

EOC HAPPENINGS

Southwestern Pennsylvania

Vol. 4, No. 1

A NEWSLETTER BY PENN STATE'S EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY CENTERS OF SWPA

April 2006

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Office of the Vice Provost for Educational Equity

The Director's Cut



Rick Roberts

Welcome to *EOC Happenings*. This edition marks a year of exciting opportunities and changes within Penn State's Educational Opportunity Centers of Southwestern Pennsylvania.

The EOC added two new staff members, Lisa Deihl as the educational counselor and Tiffanee Heywood as the new educational liaison. Both bring unique talents to EOC and are a pleasure to work with.

This year will also mark the fifteenth year of operation for the Educational Opportunity Centers of Southwestern Pennsylvania. The EOC has assisted more than **18,000** individuals in applying for postsecondary education, assisted more than **19,000** individuals in applying for financial aid, and helped more than **6,000** participants enroll in postsecondary education. As many of you know, the EOC is in the midst of writing a grant proposal to receive continued funding from the United States Department of Education. The EOC, in collaboration with local community-based agencies, has been successful in serving the residents of Southwestern Pennsylvania since 1991 and is confident that the center will be refunded. The EOC is proud of its accomplishments.

By working closely with community-based agencies the Educational Opportunity Centers recruited more than 2,000 new participants during the 2004-05 program year and 712 EOC students enrolled in postsecondary programs of study. This is a testament to the wonderful, dedicated staff at the EOC of Southwestern Pennsylvania. I would also like to acknowledge the continued unwavering support given to the EOC by the chancellors at Penn State McKeesport (Dr. Curtis Porter), Penn State Beaver (Dr. Gary Keefer), and Penn State Fayette, The Eberly Campus (Dr. Gregory Gray). With their continued commitment to the EOC and staff we are able to serve the residents of Southwestern Pennsylvania and help them reach their educational goals.

Thank you to all of our collaborating agencies and individuals. Without your support and commitment the dream of postsecondary education for many people would remain just that, a dream. The EOC will continue our work in helping low-income, first-generation college adults fulfill lifelong goals of obtaining education, great careers, and an improved standard of living.

I hope *EOC Happenings* will be a resource for you. We will continue to keep you informed about EOC activities, in addition to important issues in higher education, labor and industry, as well as important related topics. Please visit our Web site at www.equity.psu.edu/eocswpa. Together we can make a difference!

Participants Visit the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame



The EOC hosted another successful educationally enriched, entertainment filled cultural trip. On Saturday, August 6, 2005, participants traveled to Cleveland, Ohio.

The day trip provided an opportunity for program participants to tour historical John Carroll University (JCU). The school is nestled comfortably in the heart of University Heights. Participants learned that the private, coeducational, Catholic and Jesuit university provides programs in liberal arts, science, and business at the undergraduate level and in selected major areas at the master's level.

Lunch at the Hard Rock Café (HRC) proved to be an amazing experience for all. Through an astounding collection of classic guitars, other instruments, posters, costumes, music, lyric sheets, album art, platinum and gold LP's, and photos, participants received a comprehensive visual of the history of rock-n-roll. They also learned that the memorabilia collection of more than 60,000 pieces rotates to more than 121 HRC's in over forty countries.

After lunch the EOC participants perused the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum at their leisure. The museum is made up of a dynamic array of priceless artifacts. The collection is a repository for rock and rolls most celebrated artists.

Prior to the trip, participants possessed a minimal amount of knowledge about Cleveland, John Carroll University, and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum. Through evaluation, participants reported that they gained a significant amount of knowledge as a result of their experiences. Thus validating that when individuals are exposed to a community and culture widely divergent from their own, it is an opportunity for them to learn, grow, and begin to plan or continue a program of postsecondary education. Everyone had a great time and made suggestions to visit other destinations for cultural outings.

EOC Participants Speak Up!

“From the moment I met Rick, to the on-campus interview—by the first day of class I had acceptance, an apartment, class schedule.....I could never negate the positive influence the Educational Opportunity Center provided.”

Chaquita B.

“I'm glad I talked to Lisa, she gave me a new perspective. I wish I had known her three years ago.”

Michelle O.

“Connie gave me hope with funding assistance for school.”

Jeanne U.

“I did not realize how out-of-touch my skills had gotten and how much I needed to learn. The workshop was a wake-up reality check for me.”

Melissa F.

You're Invited

EVENT: EOC Open House

DATE: Wednesday, May 3, 2006

TIME: 3:30–6:00 p.m.
Awards program begins at 4:30 p.m.

