

# UAEA

UNIVERSITY ADVANCEMENT & EXTERNAL AFFAIRS



ANNUAL REPORT  
2024 – 2025



*Living the UAEEA Mission:*  
**Advancing with Purpose**

In its fourth year, UAEEA moved beyond its formative stage and firmly established itself as a division advancing the university's mission. In 2024–2025, UAEEA marked not first steps but significant achievements—through strong internal partnerships, expanded community collaborations, and visible leadership in major university events. This report highlights the purposeful ways UAEEA advanced its mission with purpose and impact.



### *A Message from the Vice President*

As the vice president, I am delighted to present the division's accomplishments from this past year. Although this marks the fourth year of University Advancement & External Affairs (UAEA), it is the third annual report. This report is a testament to the impact and successful journey of University UAEA thus far. This year, we made significant progress because of the solid and dynamic leadership team that supports the division at large, each other, and our students in all that they do. While these achievements are an indication of the division's stability and progress, we are pressing forward with new goals and objectives that will support our students as they matriculate in, though, and out of the university. In addition to the results shared by members of this division, I am

also pleased with the work of the West Chester University Foundation and Office of Alumni Engagement. This team exceeded their capital campaign goal and is positioning themselves to continue supporting the priorities of the university. This annual report will highlight many of the achievements of the Division of University Advancement & External Affairs and our partners at the WCU Foundation and Alumni Engagement.

Sincerely,

**Zebulun Davenport, Ed.D.**

## Presidential Inauguration

In the spring of 2025, the vice president for UAEA assembled a team of four staff members from various areas to form a core team to lead the planning and execution of the inauguration of the 16th president of West Chester University. The core team came from University Advancement & External Affairs, the President's Office, Conference Services, and Communications & Marketing. Along with the larger, university-wide 20-person planning committee, a week-long celebration of this historic event was organized, culminating in the inauguration of the university's second female president.

The committee created a week of events not just to celebrate the presidential inauguration, but also the campus community, featuring five themes each day: Celebrating Women, the Spirit, the Heart, Research Excellence, and the Next Chapter of WCU. Each event throughout the week was hugely successful, capturing the joy and pride of the campus.

On Friday, March 28, 2025, WCU welcomed PASSHE and elected officials, members of the surrounding community, as well as university

faculty, staff, and students to the swearing-in ceremony of Dr. R. Lorraine (Laurie) Bernotsky. Following the official ceremony, members of the university, the community, and WCU alumni joined the new president and her spouse, Michael Bray, for dinner and dancing at the annual Presidential Gala held at the Longwood Gardens Conservatory. This year's gala raised \$58,779 to support the next chapter of student success and experiential learning at WCU.

## The President's Speaker Series

As part of its commitment to elevate public discourse and spotlight extraordinary leadership, UAEA proudly contracted and led the coordination of a marquee event in the 2024–2025 academic year: a live conversation with acclaimed journalist Robin Roberts, co-anchor of ABC's Good Morning America.

On Friday, April 4, 2025, Roberts took center stage in Emilie K. Asplundh Concert Hall for a memorable evening of insight, storytelling, and inspiration. She was joined in dialogue by Dr. Laurie Bernotsky, the newly inaugurated



President of West Chester University, who assumed the presidency just one week prior, on March 28. The event was presented as a highlight of the President's Speaker Series, a platform designed to engage

the University community and regional audiences in thought-provoking conversations with national figures. This high-profile event not only showcased West Chester University's stature as a destination for nationally recognized speakers but also underscored UAEA's role in curating and executing meaningful, mission-aligned public programming.

**"Everybody's got something. It's not about what happens to you, it's how you respond!"**

— Robin Roberts

## Regional Impact: Business Leaders Panel at WCU



West Chester University, with the leadership of its University Advancement and External Affairs (UAEA) division, demonstrated its strength as a regional convener by hosting the CEOs of four of the area’s most influential companies—Salim Ramji (Vanguard), Madeline Bell (Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia), Chris Gheysens (Wawa), and Leo Parsons (CTDI)—for the first annual high-profile panel discussion moderated by Tamela Edwards of 6ABC.

