

SUSQUEHANNA RIVER VALLEY UPTURN

Penn State's landscape architecture program focuses on downtown revitalization

A NEW GEISINGER MEDICAL FACILITY brings traffic to downtown Danville, Pa., but the central business district remains plagued with aging buildings, struggling businesses and a lack of recreational options.

Danville has turned to the planning and design expertise in Penn State's landscape architecture program for help in its revitalization efforts, becoming the third Susquehanna River Valley community—following Selinsgrove and Sunbury—to do so. “We enlisted Penn State's help to not only conserve our quality of life but also to develop a community vision to enhance it through a planned balancing of economic, recreational and aesthetic factors,” said Jim Wilson, executive director of the Danville Business Alliance.

As urban sprawl from Philadelphia, Wilkes-Barre and Lehigh Valley creeps into the Susquehanna River Valley, more towns are employing revitalization strategies to conserve their small town character. Selinsgrove, Sunbury and Danville received funding from the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Main Street Program and other sources to aid their downtown economic development efforts.

Residents' Input Guides Process

While urban sprawl is not a direct threat to Danville, awareness of the problem led the town to seek Penn State's assistance. Assistant Professor Caru Bowns and her fourth- and fifth-year landscape architecture students are working with Danville residents in a community-wide effort to revitalize the downtown. Students collected input from community members through public workshops and surveys during the fall and completed the master plan in December.



Students go to a community meeting in Danville, where the business district is struggling.

Like the projects in Selinsgrove and Sunbury, “community input guides the students' planning as they come up with ways to revive Danville's civic spaces and also address commercial and recreational opportunities,” said Bowns.

Both Selinsgrove and Sunbury are implementing their master plan recommendations. Sunbury, for example, has issued an RFP (request for proposal) for the final design of shops and restaurants in Stroh Alley, previously an unsafe and neglected area in the central business district. “When projects move forward, it gives credence to the viability of the university and community collaboration,” said Bowns.

—Amy Milgrub Marshall

DIVERSITY TRAINING

TEACHERS ARE PERHAPS MOST APT to see changing demographics in Pennsylvania communities—through the different faces and languages in their classrooms. Joseph Roy, assistant superintendent for the Springfield Township School District in Montgomery County, finds that now it's more important than ever for teachers to work on understanding the different cultural backgrounds of their students. "Our district has been very proactive to insure that we embrace diversity and focus on equity," said Roy.

In a new partnership, the district has been working with Dr. Carla Chamberlin-Quinlisk, associate professor of communication arts and sciences at Penn State Abington and coordinator of the campus' Center for Intercultural Leadership and Communication, on a new professional development workshop for the district's teachers that aims to break cultural barriers.

The Teachers as Intercultural Leaders program, offered through Continuing Education, looks at cultural identity and how stereotypes and prejudices are formed and maintained—focusing on how individuals see the world and why they see it that way, said Quinlisk. With three full days of training in the fall, followed by five two-hour sessions over the winter and spring, "the participants learn over time," explained Quinlisk.



Changing demographics in classrooms call for intercultural education.

"The program is focused on building effective relationships. You don't just unlearn your prejudices and stereotypes in one afternoon; this really is a developmental process."

The workshops take participants through an interactive and reflective route of learning about communication, language and culture in school settings, allowing teachers to share their experiences.

One exercise required participants to meet with their students' parents to learn about their cultural backgrounds. "Our teachers ... need to understand not only that where they come from impacts how they see others—but that they also need to communicate to make sure they understand where students and parents are coming from," said Roy, adding that he hopes to extend the program to more teachers in the future.

—Kristen Smith

What's New Online:

MASTER OF PROFESSIONAL STUDIES—HUMAN RESOURCES AND EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS

EVEN WITHOUT THE POOR ECONOMY

and massive layoffs, the field of human resources and employment relations has become increasingly complex. "Compensation and benefit programs, salaries, employment and labor laws—the field is rapidly evolving," said Dr. Paul Clark, professor and head of the Department of Labor Studies and Employment Relations in the College of the Liberal Arts.

That's why the department and Penn State World Campus are offering the new online degree, Master of Professional Studies in Human Resources and Employment Relations.

"This program meets a need for professionals in the field who want to improve their expertise and further their career but who do not have access to a residential master's program or can't participate in one because of their schedule," said Clark.

The program has exceeded enrollment expectations: There were 90 students enrolled in the fall, with approximately 50 additional students this spring.

"The program has been so useful and applicable that I can't wait to get to the next assignment," said Daniel Geltrude, program participant and owner of the accounting firm Geltrude & Company, LLC, based in Nutley, N.J.

—Melissa W. Kaye