LOCATION: Penn State Beaver
Special Events Room
Student Union Building

Please RSVP to Patty Forrest at 1-800-378-6230 or via e-mail at paf13@psu.edu by Wednesday, April 26, 2006.

Visit our Web site at
www.equity.psu.edu/eocswpa

Congratulations EOC Enrollees!

More than 700 EOC participants enrolled this year at the following postsecondary schools:

Academy of Court Reporting	Median School of Health and Business
All State Career School	Mercy Hospital
All State Truck Driving	Mercyhurst College
Art Institute of Pittsburgh	Millersville University
Asbury College	Mutual Aid Ambulance
Belmont University	New Horizons
Bidwell Training Center	Newport Business Institute
Bud Truck Driving School	North Fayette Area Vocational Technical School
Butler County Community College	Ohio University
California University of Pennsylvania	Penn State Altoona
Cambria Rowe Business College	Penn State Beaver
Career Training Academy	Penn State Fayette
Community College of Allegheny County (CCAC)	Penn State McKeesport
CCAC Boyce	Penn State New Kensington
CCAC Allegheny	The Pennsylvania State University
CCAC North	Pennsylvania Institute of Technology
CCAC South	Philadelphia Biblical University
CCAC Washington	Phoenix University
Cheyney University	Pittsburgh School of Massage Therapy
Citizens Hospital	Pittsburgh Technical Institute
Clarion County Career Center	Point Park University
Clarion University	Robert Morris University
Coach U	Rosedale Technical Institute
Community College of Beaver County	Seton Hill University
DCI Career Institute	Sewickley Valley Hospital
Dean Institute of Technology	Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania
Douglas Education Center	South Hills Beauty Academy
Drexel University	Saint Vincent College
DuBois Business College	Statford Career Institute
Duff's Business Institute	Tack Operating School
Duquesne University	TDDS Technical Institute
Edinboro University	Thaddeus Stevens College of Technology
Education and Technology Institute	Thiel College
Empire Beauty School	Training, Inc.
Fairmont State University	Triangle Tech
Fayette County Vocational Technical School	Truck Technology Training
Florence-Darlington Technical College	University of Maryland
Gannon University	University of Nebraska
Geneva College	University of Northwestern Ohio
Goodwill Employment Training Center	University of Pittsburgh
Greene County Vocational Technical School	University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown
Grove City College	Washington Jefferson College
Hobart Welding School	Waynesburg College
ICM School of Business and Medical Careers	West Chester University of Pennsylvania
Indiana County Career and Technology Center	West Virginia Career Institute
Jefferson Technical College	West Virginia University
Jefferson County DuBois Area Vocational Technology	Western Area Vocational Technical School
LaRoche College	Western School of Health and Business Careers
Laurel Business Institute	Westmoreland County Community College (WCCC)
Lehigh University	WCCC at Waynesburg
Lenape Vocational Technical School	Youngstown State University
Lincoln University	

Welcome Our Newest Team Members



The Educational Opportunity Center welcomes Ms. Lisa Diehl, educational counselor, to the staff. With a background in education and experience working with diverse populations, Lisa is excited to return to Penn State as a staff member of the Educational Opportunity Centers of Southwestern Pennsylvania. She began counseling and educating low-income children and parents in her hometown of Johnstown, Pennsylvania, as a social worker and facilitator at a nonprofit agency. After her move to Pittsburgh in 1999, she expanded her knowledge and gained classroom experience in both public and private high school settings while teaching English and GED classes to young adults. In addition, she has also taught computer classes to adults and facilitated groups for teens at the Carnegie

Library of Pittsburgh's Hazelwood branch. Lisa hopes to continue helping potential students reach their goals and achieve success. Lisa's target counties include Allegheny, Indiana, and Westmoreland.

Lisa attended Penn State as a first-generation student, earning a bachelor of science degree in secondary education. She later earned a master's in education from Indiana University of Pennsylvania's Monroeville Graduate and Professional Center.



The Educational Opportunity Center also welcomes Ms. Tiffanee Heywood, our new educational liaison. Tiffanee brings with her a diverse background regarding low-income, first-generation students. She currently works as the program coordinator for the West Mifflin, Pennsylvania Boys and Girls Club. She is a TRIO alum having been a student with the Penn State Talent Search program at Duquesne High School.

Ms. Heywood has an associates degree from Community College of Allegheny County and earned her bachelor of arts degree in communication from Chatham College in Pittsburgh. It is great to have Tiffanee on board with the EOC.

