced by a 13.1% increase in net position—from \$12,313,655 at the end of FY 2020-2021 to \$13,924,612 at the end of FY 2024-2025—according to audited financial statements. In addition to the revenue surplus, the change in net position reflects the acquisition of the Richland building.

History of Net Position: 2021-2025					
	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025
Current Assets	9,122,679	10,185,195	10,268,991	9,456,278	10,120,127
Non-Current Assets	14,004,054	18,424,315	20,049,997	19,905,909	18,586,114
Deferred Outflows	12,408	6,155	13,816	194,404	131,212
Total Assets and Deferred Outflows	23,139,141	28,615,665	30,332,804	29,556,591	28,837,453
Current Liabilities	1,782,114	1,713,582	1,568,463	1,591,911	1,949,786
Non-Current Liabilities	8,593,427	11,690,790	13,086,375	12,784,703	11,974,826
Deferred Inflows	449,945	908,492	720,550	836,491	836,491
Net Position	12,313,655	14,302,801	14,957,416	14,343,486	13,924,612
Total Liabilities, Deferred Inflows & Net Position	23,139,141	28,615,665	30,332,804	29,556,591	28,837,453

Information provided in this table was taken from the audited financial statements for fiscal years 2020-2024

Table 6.1 History of Net Position: 2021-2025 Source: Audit

In alignment with its Cash Reserves Policy, the college added \$500,000 to its reserves in October 2022, bringing total cash reserves (restricted and unrestricted), cash on hand, and other unrestricted funds to over \$9 million in 2025, which is 60% of the college's \$15 million operating and capital budget. These funds are divested in the following ways:

- Operating Reserve is \$1,318,513 as of 6/30/2025
- Emergency Capital Reserve is \$194,773 as of 6/30/2025
- Long-Term Capital Reserve is \$506,589 as of 6/30/2025

The remaining \$7,174,099 cash reserves (restricted and unrestricted), cash on hand, and other unrestricted funds can be used as needed. Opportunities to strengthen these funds may arise as we proactively address enrollment trends, invest in maintaining our facilities, manage personnel and operating costs strategically, and adapt to evolving state and county funding landscapes.

As part of the college's annual financial reporting to both IPEDS and Middle States, the Annual Institutional Update Composite Financial Formulas are used to calculate the Composite Financial Index (CFI). This is the key indicator of institutional financial health and is presented to the Board of Trustees each year. A CFI score of 3.0 or higher indicates solid financial health, while scores between 1.0 and 3.0 reflect minor concerns. The following table shows the CFI for the college based on 2025 figures.

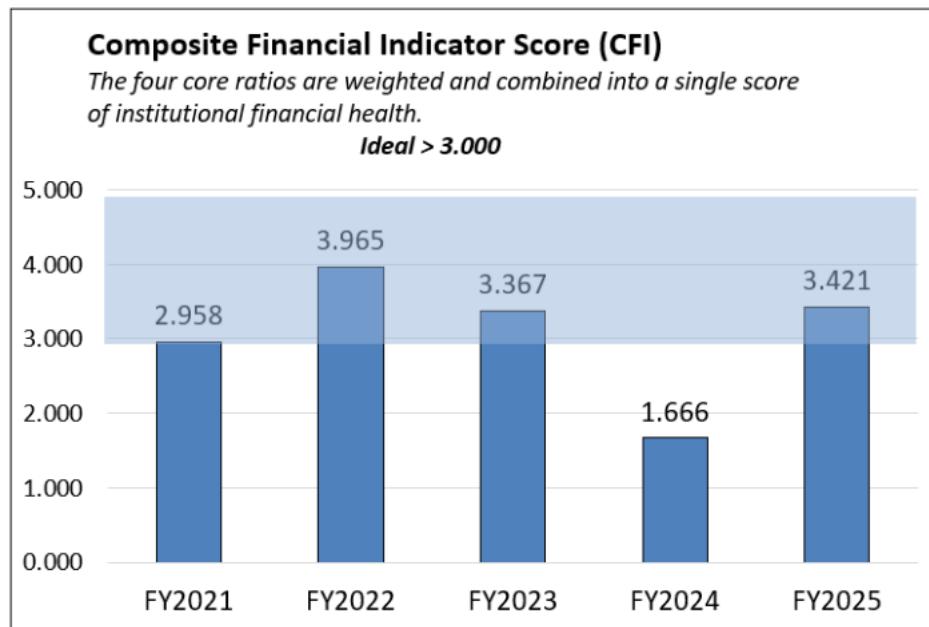


Table 6.2 Composite Financial Indicator Source: IPEDS and MSCHE

The college has maintained a healthy financial position from 2020-2023. Declining enrollment in 2024 combined with depletion of federal COVID funds resulted in a drop in the CFI.

Furthermore, the Pennsylvania Highlands Community College Foundation has also strengthened its financial position in recent years. In 2025 alone, the Foundation increased its assets by over

\$1.3 million, including a \$1.2 million endowed donation and two successful fundraising events. Through these efforts and prudent investment strategies, the Foundation has provided over \$80,000 in scholarships to students in recent years. Looking ahead, the Foundation's FY 2026–2028 Strategic Plan aims to expand its impact through the growth of the Supporting Scholarship program, reinforcing its role as a vital financial partner in advancing the college's mission and strategic initiatives.

Overall, the Foundation scholarship programs have had a large impact on students over time, enabling them to achieve their career and educational goals while mitigating the concern of student loan debt and financial obligations outside of the classroom. For example, Emily used her scholarship award to complete the prerequisites for her Speech Pathology career, ultimately earning an invitation to Indiana University of Pennsylvania's accelerated doctoral program. Next, Grant, now a Pennsylvania State Police officer, was able to devote the necessary time to excel both academically and on the basketball court thanks to his scholarship. Further, Nathan earned his degree in criminal justice, graduated, and then enrolled in the Penn Highlands Police Academy. He is now proudly serving his local community as a patrol officer. Finally, Bella, an education major, is graduating from the University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown and has already been offered a second-grade teaching position.

“My work at Penn Highlands is meaningful because I see the impact we have on students every day. Whether it’s helping someone navigate a challenge or celebrating their achievements, I’m reminded that what we do truly matters.”

- Denise, KEYS Program Student Support Specialist

To support its educational mission across five counties and over 5,000 square miles, the college maintains six instructional locations along with an outreach office in Huntingdon County. According to a classroom and office usage study, there is more than a sufficient number of classrooms, science labs, computer labs, and student and employee spaces to support the operations of the college.

Of the six instructional locations the college operates, only the Richland campus is financed through a mortgage, which is scheduled to be paid off by 2040. All other college locations are leased from various independent property owners, with long-term maintenance responsibilities falling to the respective landlords. The college utilizes capital funding from the Pennsylvania Department of Education, which covers 50% of the annual lease costs for the other five instructional sites. Additionally, this funding supports 50% of renovation expenses through loans. The remaining 50% of costs for both annual leases and renovation expenses are incurred by the college's operating budget.

Significant renovations have occurred across several instructional locations over the last five years. These renovations and facilities updates have been driven by the 2017 Facilities Master Plan and the Facilities Utilization Plan along with discussions with the Director of Facilities, President's Cabinet, the College President, and the Board of Trustees. If capital funding is requested from the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) as needed. If Capital funding is secured, then 50% of the lease/mortgage and 50% of renovation costs are covered by the PDE capital payments until the funds are no longer needed (i.e., the lease ends, or the capital

renovation loan is paid off). The Board of Trustees must approve all new lease/mortgage agreements and capital funding requests.

The Human Resources Department, Finance Department, and the President monitor faculty and staff allocations and identify opportunities to ensure that staffing remains right sized and responsive to institutional needs. The President's Cabinet provides guidance on when it is necessary to hire new full-time employees either to support the strategic plan and the growth of new academic programs. Staffing decisions are guided by clearly defined policies and procedures that promote transparency, equity, and efficiency. These include protocols for position justification, approval of workflows, and periodic assessments of staffing levels across units. The Chief Human Resources Officer consults with departmental managers and Cabinet to make staffing decisions.

During the budgeting process, departmental leaders may request new personnel using the Supplemental Employee Request Form. The President's Cabinet will review and determine if resources are available to support a new employee and if the request appropriately aligns with the strategic plan.

To assist with ensuring adequate staffing, the college recognizes that providing the appropriate salary/wage and benefit package is important in attracting new employee talent and retaining current employees. Recognizing the importance of compensation in employee retention, the College provides annual increases to staff and faculty in accordance with their respective collective bargaining agreements. Salary ranges for administrators are informed by College and University Professional Association – Human Resources (CUPA-HR) data and Bureau of Labor Statistics benchmarks. While base pay may begin below market averages, the college's total compensation package, including generous health benefits, retirement plans, and time-off policies, has proven effective in attracting and retaining talent.

Furthermore, Penn Highlands maintains a five-year Information Technology (IT) Operational Plan that supports the college's mission, vision, and strategic goals. The plan focuses on using cost-effective, innovative, and sustainable technology to improve student success, institutional effectiveness, and operational efficiency. It aligns closely with the college's strategic plan and helps guide IT decisions and investments. Progress of the IT Plan is tracked through system performance, Help Desk trends, user satisfaction, project completion, and budget adherence. The plan outlines IT's role in providing secure, reliable, and forward-thinking services that benefit students, faculty, staff, and the broader community. The plan is shaped by current technological trends—such as cloud computing, cybersecurity, data analytics, classroom technologies, and emerging tools like artificial intelligence and hybrid learning platforms. Regular input from faculty and staff ensures that IT investments are strategic and measurable. IT priorities and budget needs are reviewed with the College President and President's Cabinet during the annual budgeting cycle. Additionally, two capital leases from the Pennsylvania Department of Education provide additional funding for expensive equipment purchases, covering 50% of the total cost.