EOC Staff Sketch: Cheryl Sorrentino



A dedication to helping others goes beyond the EOC participants. Cheryl Sorrentino, administrative aide for the Educational Opportunity Center, also fulfills another important role at the McKeesport campus. She is chairperson for Penn State McKeesport's Commission for Women, an organization for staff, faculty, and students that encourages both men and women to join. According to Cheryl, "We suggest changes in existing policies and facilitate the creation of new policies that improve the climate for women within the university and community. By doing this, we're dedicated to the configuration and preservation of relationships within the university and community-based organizations that are geared toward issues concerning women and diversity." Since October 2004, Cheryl has been responsible for presiding over meetings, coordinating communication among its members, overseeing event planning, and coordinating fund-raising efforts for the commission itself as well as for charity-based projects. She also serves as the McKeesport campus Commission for Women liaison and collaborates with the Commission for Women at University Park.

The commission holds an annual spring luncheon open to both campus and community members. In addition, the commission has sponsored the PALLY project on campus, collecting new and gently-used teddy bears to distribute to children victims and witnesses of domestic violence. In addition, the commission has solicited and donated T-shirts as part of the Clothespin project. Children affected by domestic violence decorated and displayed the t-shirts to promote domestic violence awareness, as well as to symbolize their strength and resiliency.

Counselor's Corner

Tax help equals FAFSA help



To apply for federal and state grants and student loans, all students must complete and submit a Free Application for Federal Student Aid or FAFSA. On that

form, students and parents of students under the age of 24 must supply their income and tax information, which is made much easier once students and parents complete their federal tax returns. Well, tax time is almost here! On April 15, millions of last-minute tax filers will rush to the post office to get their tax returns postmarked by the deadline.

Completing and filing a tax return is an unpleasant and inconvenient task for some, and it can be difficult or downright impossible for others. Many people prefer to hand over their hard-earned money or a portion of their refund to tax preparation companies or accountants rather than try to make sense of deductions, adjusted gross salaries, exemptions, and credits—never mind the instructions! Some people, anxious to receive their refund quickly, fall prey to the “Instant Refund” claims and forfeit a large portion of their refund to unknowingly borrow their own money, paying huge fees for what is actually a “refund anticipation loan.” Others neglect to file their taxes altogether, putting themselves at risk for costly penalties and possible criminal charges, as well as making it harder to apply for educational financial aid. Fortunately, two sources of FREE help are available to low-to-moderate income wage earners that can make filing taxes easy and provide you with the correct and accurate information that will, in turn, make your FAFSA easier to complete. First, Free Filing via the Internet is available to those taxpayers who make an adjusted gross income of \$50,000 or less. Some popular tax companies offer a user-friendly, online version of their popular at-home software programs (TurboTax and/or Tax cut, for example). In most cases, the programs ask the user for specific information and decide what type of return to file, what deductions are available, and what calculations to make based on the information the user provides.

Upon completion, the user can print out and mail the return. Some programs also allow you to e-file for free, speeding up the process and, in some cases, providing a refund in as little as ten days. A list of companies that offer these services through the IRS is available on the IRS Web site (www.irs.gov).

Because each company has different eligibility criteria, be sure to carefully read each company's guidelines before choosing a site to use. Look for sites that offer free e-filing as well.

If you would like to try Free File yourself but do not own a personal computer, remember that most libraries offer free computer usage to the public. Contact your local library for availability, usage rules, and especially time limit policies.



Ask about saving your work or getting a time limit increase if you don't think you can finish in the allotted time, especially if you're a “newbie.” Most

library staff will be pleased to help with the computers, so don't be shy!

Secondly, volunteer tax preparers at VITA (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance) sites complete taxes for low- to moderate-income individuals with salaries of \$37,000 for free! VITA sites operate from February 1 to April 15; however, the best time to visit a VITA site is the middle of February. Some sites even offer free e-filing. To find your local VITA sites, which are sponsored by libraries, community centers, and agencies in many areas, you should call the IRS toll-free number at 1-800-829-1040. If you call a VITA site, ask if they e-file. When you visit, it is very important to take along your prior year's tax return. You will also need to bring photo identification; social security numbers and birthdates for yourself, your spouse, and any dependents; current year's tax package (if you have it); W-2's for yourself and spouse from ALL employers; bank statements, bank routing and account numbers (for direct deposit); day care expenses and provider's number; and, if filing jointly, both spouses need to be present for signatures.

(By the way, much of the same information is necessary to complete your FAFSA.)