7. documented financial resources, funding base, and plans for financial development, including those from any related entities adequate to support its educational purposes and programs and to ensure financial stability;

The college uses diverse revenue streams to support college operations and capital projects. However, like most community colleges in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Penn Highlands receives much of its funding through three primary sources including tuition and fees, local sponsorship, and state appropriations. The largest source of revenue for the college comes from tuition and fees charged to students attending for-credit classes. The Board of Trustees has authorized a small increase in tuition and fees each of the last six years. This has allowed the college to generate additional income despite sometimes smaller for-credit enrollments.

The college's local sponsor, Cambria County, provides the equivalent of one millage of real estate tax to the college each year, this equates to approximately \$1.2 million.

The Pennsylvania Department of Education provides annual operational and capital allocations to the college. Operational funds are tied to full-time equivalent enrollment (FTE) while capital funding is based on the amount allocated in the state budget. If funding is available for a project, then those funds pay 50% of the repayment of outstanding capital project loan costs and ongoing lease/mortgage expenses. Additionally, capital funds can support the purchase of some types of capital equipment.

In addition to these primary sources of revenue, Pennsylvania Highlands uses funding from a variety of grants available through the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the federal government including the PA Jobs Training Grant, Dual Enrollment Innovation Grant, Cyber Security Grant, Keystone Education Yields Success (KEYS) program, Carl D. Perkins, and grants through the Appalachian Regional Commission and PA Department of Community and Economic Development.

Additional sources of revenue are generated from the college's Police Academy, workforce development offerings, the College's Foundation, and a conservative investment strategy. Non-credit academic programming has greatly expanded in the last five years by developing new partnerships to provide additional revenue to the college. For perspective, in FY 2025 the Workforce Development and Community Education Departments generated \$185,461 in revenue. In comparison, in FY 2020, \$101,434 was generated. Enrollment has also grown in the Police Academy which will generate over \$118,000 in additional income in the 2025-2026 fiscal year.

The college also utilizes a modest approach to investing its financial resources. Working with the college's primary financial institution, restricted and unrestricted reserve funds are invested in a money market fund that produces a rate of return of approximately four percent. These investments generate more than \$250,000 annually. This investment strategy provides a moderate rate of return with minimal risk but also provides a high degree of liquidity and financial flexibility.

Further, the college has access to resources made available through the Pennsylvania Highlands Community College Foundation, which is a 501c3 non-profit organization. While the college foundation provides several distinct scholarship programs for students attending Penn Highlands, it provides direct financial support to the college for the Supporting Scholarship initiative as well as to its dual enrollment programs that account for approximately \$80,000 in additional funding to the college each year.

Additionally, the President has had ongoing conversations with the Somerset County Commissioners to support college activities in Somerset County. Due to this engagement, the college received \$220,209 of grant support (combined) for FY 2024 and FY 2025. This grant support has been leveraged in the following ways:

- \$170,000: Dual enrollment scholarships
- \$31,800: Phlebotomy Program Support
- \$18,409: Equipment purchases for various equipment needs

In fall 2025, the Commissioners applied to the state for a \$250,000 grant to support the operations of the college and to lower the cost of tuition to Somerset County residents. Determination on the grant is pending.

8. a record of responsible fiscal management, including preparing a multi-year budget and an annual independent audit confirming financial viability and proper internal financial controls, with evidence of corrective measures taken to address any material findings cited in the audit or an accompanying management letter;

The college follows two internal administrative policies that provide guidance for internal financial controls: the Financial Reporting and Control Policy and the Purchasing Guidance Policy. The purpose of these policies is to establish a framework for internal controls designed to provide reasonable assurance that the operations of the college are effective and efficient, the financial and operational reporting is reliable, and the college complies with all applicable laws, regulations, and policies. These policies apply to all departments, faculty, staff, administrators, and student workers of the college, across all campuses and operations.

Following adoption of the college budget by the Board of Trustees, budget managers have access to the funds within their respective cost center budgets. Budgeted purchases are generated from the assigned line items within the respective cost center budgets. All purchases occur within a multi-level review process facilitated through workflow automation software. This process requires written approval by the budget manager, the cabinet member overseeing the specific cost center, and the Associate Vice President of Finance. Any purchase of more than \$25,000 also requires approval of the College President, and any purchase of more than \$50,000 requires formal approval by the Board of Trustees. This process ensures a standardized level of budgetary control for all purchasing activities within the college.

Expenses are analyzed by comparing current year's data to prior year data, broken down into significant categories. Monthly financial statements compare current year-to-date expenses with those from the same period in the previous year. During the audit process, expenses are categorized into functional expenses (such as Instruction, Academic Support, Student Services,

Institutional Support, Operations and Maintenance of Facilities, Provision for Uncollectable Accounts, and Depreciation and Amortization) and natural classification categories (including Salaries & Wages, Fringe Benefits, Supplies/Equipment & Repairs, Professional & Purchased Services, Utilities, Advertising, Leases & Depreciation, and other expenses). The total functional classification categories from the audited financial statements are analyzed over the past four years, showing the dollar and percentage variance from the most recent audited fiscal year compared to the prior fiscal year. This analysis allows the college to compare core expenditures and institutional support over the past four years as evidenced in the following chart.

Penn Highlands Community College Budgets (2023 - 2026)

	Budget 2022-2023	Budget 2023-2024	Budget 2024-2025	Budget 2025-2026
Revenue				
PA Dept. of Ed. Operating	\$ 3,119,287	\$ 3,204,287	\$ 3,274,501	\$ 3,627,112
PA Dept. of Ed. Capital	608,996	708,466	775,582	805,428
Cambria County Allocation	1,205,000	1,205,000	1,205,000	1,220,000
Student Tuition and Fees	6,978,729	7,071,743	6,813,748	6,906,289
ACE Dual Enrollment	490,974	429,012	472,512	605,220
Workforce/Community Education	108,100	168,956	178,000	204,950
Police Academy	195,000	99,875	94,850	75,500
Grant Reimbursements	-	-	783,663	980,298
Other Revenue	419,660	410,600	320,200	261,400
Investment Returns	-	-	200,000	283,350
Reserves (Operating)	42,771	-	-	-
Reserves (Capital)	-	207,298	59,073	-
Foundation Support Operating	68,000	85,000	85,000	80,000
Total Revenue	\$ 13,236,517	\$ 13,590,237	\$ 14,262,129	\$ 15,049,547
Expenses				
Personnel				
Full Time Salaries and Wages	\$ 5,691,934	\$ 5,718,917	\$ 6,117,325	6,234,010
Adjunct, Overload & Part Time Salaries	845,545	736,742	821,201	958,209
Fringe Benefits	2,724,547	2,688,598	2,646,796	3,194,158
Total Personnel	9,262,026	9,144,257	9,585,322	10,386,377
Operating				
Non-Personnel Operating	2,497,631	2,752,082	2,949,394	3,017,464
Subtotal Non-Personnel Operating	2,497,631	2,752,082	2,949,394	3,017,464
Capital and Leasing				
Facility Leases	544,529	674,921	640,901	634,723
Equipment Leases	109,331	105,756	104,157	70,153
Richland Purchase Loan	519,624	519,547	520,205	519,569
Blair Expansion Loan	303,376	303,376	303,376	303,376
Centre County Loan	-	90,298	48,774	48,774
Richland Gymnasium Renovation	-	-	110,000	59,691
Subtotal Capital and Leasing	1,476,860	1,693,898	1,727,413	1,636,286
Subtotal Expenses	13,236,517	13,590,237	14,262,129	15,040,127
Total Expenses	13,236,517	13,590,237	14,262,129	15,040,127

Table 6.3 Three-year budget summary, 2022-2025

The administration presents comprehensive financial reports at every board meeting. As such, the college administration provides transparent, clear, and comprehensive financial information to the Board of Trustees. This financial information is discussed at length at the Facilities and

Finance Board special committee and Executive Committee before being presented to the entire Board of Trustees for approval.

Both the Financial Reporting and Control Policy and the Board of Trustees Bylaws state that the college hires a certified accounting firm to conduct an annual audit of the college's finances. Audits confirm the financial viability of the institution as well as the proper use of internal financial controls. No audit in the past five years indicated the need for any type of corrective action to be undertaken as there were no material findings cited in the audit or any accompanying management letters.

In 2024, a new Associate Vice President of Finance was hired. Beginning in 2025, the college implemented a three-year budget projection process which extends through fiscal year 2028-2029. The result of the budget projections shows the college with a deficit budget in the 2028-2029 fiscal year. While the assumptions made for these projections are based on 2025-2026 levels, these projections will be used in the strategic budgeting process to enable the college to implement strategies to improve its financial position offsetting the deficit as the following table demonstrates.

PROJECTION PERIOD				ASSUMPTIONS AND OTHER NOTES
Projected BUDGET 2026-2027	Projected BUDGET 2027-2028	Projected BUDGET 2028-2029		
REVENUE				
Tuition and Fees	\$7,078,946	\$7,255,920	\$7,437,318	Assumes 2.5% annual increase throughout the projection period
ACE Dual Enrollment Tuition	\$620,351	\$635,859	\$651,756	Assumes 2.5% annual increase throughout the projection period
Workforce Development and Community Ed.	\$207,000	\$209,069	\$211,160	Assumes 1% annual increase throughout the projection period
Criminal Justice Training Center	\$76,255	\$77,018	\$77,788	Assumes 1% increase in 2026-2027 & 2027-2028 and 2% increase in 2028-2029
PA Dept. of Education (operational)	\$3,699,654	\$3,773,647	\$3,849,120	Assumes 2% annual increase throughout the projection period
PA Dept. of Education (capital)	811,399	889,002	992,738	Assumes flat funding with additional amounts based on projected capital projects
Cambria County Sponsorship	1,220,000	1,220,000	1,220,000	Assumes flat funding throughout the projection period
Foundation Support	\$85,000	\$90,000	\$95,000	Assumes \$5,000 annual increase throughout the projection period
Other Revenue	264,014	266,654	269,321	Assumes 1% annual increase throughout the projection period
Investment Returns	286,184	289,045	\$291,935	Assumes 1% annual increase throughout the projection period
Grant Revenue	980,299	980,299	\$980,299	Assumes flat funding throughout the projection period
Reserves (Operating)				
Reserves (Capital)				
TOTAL REVENUE	\$15,329,102	\$15,686,513	\$16,076,435	
EXPENSES				
Personnel Operating Expenses				
Salaries and Wages	\$7,372,024	\$7,556,325	\$7,745,233	Assumes 2.5% annual increase throughout the projection period
Fringe Benefits	3,353,866	3,521,559	3,697,637	Assumes 5% annual increase throughout the projection period
TOTAL PERSONNEL EXPENSES	\$10,725,890	\$11,077,884	\$11,442,870	
Non-Personnel Operating Expense				
Contracted and Professional Services	377,079	388,391	388,391	Assumes 3% increase in 2026-2027 & 2027-2028 and no increase in 2028-2029
Utilities	257,502	270,377	283,896	Assumes 5% annual increase throughout the projection period
Departmental Supplies	714,741	736,183	736,183	Assumes 2% increase in 2026-2027, 3% increase in 2027-2028 and no increase in 2028-2029
Database and Software	765,083	788,035	788,035	Assumes 3% increase in 2026-2027 & 2027-2028 and no increase in 2028-2029
Marketing	247,955	250,435	252,939	Assumes 1% annual increase throughout the projection period
Insurance	315,000	330,750	347,288	Assumes 5% annual increase throughout the projection period
Maintenance	325,192	334,947	334,947	Assumes 3% increase in 2026-2027 & 2027-2028 and no increase in 2028-2029
Professional Development	49,765	50,262	50,765	Assumes 1% annual increase throughout the projection period
Other	52,111	21,998	21,998	Assumes a decrease in this category of expenditure in 2027-2028 and no change in 2028-2029
TOTAL NON-PERSONNEL EXPENSES	\$3,104,428	\$3,171,378	\$3,204,441	
Capital and Leasing Expenses				
Facility Leases	\$642,472	\$642,472	\$642,472	Includes an initial increase of \$7,749 in 2026-2027 held constant in out years
Equipment Leases	107,282	107,282	107,282	Historically low equipment lease expense increased to historically normal amounts during projection period
Debt Service Blair (Renovations)	120,940	-	-	Debt service payment for Blair facility fully repaid as of 12/31/2026
Debt Service Richland (Mortgage)	518,667	520,500	520,500	Projections based on loan amortization schedule
Debt Service Centre (Renovations)	48,774	48,774	48,774	Debt service projections for Centre County Center renovations held constant
Richland Gymnasium Renovation	11,941	59,691	63,025	Cost of Richland renovation project and estimated amortization of debt
Additional Debt Service/Lease Payments	-	47,766	248,570	Includes Blair Renovation Project debt service
TOTAL CAPITAL AND LEASING EXPENSES	1,450,076	1,426,485	1,630,623	
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$15,280,394	\$15,675,747	\$16,277,935	
SURPLUS/DEFICIT	\$48,708	\$10,766	(\$201,500)	

Table 6.4 Three-year budget projections, 2026-2027 through 2028-2029

9. well-defined, inclusive decision-making processes and clear assignment of responsibility and accountability for achieving institutional and unit effectiveness;

The college ensures inclusive decision-making in several ways. First, the college governance process allows for input and feedback from all college constituents, including students. Second, the President has established a Leadership Council that is comprised of department managers and faculty Division Chairs, and two union Presidents to provide feedback on current or pressing college issues.

Additionally, the College Senate agendas and meeting minutes are available on myPEAK under the Governance tab. College Senate regularly reviews and revises the college's Board policies for clarity, accuracy, and viability and provides for the opportunity to petition to add new board policies. The College President presents any revisions or new policies to the Board of Trustees for review and approval. For example, in 2024, the college needed to address the use of Artificial Intelligence by students to complete coursework. A policy was developed (Using AI Technologies Policy) which was circulated through the various senates for feedback. The Student Senate raised questions regarding when AI was acceptable in completing coursework. This feedback led to guidelines for students' use of AI which can be found in instructors' class syllabi, course assignments, the Student Handbook, and in the Academic Integrity Policy. The Board of Trustees subsequently approved the new policy.

The college's organizational chart is managed by the College President and the Associate Vice President of Administration with input from the President's Cabinet. When positions become open, analysis of the need for the position and the qualifications needed to fill the position are discussed beginning at the manager-level, then to the Vice President, and ultimately to President's Cabinet for approval. Once a position is approved, the College follows a structured recruitment process designed to attract a broad and talent-rich pool of candidates.

"I'm truly grateful for the opportunity to work at a place where your contributions are valued and you have the opportunity to positively impact student's lives each and every day."
Michelle, Dean of Enrollment Services & Registrar

Annual performance reviews for employees, completed by department managers, inform priorities for continuous improvement and innovation by comparing performance outcomes to goals from the individual to the institutional level. Annual goals are presented to each employee that link to the imperatives and goals of the strategic plan.

10. comprehensive planning for facilities, infrastructure, and technology that includes consideration of sustainability and deferred maintenance and is linked to the institution's strategic and financial planning processes;

The college's last comprehensive facilities master plan was completed in 2017. It was used to drive many Board approved renovations and improvements at the Richland (main) campus. Since 2017, the college uses a Facilities Utilization Plan which has been used to guide more recent facilities development and other facility-related issues.

In 2026, the college will hire an outside engineering and architectural firm to create a new comprehensive facilities master plan that supports the 2026-2028 Strategic Plan initiatives across all facilities and incorporate new programming and expected enrollment growth or decline.

11. compliance with its program responsibilities under existing federal title IV and other state laws and regulations, including any audits of financial aid programs as required by federal and state regulations;

At Penn Highlands, the Financial Aid Office follows the Federal Student Aid (FSA) Handbook for guidance and regulations on federal student aid. This handbook is updated annually to reflect changes for the upcoming award year. Multiple staff members are involved in verifying, awarding, and disbursing aid to ensure accuracy. They use an Institutional Student Information Record (ISIR) checklist to review and check eligibility before offering aid, in addition to any verification by the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) if the student is selected.

Further, the Program Participation Agreement (PPA) is a contract between the USDE and a college, confirming the college's approval to participate in Title IV programs. This agreement is renewed every six years for full recertification. It requires the institution to comply with FSA laws, regulations, and policies. The PPA is signed by the College President and an authorized representative of the USDE.

Penn Highlands was initially accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) in 2002 and has maintained its accreditation by completing the self-study process according to the Middle States schedule. The last Statement of Accreditation Status was granted in 2017, confirming the College meets MSCHE Requirements of Affiliation. This ongoing accreditation assures students and the public of the educational quality provided by the college and meets requirements established by the USDE.

Next, the Eligibility and Certification Approval Report (ECAR) is generated by the USDE after an institution submits its PPA. The ECAR identifies programs eligible for Title IV funding and lists the levels of programs offered. It also includes nondegree programs, short-term programs, gainful employment (GE) programs, and additional approved locations.

In terms of Title IV responsibilities, the USDE releases official cohort default rates (CDR) annually. Schools with a CDR above 30% for three consecutive years or above 40% for one year lose access to federal student loans and Pell Grants. Penn Highlands' current three-year cohort default rate is 0.0%, largely due to the payment pause since 2020. This report is automatically populated and published by the USDE each August.

On October 18, 2024, the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) mailed the Determination Letter to the college, confirming that the Single Audit Report for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2024, is in compliance. Each year, after the college completes its annual audit and the audit report is finalized, PDE reviews the Single Audit Report of the college. They examine the data within the Schedule of Expenditures of Federal Awards (SEFA). In this letter, PDE acknowledges that the Single Audit Report for the most recent fiscal year is substantially

in compliance with 2 CFR Part 200, Subpart F, and other relevant federal and Commonwealth policies. This letter serves as proof that the college complies with federal and state regulations.

12. strategies to measure and assess the adequacy and efficient utilization of institutional resources required to support the institution's mission and goals;

The college uses a series of institutional plans to support the mission and goals. These plans are linked to specific cost centers within the budget which are managed by those responsible for the outcomes identified in the following plans:

Academic Master Plan: Aligns academic programs with student and workforce needs, employees, engages innovative and creative teaching for success in the classroom, develops collaborative partnerships with industry and other educational institutions, and uses academic assessment to ensure student learning and success.

Academic Assessment Plan: Operationally linked to the Academic Master Plan, the Academic Assessment Plan provides a structured, ongoing process for measuring student learning outcomes and using the results to improve curriculum and instruction.

Facilities Master Plan: Helps guide Cabinet and the facilities team with the development, renovation, and management of physical infrastructure to support the institution's mission, goals, and enrollment projections.

Facilities Utilization Plan: Provides the President's Cabinet and facilities team with a snapshot of the current state of the College's infrastructure and outlines potential upcoming capital projects, focusing on immediate and near-future operational needs.

Information Technology Plan: Advances the mission by delivering secure, reliable, and innovative technology solutions to enhance student learning, operational efficiency, and community engagement with equitable access as a foundational principle.

Integrated Marketing and Communications Plan: Supports mission-driven goals by driving enrollment, building brand awareness, enhancing community engagement, strengthening workforce alignment, and boosting community trust and aligning with strategy plan goals.