To receive financial aid and get back into a postsecondary institution, you will need to complete a FAFSA. Remember that the FAFSA is very difficult to complete if you supply missing or incorrect tax information, and inaccurate information often slows the process and makes your FAFSA more vulnerable to an audit. You can complete the FAFSA using estimated salary and tax information; however, you will end up submitting corrections anyway once you do file your taxes. To speed up the financial aid process, please be sure to file your income tax return and to always save a copy for yourself. To ease the pain of filing your income tax return, take advantage of the Free Filing option and VITA program described above. Filing your taxes takes you one step closer to reaching your educational goals. As always, call the Educational Opportunity Centers for assistance in completing your FAFSA.

Coverdell Education Savings Accounts (ESA)

The Coverdell ESA is a great way to save for a child's education. The ESA, formerly know as an Education IRA, works very much like a retirement account. It allows annual after-tax contributions of up to \$2,000 per year until the child reaches the age of 18 (special needs exceptions may apply). The earnings in the account are completely tax free if the money is used to pay for qualified education expenses such as tuition, equipment, fees, and even room and board, anytime before the child reaches the age of 30. For additional information go to www.savingforcollege.com.



Tai Yim's Kung-Fu Dragon Dance

On March 16, 2005, the Educational Opportunity Center hosted sixty enthusiastic young students from the Young Inspiration, Inc. program at Penn State Fayette, The Eberly Campus. The students thoroughly enjoyed the fun and festive atmosphere provided by the Tai Yim's Kung-Fu Dragon Dance team. The exciting dance team has been performing in the United States for many years. The dragon dance is very dynamic and requires a good sense of teamwork.

During the show, the Young Inspiration students had an opportunity to interact with the dance team, learn a few of their Kung-Fu movement skills, and dress in some of their colorful dragon garb. The students' laughter and applause echoed throughout the auditorium. To cap the evenings program, the children enjoyed cookies, chips, and soda.

Penn State McKeesport's Open House



The Educational Opportunity Center of Southwestern Pennsylvania celebrated another successful, fun-filled year by hosting our annual open house on Tuesday, June 7, 2005. The event took place in the new student community center on the campus of Penn State McKeesport. A special thanks to all of the EOC and Penn State McKeesport staff, community members, supporting agencies, organizations, and program participants who shared their time with us during the afternoon. Thank you for all of your continued dedication to the EOC.

Among the faces in the crowd were Dr. W. Terrell Jones, vice provost for Educational Equity; Dr. Thomas Poole, associate vice provost for Educational Equity; and Geri Weilacher, assistant to the vice provost for Educational Equity, who traveled from the University Park campus. Thank you for your ongoing support. We also would like to thank Dr. Curtiss Porter, chancellor, Penn State McKeesport, for his kind words and opening remarks.

Several individuals were honored at our annual awards ceremony. Two of those individuals received our "Friend of EOC" award. This award is presented to those organizations and postsecondary institutions who have gone above and beyond in supporting the EOC program and our participants. Among this year's recipients were Kathleen (Micki) McDonough from the Community College of Allegheny County's New Choices/ New Options program and Jan Grabowski, director of Admissions at Westmoreland County Community College. Thank you for your collaboration and assistance to the participants of the EOC. Two of our program participants, Nicole Ponzetti and Brian Cottom, were honored with the EOC Perseverance Award for their continued drive and dedication in achieving their educational goals. Congratulations!

As always, everyone enjoyed the grand prize drawings at the conclusion of the event. Thank you again for another exciting and successful year.



In the Spotlight

Robert McKay (EOC Fayette)
By: JoAnn Harris

Robert McKay has been a dedicated participant in the Educational Opportunity Centers program since January 2004. Bob came to the EOC seeking admission and financial aid assistance with a dream to major in nursing and become a registered nurse. Bob enrolled at Penn State Fayette, The Eberly Campus in fall 2004. Since his enrollment, he has been named to the Dean's List and maintains a 4.0 grade-point average. In fall 2005, he was accepted into the nursing program.

Bob is helping to assist students at Penn State Fayette in attaining their goals. He is a student advocate and a tutor to many of these students. Quite often, you will find him tutoring students in the lounge or just offering them a helping hand.

Bob is an adult student who has overcome many personal obstacles that have stagnated his personal and academic growth. He is a focused, strong, caring, and friendly person who has found the strength and the perseverance to overcome his personal tragedies and circumstances. He says he has not received any tangible awards, but has found peace with himself, faith and hope for a better future. Bob is pursuing his dream.

Amanda Allison (EOC Beaver)
By: Connie Kugel

When you first look at this vibrant young lady you think that she is your typical teenager—carefree, fun-loving, and wanting to live life to the fullest, while hanging out with her friends. Yes, these words do characterize Amanda Allison, but she is so much more.