Staffing Plan: Ensures that all departments are appropriately resourced to meet institutional strategic goals and operational needs. This plan is developed in alignment with strategic priorities and is regularly reviewed by the Chief Human Resources Officer to adapt to changing demands, enrollment trends, and budgetary considerations.

Strategic Enrollment Management Plan: Develops strategies aimed at improving student access, provides consistency in operations, and drives student enrollment gains, student retention, and student success.

The college's budget process plays a crucial role in determining its ability to carry out its mission and strategic plan. Funds are allocated to various departments to ensure the operation and

sustainability of the college, with a primary focus on fulfilling the college's mission. Additional funds are earmarked for specific initiatives, each linked to a strategic plan imperative, goal, objective, operational plan, or assessment outcome, thereby ensuring that every financial decision supports the broader mission of the college.

At the college, both academic and administrative areas are deeply committed to continuous improvement through annual assessment activities. These efforts are meticulously scheduled, with clearly defined processes and timelines. Faculty and administrative leaders play a crucial role in this process. They produce detailed assessment reports that highlight key findings and offer recommendations for improvement. When budget requests exceed the previous year's amounts, they must be justified with ties to assessment outcomes or the strategic plan.

In addition to regular assessments, ad hoc reports are generated as needed, and formal academic program reviews are conducted on a scheduled basis. Academic program reviews are shared with the college leadership and the Board of Trustees, ensuring that the continuous improvement cycle informs decision-making. Resource allocation decisions are made with the college's mission in mind, ensuring that every decision supports the institution's goals.

13. periodic assessment of the effectiveness of planning, resource allocation, institutional renewal processes, and availability of resources.

Evidence of periodic assessment of the college's various planning processes is evident in updates presented to the Board special committees, and at full Board meetings, through weekly reviews of the strategic plan by the President's Cabinet, and at faculty division levels. At each of these levels, outcomes are tied to budget allocations and used as part of the budgeting process. Ultimately, budget allocations based on requests are reviewed at the President's Cabinet level and recommendations form the basis for the college's annual budget. Feedback on budget decisions is communicated to budget managers when the final budget is developed.

Beginning in fall 2025, the college embarked on the development of its next strategic plan. To lay the foundation for this planning process the college had speaker, Scott Van Pelt from the University of Pennsylvania, speak with the entire college community on the changes and shifts occurring in the higher education landscape, what that will mean for the college, and then engaging the staff and faculty in small group brainstorming discussions. The results of this activity was one of the foundational components of the new strategic plan. Other activities included gathering additional information from all college constituents including the Board of Trustees, students, and community members. A new strategic plan is projected to go to the Board of Trustees for approval in spring 2026.

Conclusion

Overall, Penn Highlands demonstrates a mature and integrated approach to planning, resource allocation, and institutional improvement. Across strategic, operational, financial, and assessment processes, the college consistently aligns its goals with its mission and uses evidence-based decision-making to guide progress. The institution's planning culture is collaborative and transparent, engaging internal and external stakeholders to ensure that goals reflect both

community needs and institutional priorities. Financial planning is disciplined, data-informed, and linked directly to strategic objectives, enabling the college to maintain a stable financial position even amid enrollment fluctuations and external pressures. Investments in facilities, technology, staffing, and student support reflect a commitment to long-term sustainability and student success. While the college faces challenges common to community colleges—such as demographic shifts, rising operational costs, and evolving regulatory demands—it has established the structures, processes, and financial safeguards necessary to adapt effectively. Overall, the college demonstrates compliance with Standard VI and shows a clear capacity for continuous improvement.

Recommendations

- Comprehensive and mission-aligned planning processes that integrate institutional, departmental, and operational goals.
- Strong stakeholder engagement, including faculty, staff, students, community members, and advisory councils, throughout the planning cycle.
- Use of data and assessment, including dashboards, VFA metrics, and departmental assessments, to inform decisions and track progress.
- Disciplined financial planning and budgeting, clear procedures, justification requirements, and alignment to strategic priorities.
- Healthy financial position, including strong reserves, diversified revenue streams, and consistent Board oversight.
- Effective facilities and technology planning, supported by state capital funding, long-term IT planning, and ongoing renovations aligned with institutional needs.
- Transparent communication, with planning documents, dashboards, and updates regularly shared with the college community and Board of Trustees.
- Demonstrated commitment to recognizing and utilizing diverse points of reference in decision making, reflected in planning processes that incorporate regional demographics and community input.

Opportunities for Improvement

- Declining enrollment trends pose ongoing financial and operational challenges despite strong planning structures.
- Dependence on tuition, state appropriations, and local sponsorship leaves the college vulnerable to external economic and political fluctuations.

Evidence

Academic Integrity Policy

Academic Master Plan

Annual performance review template

Board of Trustee minutes – Feb 2021

Board of Trustees By-laws

Budget packet

College budget

College Training Plan
Eligibility and certification approval report
Enrollment dashboard
Environmental Scan
Facilities Master Plan (2017)
Facilities Utilization Plan
Federal Student Aid Handbook
Financial aid single audit report
Financial audits
Financial Reporting and Control Policy
Foundation 20-25 Strategic Plan
Foundation 26-28 Strategic Plan
Information Technology Plan
Institutional Effectiveness Plan
Institutional student information record checklist
Integrated Marketing plan
Organization Chart
PDE determination letter 10/2024
President's Cabinet meeting minutes - sample
Program participation agreement
Purchasing Guidance Policy
Regional advisory committee minutes
Staffing Plan
Statement of Accreditation Status
Strategic Enrollment Management Plan
Strategic Plan
Strategic Planning Dashboard
Student Handbook
Surveys for strategic planning process (2020)
Using AI Technologies Policy

Standard VII: Governance, Leadership and Administration

Introduction:

Penns Highlands has a well-established system of college governance beginning with the college's Board of Trustees, President, President's Cabinet, and the College Congress, which is an employee and student senate system. Each of these entities work collaboratively to ensure that the college identifies strategic institutional goals and that those goals are reviewed and assessed.

Evidence reviewed as part of this standard confirms that the college is dedicated to ensuring that qualified personnel work to support and achieve the college's mission and goals.

A candidate or accredited institution possesses and demonstrates the following attributes or activities:

1. a clearly articulated and transparent governance structure that outlines roles, responsibilities, and accountability for inclusive decision making by each constituency, including the institution's legally constituted governing body, administration, faculty, staff, and students, as well as any related entities;

The college's governance structure is clearly articulated for all college personnel and students with clear identification of roles and accountability. The following chart depicts an overview of the college's governance system from the Board of Trustees down through senior administration and the Senates.

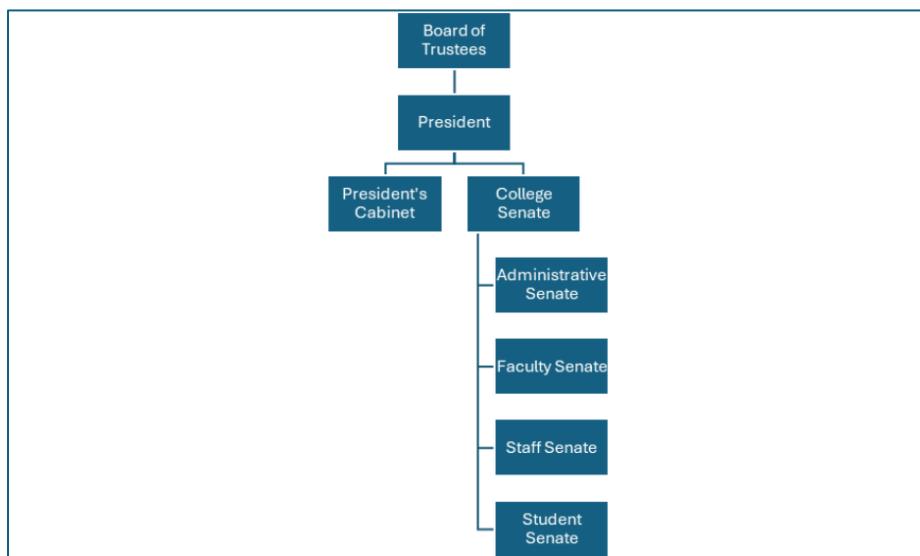


Table 7.1 College Congress Overview

Information on Penn Highlands' governance structure is available in two locations; the college's webpage under About-Administration, Faculty, and Governance, and on the college's myPEAK

portal under Governance. The college webpage provides the public with information on the composition of the college's Board of Trustees as well as an overview of meeting dates, meeting agendas, and minutes. This ensures transparency on how the Board operates and the decisions it makes. The organization of the Office of the President is also included on this webpage and outlines the composition of the President's Cabinet.

The College Congress, the primary internal governance body, operates in accordance with the Constitution of the College Congress and is comprised of five constituent senates:

- **College Senate:**

This body consists of 16 members, four members from each of the Faculty, Administrative, Staff, and Student Senates. To foster accountability and transparency, all employees and enrolled students are invited to attend the College Senate meetings. As discussed in the College Senate Bylaws, the College Senate serves as an advisory group and provide recommendations to the College President and to President's Cabinet on a variety of topics but especially to proposed revisions, deletions, or additions to Board Policies. Members of every Senate have an opportunity to review and provide recommendations for improvement on any Board Policy before it is submitted to the Board of Trustees for final approval.

- **Administrative Senate:**

The Administrative Senate consists of full-time or part-time non-faculty employees who have supervisory and/or budgetary responsibilities.

- **Faculty Senate:**

Faculty Senate consists of full-time faculty, appointed adjunct faculty, and any non-faculty employees (e.g., the Chief Academic Officer) who maintain a position that has a clear connection to for-credit programming, academic policy, or instruction.

- **Staff Senate:**

Staff Senate consists of full-time or part-time non-faculty employees who provide a supportive role in their respective offices and who do not have supervisory or budgetary responsibilities.

- **Student Senate:**

The Student Senate consists of enrolled Penn Highlands students. The Student Senate provides recommendations on matters of student life and welfare. The Student Senate may receive additional charges from the College President, designee of the College President (e.g., Director of Student Activities and Athletics), or College Senate.

“Penn Highlands truly feels like a family—they genuinely care about their students and want them to succeed. My experience was so meaningful that I have now been working at Penn Highlands for the past five years.”

-Adrianne, Assistant Director of Student Activities & Athletics

Each senate is empowered to establish bylaws to address issues of terms, duties and responsibilities of officers, and to establish standing and ad hoc committees of the senate. The College Senate Bylaws establish not only the roles of leadership within that senate, but also the standing committees in which each senate participates. All established College Senate

committees have regularly scheduled meetings, a public meeting calendar, and minutes which are published on the governance page on the myPEAK portal.

The standing committees of the College Senate include Community Involvement, Diversity, and Employee Development. Three members from each senate serve terms on these committees. There are also several ad-hoc committees established by the College Senate such as the Academic Calendar Ad Hoc Committee, the Ethics Ad Hoc Committee, the Holiday Party Ad Hoc Committee, and the Employee Picnic Ad Hoc Committee. Faculty Senate bylaws have established additional committees of that Senate to include the Academic Policies, Curriculum, General Education, and Professional Development Committees.

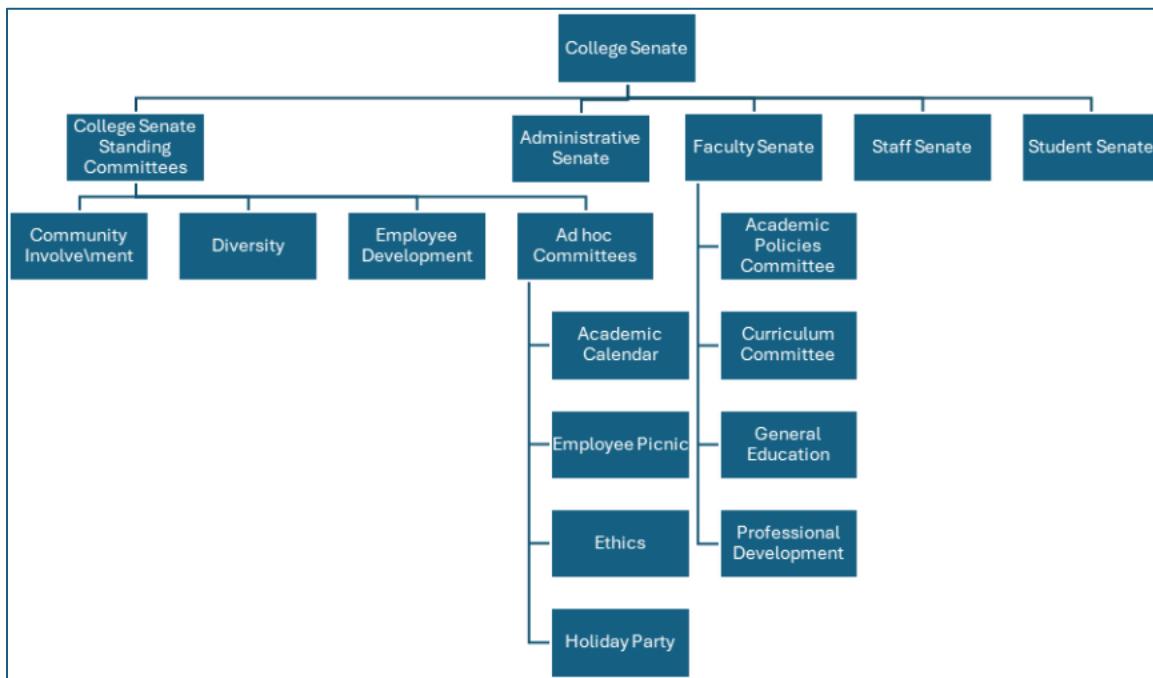


Table 7.2 College Senate Organizational Chart

In 2025, the College President launched an annual governance training for all senate officers to strengthen the efficiency and effectiveness of college governance. This governance training reinforces consistent senate operations through a review of the role and responsibilities of the Board of Trustees, the Constitution of the College Congress, the College Senate Bylaws, Robert's Rules of Order, requirements for public meeting notices, expectations for posting minutes, and related governance practices.

During the 2024–2025 academic year, the senates also undertook a comprehensive self-evaluation of the Constitution of the College Congress, individual senate bylaws, and the committee structure established by the College Senate. This review was informed by a membership survey that identified areas needing clarification and improvement within the College Congress structure. Senate officers collaborated to draft revisions to the Constitution of the College Congress and Senate Bylaws, including a streamlined committee structure. Proposed changes were shared across all senates for discussion and vetting. Each of the proposed changes

were voted on by each Senate as outlined in the College Constitution and ultimately approved by the Board of Trustees.

2. a legally constituted governing body that:

a. serves the public interest, ensures that the institution clearly states and fulfills its mission and goals, has fiduciary responsibility for the institution, and is ultimately accountable for the academic quality, integrity, planning, and fiscal wellbeing of the institution;

The college's Board of Trustees consists of 12 members appointed by the Cambria County Commissioners for a term of six years. Members are eligible for reappointment for additional terms. Recommendations for vacant board positions are submitted by the Board of Trustees to the Cambria County Commissioners for consideration. The Commissioners have two months to fill vacancies. Cambria County is financial sponsor of the college, and therefore, appoint the majority of the Board of Trustees. Additional Board positions also include representation from the other four counties the college serves. These non-Cambria County positions are by invitation of the Board of Trustees, serve a three-year term, and are voting members. The chair of the Student Senate also serves as a Student Trustee and is a voting member on most subjects, (e.g., student trustee is exempt from personnel and contractual issues) and serves a one-year term unless reelected by the student body during a new academic year. This brings the total number of board members to 17.

The Board of Trustees Bylaws govern the action of the Board and establishes its role and responsibilities as they relate to the governance of the college. This document defines the duties of its officers and establishes committees through which the board administers and conducts oversight of the college's operations. The special committees of the Board of Trustees include the Executive, Finance and Facilities, Academic Affairs and Student Services, and External Affairs. Information presented and actions recommended by these committees make up the agenda of the meetings of the full board, which occur bi-monthly throughout the year.

To enhance its effectiveness in governance of the College, the Board of Trustees annually evaluates its own performance at the annual Board retreat or no later than July of each year. The process used for this evaluation is documented by the Board of Trustees Bylaws.

b. has sufficient diversity, independence, and expertise to ensure the integrity of the institution. Members must have primary responsibility to the accredited institution, meet regularly, and not allow political, financial, relationship with a related entity, or other undue influences to interfere with their governing responsibilities;

The Board of Trustees is comprised of 17 distinguished community members who bring diverse expertise and experience to their governance roles while also representing a broad geographic area. Members, drawn from various professional backgrounds including academia, finance, law, and industry, work collaboratively to provide guidance and support to the college's administration. Their combined efforts contribute to maintaining the institution's reputation and fostering an environment conducive to learning and innovation. The Board also contains a

Student Trustee, who is elected every fall semester through the voting process of the Student Senate. The chart below shows the composition of the college's Board of Trustees:

Pennsylvania Highlands Board of Trustees: 2025-2026

Name	Occupation	Gender	Race	Years On Board	Representing
Dr. Janet Grady, Chairperson	University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown, Retired	Female	White	15	Cambria County
Dr. Jennifer Anderson, Vice Chairperson	Appalachia Intermediate Unit 8	Female	White	2	Cambria County
Greg Winger, Secretary/Treasurer	First National Bank	Male	White	13	Cambria County
Lladel Lichtry, Public Relations Officer	Community Foundation of the Alleghenies	Female	White	3	Cambria County
John Augustine, At-Large Officer	Greater Johnstown Career & Technology Center	Male	White	6	Cambria County
Carl D. DeYulis	Ebensburg Insurance Agency	Male	White	13	Cambria County
Benjamin Estell	Centre Region Council of Governments	Male	White	1	Centre County
Rev. Reginald Floyd	St. James Missionary Baptist Church	Male	Black	2	Cambria County
Joe Hurd	Blair County Chamber of Commerce, Retired	Male	White	2	Blair County
Jacqueline Kulback	Gautier Steel Ltd.	Female	White	8	Cambria County
Dr. Jennifer Mitchell	Huntingdon County Area School District	Female	White	3	Huntingdon County
Brett Smith	Brett Smith Law Offices, LLC	Male	White	2	Cambria County
Dr. Leah Spangler	The Learning Lamp and Ignite Education Solutions	Female	White	4	Cambria County
Linda Thompson	Johnstown Area Regional Industries, Retired	Female	White	6	Cambria County
Carissa Itle Westrick	Vale Wood Farms	Female	White	8	Cambria County
Brian Lanham, Student Trustee	Penn Highlands Student Senate President 2025-2026	Male	Black	1	Student Body

Table 7.3 Composition of the Board of Trustees

Per the Board of Trustees Bylaws, "Board autonomy is vital to exercising independent judgment in carrying out Board responsibilities of accountability, stewardship, and oversight and acting in the best interests of the college. Trustees must be sufficiently independent of any relationship

that could interfere with the exercise of independent judgment.” To that end, the Board has established a Conflict-of-Interest Policy and Board members must declare any conflicts of interest annually on the Disclosure of Conflict-of-Interest form. Moreover, the bylaws specifically state that a county commissioner or the immediate family of a commissioner may not serve on the Board of Trustees.