Ever since she was in second grade, this 2005 graduate from New Brighton High School, (my alma mater, Go Lions!), has wanted to be an elementary school teacher. She made this choice from being influenced by her Aunt Kelly, a teacher in North Carolina, who would bring her old school books to use when playing school with the neighborhood kids. Amanda never budged nor waivered in her career choice even through those difficult years of change and exploration that kids go through. An elementary school teacher...yep...that was her first and final answer.

In February 2002, Amanda had a slight set-back when she was diagnosed with Osteosarcoma, a type of bone cancer. During her treatment, she received a total knee replacement, had a six-inch rod placed in her femur, and underwent twenty-six chemotherapy treatments that ended with a clean bill of health. She thought she was over the big health obstacle in her life, but then had another one jump up two months before she was to start Penn State Beaver in fall 2005. She was diagnosed with Osteosarcoma in her right lung, which required the removal of the lower lobe of her right lung. At the time, she thought she would have to postpone her admission until the spring 2006 term in order to recover and go through another series of chemotherapy. Days before the semester started, Amanda was given a clean bill of health and she started her pursuit of her dream to become a teacher. She will need to have check-ups every three months for several years, but is grateful that she doesn't have to go through extensive treatment.

Amanda is matriculating at Penn State Beaver with slight challenges, but has faith that she will do better. Her outlook on life is that she doesn't take things for granted and lives day-by-day. Stress FREE! She never lets things get to her and goes with the flow. She has the ability to touch the lives of the people she comes in contact with on a daily basis and we are better people because she has come into our lives. The most incredible thing about her dream is that she wants to come back to the Beaver County area to teach and give back to the community that she grew up in, which is something that you don't often find today.

I am grateful to have the opportunity to work with her. I have a deep sense of admiration for her with all that she has overcome. I know that she will be a great teacher and will touch the lives of the many generations to come. Amanda, keep up the incredible job and remember to live by this motto: "Believe in yourself and in your goals no matter how impossible things may seem!"

EOC Collaborating Agencies

It is with our sincere thanks that we acknowledge the following agencies for their collaboration by sponsoring workshops, making referrals, and/or providing other kinds of support:

Action Housing, Inc.
 Adult Learning Center
 Aliquippa Alliance for Unity and Development
 Aliquippa Communities That Care
 Allegheny County Department of Human Services
 Allegheny County Prison
 Allegheny Intermediate Unit 8
 Allegheny Valley Employment
 Americorps
 Another Way
 Arbor Youth Program
 Area Vocational Technical School (AVTS)
 Arin I.U. #28
 Armstrong Educational Trust
 Arsenal Family and Children's Center
 Auberle
 Braddock Regional Center
 CareerTrack-Indiana and Armstrong
 Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh
 Job Career and Educational Center (JCEC)
 Communities in Schools
 Connecting You—Mercy Hospital
 Even Start-Mon Valley
 Fayette County Community Action Agency
 Fayette County Housing Authority
 Goodwill Industries
 Greater Pittsburgh Literacy Council
 Head Start-Braddock
 Head Start-Fayette County
 Hill House Association Out of School Program

Hosanna House
 Job Links - Oakland
 Lifeswork
 Lydia Place
 McKeesport Collaborative
 Mon Valley Initiative
 Mon Valley Providers Counsel
 NEED, Inc.
 Neighborhood Living Project
 New Choices/New Options (NC/NO)
 (NC/NO) - Indiana
 (NC/NO) - Carlow College
 (NC/NO) - CCAC
 Norwin Public Library
 Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR)
 Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency (AES/
 PHEAA)
 PIC - Westmoreland
 Pittsburgh Regional Service Center
 Private Industry Council—Fayette
 Private Industry Council—Westmoreland
 Reintegration Project
 Renewal, Inc.
Team PA CareerLink Centers:
 Airport Corridor Connection/Allegheny CareerLink West
 Alle Kiski CareerLink
 Armstrong County CareerLink
 Beaver County CareerLink
 Fayette County CareerLink

Lenape Vocational Technical School
 Mon Valley CareerLink
 Pittsburgh CareerLink
 Pittsburgh CareerLink East
 Punxsutawney CareerLink
 Southwestern Community Action
 Tri-County Workforce Investment Board
 Urban League of Pittsburgh
 Urban Youth Action
 VA Medical Center-Pittsburgh
 Washington Hospital Teen Outreach
 Westmoreland County Prison
 Westmoreland Human Opportunities, Inc.
 Young Inspiration, Inc.
 Youthbuild - East Hills
 YouthWorks

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