Trustees meet in open meetings six times per year with dates, times and locations publicized on the college’s webpage and in the media with meetings held both in-person and via Zoom. The public is invited to attend these open board meetings with specific time set aside on each agenda for public comment. Additionally, an annual retreat is held for trustee training, to learn about college topics in-depth, for annual strategic and budget planning, and to provide feedback on the college’s strategic initiatives.

c. ensures that neither the governing body nor its individual members interfere in the day-to-day operations of the institution;

The Board of Trustees does not interfere with the day-to-day operations of the college. To manage day-to-day operations the Board hires and annually evaluates the College President as the chief operating and executive officer of the college. Individual board members will work with the President to identify opportunities within the community and to assist the President, when asked, on projects for which they may have expertise. Board members further support the college through participation in activities and events at commencement, Foundation fundraising events, and annual meetings of the Pennsylvania Commission for Community Colleges.

d. oversees at the policy level the quality of teaching and learning, the approval of degree programs and the awarding of degrees, the establishment of personnel policies and procedures, the approval of policies and by-laws, and the assurance of strong fiscal management;

The Board of Trustees oversees, at the policy level, the quality of teaching and learning, the establishment of policies, and the assurance of strong fiscal management of the college. The Board accomplishes this oversight through four standing special committees that meet regularly prior to the public board meeting to review items within their purview.

The Academic Affairs and Student Services Committee is responsible for reviewing recommendations from the College’s Academic Affairs and Student Services division. Its work typically includes evaluating proposed additions, revisions, or deletions to academic and student services policies; reviewing five-year academic program evaluations; considering changes to for-credit academic programs, including new programs or major modifications including disbanding the programs; and membership for academic program advisory committees.

The Finance and Facilities Committee is responsible for reviewing recommendations from the College’s Finance and Facilities divisions, including proposed changes to policies related to technology, safety, security, finance, and facilities. Its work also includes reviewing monthly financial statements, evaluating financial and facilities arrangements such as leases, capital

projects, master plans, technology plans, assessing the annual College budget including tuition and fee changes for credit courses, and overseeing the annual financial audit of the institution.

The External Affairs Committee is responsible for reviewing recommendations from the college's Foundation, Marketing, and Recruiting Departments including proposed additions, revisions, or deletions to external affairs policies; local, state, and federal government advocacy efforts; student recruitment strategies; and public relations and marketing initiatives. The committee also receives reports from the Foundation on planning and alumni organization activities.

The Executive Committee is comprised of the five officers of the board. This committee reviews all the recommendations and activities of the other committees and determines which items will be placed on the agenda for Board vote. This is also the committee that deals with any human resource issues, contractual concerns, strategic plans updates, bylaw revisions, and mission, vision, and values statement revisions before being sent to the full board for discussion and/or approval.

e. plays a basic policy-making role in financial affairs to ensure integrity and strong financial management. This may include a timely review of audited financial statements and/or other documents related to the fiscal viability of the institution;

The Finance and Facilities Committee, the Executive Committee, and the full Board of Trustees conducts a thorough review of the college's annual audits and three bimonthly financial statements including Operating and Capital Budget Summary (budget vs actuals), Statement of Revenues and Expenses, and the Statement of Net Position. The Finance and Facilities Committee makes recommendations to the full board on any debt service incurred by the college and evaluates the college's annual calculated Composite Financial Indicator (CFI). The College's auditors present the audits annually to the Finance and Facilities special committee and then again to the full Board of Trustees where board members may ask questions. It should be noted that the college has received an unqualified opinion with no audit findings since the last self-study in 2017.

f. appoints and regularly evaluates the performance of the Chief Executive Officer;

The Board of Trustees appoints and evaluates the Chief Operating and Executive Officer of the college, the President, and codifies in him/her the authority to fulfill the responsibilities of the position found in the President's job description and contract. The Board of Trustees conducts an annual performance review of the President and sets performance goals for each calendar year. At times, as part of this performance evaluation, a 360-review can be requested by the Board to collect feedback from college employees, the results of which are incorporated into annual feedback, goal setting, and planning.

Some Board members conduct informal meetings with the President to provide additional guidance and oversight to the President. The President meets monthly with the Board Chair and frequently with the Executive Committee as needed to discuss confidential or critical issues. Therefore, while the full Board of Trustees only formally engages bimonthly with the President

and college employees, there are several more informal meetings taking place in person or through communications via email or phone call.

g. is informed in all its operations by principles of good practice in board governance;

To ensure the Board's operations are informed by principles of good practice in board

"It is a privilege to serve on this board as PHCC is a recognized leader in educational excellence, workforce development, and community involvement that keeps our communities thriving and better positioned for future success."

Greg, Board of Trustee Member

governance, the college provides opportunities for training and professional development to its Trustees. Trustees may attend in-person and virtual conferences and events sponsored by the Pennsylvania Commission for Community Colleges who provide training on issues related to higher education. New board members are onboarded through an orientation training conducted by key college personnel and the President. Moreover, the Board operates in adherence to regularly reviewed bylaws that govern its operations and ensure board

integrity. Per these bylaws, Trustees are expected to demonstrate a strong commitment to serving the college and its communities by upholding the institution's mission and strategic goals, adhering to Board bylaws and policies, and providing informed support and guidance to the President. To ensure its adherence to the mission, the Board conducts an annual evaluation of its performance. This annual evaluation has led to improvements to board operations over the years. For example, the 2021 Board self-evaluation effort led to the enhancement of the actual evaluation process when results identified that the tool used for review was not adequately addressing the board outcomes and responsibilities outlined within its bylaws. The evaluation tool was adjusted following a review of the results and discussion by the full board and remains in place today.

h. is not chaired by an institutional or system representative to avoid conflict of interests;

Penn Highlands is an independent public community college operating within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. It is not a member of a state system or subordinate to the Commonwealth or to the Pennsylvania Department of Education. In the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, the College's local Board of Trustees has the final legal authority as defined in the Community College Act of 1963-Chapter 35.

i. establishes and complies with a written conflict of interest policy designed to ensure the impartiality of the governing body by addressing matters such as payment for services, contractual relationships, employment, and family, financial or other interests that could pose or be perceived as conflicts of interest. A majority of members have no employment, family, ownership, or other personal financial interest in the institution.

Per the Board of Trustees Bylaws, "Trustees should have primary responsibility to the College and shall not allow political or other influence to interfere with governing Board duties. Trustees are subject to the Board's conflict of interest policy and should declare any conflict of interest when discussing College business." To ensure compliance, the Board of Trustees has

established a Conflict-of-Interest Policy that applies to all trustees. Trustees are required to submit a Disclosure of Conflict-of-Interest form annually to disclose any possible relationships that may compromise their ability to take fair action on college policies or procedures. If a conflict of interest is identified, the Trustee is required to abstain from voting on any issue related to the conflict of interest. In addition, the College President completes a conflict-of-interest form as does members of the President's Cabinet.

j. supports the Chief Executive Officer in maintaining the autonomy of the institution;

While the college is partially funded by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and by Cambria County, the college and its President remain autonomous. The President only reports to the Board of Trustees and not directly to the Cambria County Commissioners.

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania does not have a community college system organized as one body. To keep abreast of issues that may impact community colleges the Pennsylvania Commission for Community Colleges (PACCC), a voluntary consortium of community colleges, provides leadership and direct lobbying efforts on issues affecting community colleges and represents the collective needs to state policy makers. The College President participates in the PCCCs Council of Presidents. The chairperson of each college's Board of Trustees and the college presidents make up the board of PACCC who oversee the efforts of PACCC's paid staff. Meetings of this organization give the President and Board members insight into any changes or proposals being made at the state level that may impact the current structure of the college within the Pennsylvania Department of Education. Any issues are brought by the President to the Board for consideration.

The College President must abide by the Political Activity Board Policy. According to Policy, the President must avoid personal political endorsements, fundraising, and public support for candidates or parties, acting only in ways that represent the College's institutional interests in political matters. Other designated officials may also be subject to similar restrictions, with the President authorized to set appropriate guidelines.

k. makes freely available to the Commission accurate, fair, and complete information on all aspects of the institution and its operations and ensures the institution describes itself in comparable and consistent terms to all of its accrediting and regulatory agencies.

The college provides accurate information to the Commission and all state and federal reporting agencies. Data is collected annually at the state level through the Pennsylvania Information Management System (PIMS) and at the federal level through the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). IPEDS data is used by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education to compile the college's Annual Institutional Update. Moreover, as part of the college's participation in the Pennsylvania Commission on Community Colleges, data from Penn Highlands is shared and compiled across Pennsylvania's community colleges to draw comparisons statewide on enrollment, retention, completion, and student academic outcomes.

The college also provides required data elements to the National Alliance for Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP) as part of its accreditation process. The college was reaccredited by NACEP in 2022 and is on a seven-year accreditation cycle. As part of the accreditation process, the college submits a NACEP annual report which uses basic information such as number of courses offered, number of instructors and high schools, average class size, total students participating, etc. There are also questions related to how the college meets the standards.

3. Chief Executive Officer who:

a. is appointed by, evaluated by, and reports to the governing body and shall not chair the governing body;

As mentioned in detail in Standard VII, 2f, the college President is appointed and annually evaluated by the Board of Trustees. The college President reports and is accountable to the Board of Trustees, and does not chair any Board committee or meeting. Additionally, the College President does not chair any governance entity including College Senate. Senate officers are elected from the employee or student members of the Senate. College Senate is a governance body that provides recommendations about policies or college affairs to the President and the President's Cabinet. Once at the cabinet level, recommendations can be either acted on or forwarded to the Board of Trustees for approval. The exception to this process is curricular changes proposed and approved by Faculty Senate and Vice President of Academic Affairs and Student Services. From the Vice President of Academic Affairs and Student Services, appropriate curriculum changes go directly to the Academic Affairs and Student Services Special Committee of the Board of Trustees and then to the full board for final approval.

b. has appropriate credentials and professional experience consistent with the mission of the organization;

The college President, Dr. Steve Nunez, was hired in 2020 following a national search conducted with consultation from the Association of Community College Trustees. Dr. Nunez holds an associate degree from Southwest Virginia Community College, both a bachelor's and master's degrees in biology from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech), and a doctorate in community college leadership (Ed.D.) from Ferris State University. Additionally, he has 30 years of progressive community college leadership experience including 16 years as a faculty member. Dr. Nunez has served on a multitude of community and professional boards as a representative of higher education and of Penn Highlands.

c. the authority and autonomy required to fulfill the responsibilities of the position, including developing and implementing institutional plans, staffing the organization, identifying and allocating resources, and directing the institution toward attaining the goals and objectives set forth in its mission;

The College President has the authority vested in him by the Board of Trustees and by the Board approved job description to oversee all aspects of college operations. Since his employment, the college has reviewed and created new mission, vision, and values statements, and has created

new strategic and department plans (linked to budgetary resources) that have provided the basis for institutional improvement. The President interviews all final job applicants after recommendation for hire is presented from the search committee. Only the President has the authority to hire new personnel.

The President assigns responsibility for institutional planning to appropriate staff and serves as the facilitator at board retreats to ensure input from that group. It is also the President's responsibility to oversee the fiscal health of the institution and monitor all fiscal spending.

The President is active in the community and serves on several regional boards. He is in regular contact with legislators at the local, state, and federal levels. The President communicates to his immediate reports his expectations for performance and shares his vision at weekly meetings with his cabinet.

d. has the assistance of qualified administrators, sufficient in number, to enable the Chief Executive Officer to discharge his/her duties effectively and is responsible for establishing procedures for assessing the organization's efficiency and effectiveness;

The President has sufficient number of qualified administrators to ensure effective and efficient college operations. The College President's primary direct support comes from his cabinet. The President's Cabinet is comprised of his direct reports and included the leadership of all major college departments including the Vice President of Academic Affairs and Student Services, Associate Vice President of Administration, the Associate Vice President of Finance, Associate Vice President of Technology and Analytics, Dean of Library Services and Special Projects, and Senior Vice President of Strategic Initiatives.

Many of the cabinet members have direct responsibility for the creation of operational plans that support the college's strategic plan. These include the Academic Master Plan, Strategic Enrollment Management Plan, Staffing Plan, Information Technology Plan, and Three-year Budgeting Worksheet. Each of these plans is created in support of the college's mission and strategic plan, are data driven, and are assessed continuously.

4. an administration possessing or demonstrating:

a. an organizational structure that is clearly documented and that clearly defines reporting relationships;

With a workforce of 105 full-time employees and 93 part-time employees, the College operates across multiple locations, and offers a wide range of academic programs, workforce training programs, student support programs, and community enrichment initiatives. The College's organizational chart can be accessed in the employee's myPEAK portal or on Paycom (HR web platform) and clearly documents and defines reporting relationships. Additionally, each employee's job description identifies who their direct supervisor is and the college department in which they serve.

The College's organizational structure supports its mission through collaborative leadership, shared governance, and strategic and operational planning. Led by the President and supported by a team of Vice Presidents, Associate Vice Presidents, Deans, and Directors, Penn Highlands oversees key functional areas such as Academic Affairs, Student Services, Finance and Administration, Information Technology, Security, Facilities, Human Resources, and Institutional Advancement.

When viewing the college's organization in totality, the flatness of the institution will be noted. In most cases there is only one or two steps between administrators and the President. This is a byproduct of a small organization with limited financial means to add layers of administration. The flat organizational structure, while efficient, results in administrators handling multiple roles, which may strain resources and impact long-term sustainability.

b. an appropriate size and diverse representation with relevant experience to assist the Chief Executive Officer in fulfilling his/her roles and responsibilities;

As noted above, the college operates prudently; therefore, employees are often expected to assume additional responsibilities to ensure college operations. As part of the college's strategic plan, college senior leadership and the Human Resources Department developed "a human resources (staffing) plan to create, fill, reorganize, or eliminate positions as indicated by comprehensive reviews and increase opportunities for employee learning and development."

The college, through the efforts of Cabinet members and specifically of the Associate Vice

"As Trustees, we take our role seriously, and we engage in annual evaluation not only of the President, but also of ourselves as a unit charged with the long-term success of the College."
Janet, Board of Trustee Member

President of Administration and the Human Resources Department, evaluates staffing levels across the college to right-size departments and reassign resources, using existing staffing resources, when possible, to absorb additional responsibilities. This includes utilizing existing employees' capabilities, expertise, knowledge and talents to encourage cross-training within departments, sharing resources, creating advancement opportunities, and balance workloads across the

college. Staffing levels are based on program and enrollment changes at each location. As an example, the Ebensburg location shares staff with the Blair Center, as does the Centre County location shares staff with the Huntingdon office.

The college's Staffing Plan provides data and analysis of the current positions of the college and informs the hiring process when positions become available. When positions become available, supervisors review and update job descriptions, including education requirements and job duties. These revisions are sent to the Human Resources Department and receive final approval by the President.

As the College evolves in response to regional workforce demands, enrollment fluctuations, student and employee needs and strategic planning initiatives, the college requires a forward-looking staffing approach to ensure the institution is equipped with the talent and expertise

necessary to fulfill its mission in that critical moment in time. The Staffing Plan outlines Penn Highlands' strategy for aligning its human resources with institutional priorities. Any new employee positions must be justified during the budgeting process by having definitive links to the strategic plan or assessment results. This process helps ensure that valuable resources are used to support the strategic planning initiatives.

c. members with credentials and professional experience consistent with the mission of the organization and their functional roles;

The college's administrative team has professional experience and credentials that are consistent with the mission of the organization and its functional roles. The Human Resources Department will work collaboratively with the direct supervisor and/or a Cabinet member to create a job position with relevant credential and professional experience. A review of these job descriptions will demonstrate the education and experience required for each position as well as the responsibilities and oversee each position includes. Available positions are posted on the college's website and are advertised on online job search resources and relevant higher education publications. Review of current employee credentials are available in the Human Resources Office.

d. skills, time, assistance, technology, and information systems expertise required to perform their duties;

The college provides a work ecosystem that is supported by state-of-the-art technology, information systems, and expertise with the goal of enhancing efficiency in operation. The college allows administrators to work from home, with supervisor approval, when the position's responsibilities allow. Laptop computers and a security interface to which employees may log in to access files, and software are provided to all administrators to facilitate this balance.

To support virtual work opportunities the college has a well-staffed information technology department whose responsibility is to support employees in addition to protecting the college's information networks from cyber-attacks and ensuring data redundancy. Zoom virtual technology is in place to allow for virtual meetings for administrators who work from home and at different college locations. Moreover, senate meetings, training programs such as Lunch and Learns, and Leadership Council are offered both virtually and in person to support employee participation.

In addition, the college uses the myPeak portal to assist with collaboration and information sharing. Key portal components include, but are not limited to, all college governance documents, employee forms, board approved policies, cost center management, IT and facilities requests, schedules and calendars.

e. regular engagement with faculty and students in advancing the institution's goals and objectives;

Administrators regularly engage with faculty and students to advance institutional goals and objectives. This engagement is supported by the College Congress structure, allowing for all

Senates to participate in standing and ad hoc committees for the purpose of advancing college initiatives, supporting the creation of policy, and working together to create a comfortable educational environment. This structure allows for the sharing of ideas across employee bodies such as students, staff, faculty, and administrators.

Moreover, at the beginning of each fall and spring semester, the President and President's Cabinet present college updates including strategic plan updates to all employees at the Semester Kick-Off Meeting. This presentation is available both in person and virtually to allow for participation across the college's locations.

The President presents at the start of each fall and spring semester at new student orientation to share his vision with new students. Additionally, bi-weekly email updates are distributed to all employees providing a synopsis of the important work conducted through the President's office and across all college divisions. Finally, minutes from weekly President's Cabinet meetings are shared with college employees.

The President hosts sessions with college students and employees to facilitate discussion, awareness, and to gather feedback. He meets each semester with Student Senate and Student Senate Officers as well as holds "Pizza with the President" with students across college locations. "College Talk" sessions are also held both in person and virtually with staff and faculty who do not have the opportunity to meet regularly with the President.

f. systematic procedures for evaluating administrative units and for using assessment data to enhance operations;

All administrative units are required to establish operational goals and objectives that are tied to the college's strategic and operational plans. Administrators assess efforts and actions related to the operation of their departments annually and report results and related improvements at regularly scheduled Administrative Senate meetings. A schedule of reporting, established by the Administrative Senate, ensures that all department assessments are conducted, presented, and/or reported annually. Administrative assessment reports from 2017 through 2023 are housed on the college's myPEAK portal for review. From 2024 to present, administrative assessment reports

"Penn Highlands is not just a workplace; it is a feel-good, we've-got-your-back kind of community. Knowing I play a small part in helping students succeed makes this job one of the best decisions."

-Nikki, Assistant to the Student Services Department

are contained in the Weave software platform. For example, the library gathers and analyzes usage of college databases by students for research.

Longitudinal data showed a steady decrease in usage of a database used by faculty to embed videos into courses. After conferring with faculty and results of a student survey, the library discontinued the database and instead located a new resource that has been well received by both faculty and students.

The Office of Technology and Analytics facilitates the collection of administrative college assessment data. This office uses the information to inform strategic planning performance measures, create data dashboards to enable monitoring of student outcomes such as retention and

enrollment, and support the program review process with data on graduation outcomes and financial health.

Performance evaluations for employees are conducted annually. For administrators and staff, the performance goals are determined through a collaborative discussion between an employee and their supervisor. These goals are often connected directly to the strategic plan or to an operational plan. These goals are evaluated for completion at the end of the annual cycle.

5. periodic assessment of the effectiveness of governance, leadership, and administration

The college evaluates the effectiveness of its governance, leadership, and administrative functions. Annual performance reviews for executive leaders, administrators, and staff provide structured feedback and accountability. In addition, the College Congress conducts ongoing environmental scanning to identify trends, challenges, and opportunities. Together, these processes ensure that information is consistently gathered, analyzed, and applied to support continuous institutional improvement.

The Board of Trustees conducts an annual self-assessment, per its bylaws, to ensure it is meeting the college's mission as well as to identify areas in need of improvement. Additionally, it conducts the annual review of the President which may include a 360 evaluative review by college employees. Both methods allow the Board to ensure continuous improvement of its processes, procedures, and oversight. This process also enables the President to make improvements to his leadership of and communication with the employees and students at the college. For example, following a 360-evaluation process, the President learned that college staff with whom he does not regularly interact were interested in more direct communication and the opportunity to ask questions. As a result, the President implemented "College Talks" to provide non-managerial employees a regularly scheduled opportunity to hear important college updates and ask questions.

Administrators and staff are engaged in a process of continuous feedback and review through the annual performance review process. The review is facilitated through the college's PayCom employee data management system and provides a review process and form that provides the opportunity for self-reflection, feedback for supervisors, and goal setting for the coming year. Faculty are evaluated annually as set forth by the Collective Bargaining Agreement and includes portfolio review, observations as appropriate, and administrative conferences with academic leadership.

The College President recently led collaborative efforts to review and revise the college's governance process, specifically updating the Constitution of the College Congress and College Senate Bylaws. The President convened a group of officers from each Senate to review the results of the governance survey and to provide recommendations for improvement. Such assessment has led to improvements such as the streamlining of the College Senate Standing Committee structure and improvement in the effectiveness of the governance process.

Conclusion

The college has a well-functioning governance structure including an ethical and community focused Board of Trustees who ensure that the college is meeting state and federal guidelines, has a well-established strategic plan, and who appoints and evaluates the College President. Vesting power in the President to be the Chief Operating and Executive Officer allows the Board to have a hands-off approach to college operations while holding the President accountable. Communication between the Board of Trustees and the President is accomplished through regularly scheduled meetings and all actions taken at these meetings are publicly communicated ensuring transparency.

The College President is hired by the Board and has the appropriate credentials and experience to oversee college operations. He is supported by a qualified cabinet and administrative staff who ensure that the operations of the college are effective and efficient and that the college works toward accomplishing goals identified in strategic or operational plans.

The President has also collaborated with the Board of Trustees and the College's Foundation to review and revise their bylaws. Although this process was ad hoc and responsive to immediate needs, it resulted in a reliable set of rules that provide essential structure for Board governance.

Commendations

1. Clear articulation of roles and responsibilities across the Board, President's Cabinet, and College Congress fosters inclusive decision-making and accountability.
2. The Board conducts annual self-assessments, adheres to conflict-of-interest policies, and provides professional development opportunities for trustees, ensuring adherence to best practices.
3. The President and the President's Cabinet members possess credentials and experience aligned with the college's mission, supported by systematic evaluation processes.
4. Regular reviews of bylaws, governance training, and feedback-driven initiatives (e.g., College Talks) demonstrate responsiveness to stakeholder input.
5. Information technology infrastructure supports remote work, virtual meetings, and data-driven decision-making through platforms like Weave and PayCom.

Opportunities for Improvement

1. The flat organizational structure, while efficient, results in administrators handling multiple roles, which may strain resources and impact long-term sustainability.
2. Financial limitations restrict the ability to expand administrative layers or add specialized roles, potentially impacting strategic initiatives.
3. The College's governance structure (e.g., constitution and bylaws) have been reviewed on a as needed basis. A more formalized review structure would provide continuity even during administrative turnover.

Evidence

360-review of the President
Administrative by-laws
Administrative Senate assessment schedule

Board of Trustee annual retreat agenda
Board of Trustee bi-weekly email updates
Board of Trustees self-evaluation tool
College governance training agenda
College President Curriculum Vitae
College President job description
College Senate by-laws
Conflict of Interest Policy
Constitution of the College Congress
Disclosure of Conflict-of-Interest Form
Employee Governance Survey
Executive Committee minutes
External Affairs Committee minutes
Faculty Senate by-laws
Financial audit
Governance survey 2024-2025
Leadership Council agendas
Lunch and Learn agendas
NACEP annual report
Operating and capital budget summary
Organizational chart
Political Activity Board Policy
President's Cabinet Curriculum Vitae on file in HR Office
President's Cabinet minutes – sample
Semester Kick-off meeting agendas
Special committees of the Board of Trustee minutes
Staff Senate by-laws
Staffing Plan
Statement of net position
Statement of revenue and expenditures

Acknowledgements

Pennsylvania Highlands Community College had an all-inclusive approach to self-study review. The following structure shows the composition of the Steering Committee and the working groups for each standard.

Steering Committee

Co-chairs

Yvette Madison, Professor, Social Work

Dr. Barbara Zaborowski, Dean of Library Services and Special Projects

Members*

Ashley Burkhardt, Academic Operations Specialist (Standard 2)

Laura Gaunt, Assistant Professor, Health Care Professions (Standard 7)

Alex Kirby, Instruction & Online Services Librarian (Standard 3)

Ashley Krinjeck, Director of Student Financial Services (Standard 1)

Joe Slifko, Professor, Business Management (Standard 6)

Matthew Stumpf, Assistant Professor, English (Standard 5)

Michelle Stumpf, Dean of Enrollment Services & Registrar (Standard 4)

Gary Boast, Associate VP of Technology and Analytics

*Students will be added to both the Steering Committee and to the Working Groups in the second year of the process to ensure they will be available for the team visit.

Standard 1 – Mission and Goals

Co-Chairs

Ashley Krinjeck, Director of Student Financial Services

Sherri Slavick, Professor, Physical Sciences

Members

Sonya Augustine, Executive Assistant to Administrative Operations

Scott Beamer, Admissions Coordinator

Dr. Rick Bukoski, Associate Professor, Communication & Media Studies

Mindy Nitch, Director, Student Success Center

Brad O'Hara, Instructor, Biological Sciences

Dave Williams, Desktop Systems Specialist

Standard 2 – Ethics and Integrity

Co-Chairs

Ashley Burkhardt, Academic Operations Specialist

Matthew Hoffman, Chief Information Officer

Members

Tiffany Byers, Senior HR Generalist

Nicole Turin, Instructor, Medical Coding & Billing

Michaela Long, Regional Center Director, Somerset and Penn Highlands Online

Amber Mangus, Service Worker

Marie Polka, Professor of Mathematics

Thomasa Pridgen, Student Records Coordinator

Raymond Weible, Jr., Executive Director of Marketing & Communications

Linda Wess, Assistant Director, Financial Aid

Standard 3 – Design and Delivery of The Student Learning Experience

Co-Chairs

Alexander Kirby, Instruction and Online Services Librarian

Kay-Leigh Davis, Dean of Academic Affairs

Members

Brenda Brewer, Admissions Coordinator, Somerset

Daniella Cope, Professor, Psychology

Adrianne Kuhar, Student Engagement & Athletics Specialist

Mike Lucas, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Specialist

Jill Mitchell, Professor, Biological Sciences

Wayde Simington, Assistant Professor, Mathematics

John Zlater, Cloud Analyst

Standard 4 – Support of the Student Experience

Co-chairs

Michelle Stumpf, Dean of Enrollment Services & Registrar

Robin Hughes, Associate Professor, Mathematics

Members

Matthew Bodenschatz, Executive Director of Recruiting & Admissions

Suzanne Brugh, Director of Student Activities & Athletics

Pamela Buseck, Student Services Coordinator, Blair

Dr. Robert Clark, Professor, Criminal Justice & Social Sciences

Bridget Hall, Counselor

Missi Hanley, Senior Assistant Registrar

Hannah Ross, Admissions Specialist

Nancy Webb, Student Accounts Manager

Standard 5 – Educational Effectiveness Assessment

Co-Chairs

Matthew Stumpf, Assistant Professor, English

Erica Reighard, Dean of Faculty

Members

Dr. Morgan Dugan, Associate Professor, Early Childhood Education

Dr. Larry Goetz, Keystone Education Yields Success (KEYS) Program Coordinator

Dane Lamont, School Partnerships Specialist

Mary Ann McCurdy, Professor, Mathematics

Ben Mostoller, Senior Advising Specialist

Jason Wojcik, Professor, History & Cultural Studies

Standard 6 – Planning, Resources and Institutional Improvement

Co-Chairs

Joe Slifko, Professor, Business Management

Katie Markum, Staff Accountant

Members

Melissa Boback, Associate Professor, Accounting
Julie Davis, Director of Workforce and Continuing Education
Cregg Dibert, Director of Police Academy and Campus Security
Susan Fisher, Associate Vice President of Administration
Sandy Schrum, Professor, Business Management
George Soika, Accountant

Standard 7 – Governance, Leadership, and Administration

Co-Chairs

Laura Gaunt, Assistant Professor, Health Care Professions
Marissa Davis, Regional Center Director, Centre and Huntingdon

Members

Tim Haberkorn, Assistant Director of Recruiting & Admissions
Lance Harshbarger, Instructor, English
Greg Paonessa, Assistant Professor, Computer Technology
Brad Rosemas, Integrated Marketing & Communications Specialist
Lucas Swartz, Network Administrator
Julia Taylor, Dual Enrollment Specialist
Sally Tiracave, Assistant to the Vice President of Academic Affairs