Held on March 14 in Asplundh Concert Hall, the event brought top business leaders to campus to share their perspectives on the economy, policy priorities, and the future of Pennsylvania. Co-hosted by the Chester County Chamber of Business & Industry (CCCBI), the Chester County Economic Development Council (CEEDC), and the Transportation Management Association of Chester County (TMACC), the discussion underscored WCU’s role as a hub for dialogue on issues that shape the region and beyond.

## UAEA Launches “Growth & Gratitude” Staff Development Series

Fostering Service, Learning, and Connection Across the Division

In 2024–2025, University Advancement & External Affairs proudly launched the Growth and Gratitude Series, a new professional development initiative designed to cultivate a

workplace culture rooted in reflection, learning, service, and community. The program is structured around three core pillars:

- Service – Engaging meaningfully with the greater community
- Learning – Supporting professional and personal development
- Connection & Recognition – Strengthening team relationships and celebrating one another

The first year of the Growth and Gratitude Series included the following signature events:

### August 2024 | UAEA Retreat with Chester County Food Cupboard (CCFC)

Kicking off the series, UAEA staff visited CCFC to learn about its critical role in addressing food insecurity across Chester County and its collaboration with WCU’s Resource Pantry. Staff participated in a hands-on service project, decorating produce boxes that were later delivered to local nursing homes, adding a personal and uplifting touch for senior recipients.



### October 2024 | Constructive Dialogue Institute Workshop

Staff participated in a nationally recognized training to strengthen skills in navigating complex conversations across differing perspectives—an

essential competency for external affairs and university relations work.

### December 2024 | Taco Breakfast Bar & Gratitude Gathering

A warm and cheerful celebration to close out the fall semester, featuring a festive taco breakfast, team acknowledgments, and shared moments of gratitude.

### January 2025 | Day of Service at Safe Harbor of West Chester



UAEA staff volunteered with Safe Harbor, supporting the shelter’s mission to provide food, housing, and hope to individuals facing homelessness.

### May 2025 | Women’s Wellness in Focus: Navigating Sleep, Stress, & Leadership in the Workplace

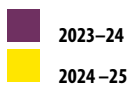
Members of the UAEA Team joined the Main Line Chamber of Commerce to explore key issues impacting professional women and enjoyed lunch.

By centering service, learning, and connection, the Growth and Gratitude Series reflects UAEA’s investment in its people, both in professional development and a sense of purpose. Planning is already underway for new offerings in the year ahead.

**CENTER:** UAEA helps at Chester County Food Cupboard **RIGHT:** Painting the walls at Safe Harbor

## Departmental Achievements & University Collaborations

This section includes UAEA's departments, which are The Center for Civic Engagement & Social Impact, The Office of External Relations, The Center for Community Solutions, The Twardowski Career Development Center, and featured accomplishments from our partners in The West Chester University Foundation and The Office of Alumni Engagement. Lastly, this section highlights the university collaborations of UAEA. You will see from the work done in 2024-2025 that UAEA commits itself to our work as partners with external and internal constituents at WCU.



There was a 19.7% increase in the number of students using the Resource Pantry, and a 21.8% increase in the total number of visits to the pantry. In AY 2024-2025, 1,175 unique visitors utilized the pantry (17.8% increase), of which 713 were first-time clients (Figure 1).

The Resource Pantry also increased the number of items received by 11.5% and increased the distribution of items by 5% in AY 24-25 (Figure 2). The Resource Pantry relies on personal and community-based monetary donations, as well as food and personal care items.

# The Center for Civic Engagement & Social Impact

**Mission Statement.** *The Center for Civic Engagement & Social Impact Mission Statement. The Center for Civic Engagement & Social Impact promotes community-based learning experiences that address issues of public concern by building mutually beneficial partnerships and empowering students to be active participants in their local, national, and global communities..*

**The West Chester University Resource Pantry** supports student success by minimizing food and basic needs insecurity and preparing students for life after graduation. The Resource Pantry experienced an increase in usage during the academic year (AY) 2024-2025 compared to AY 2023-2024.

The Resource Pantry relies on personal and community-based monetary donations, food, and personal care items.

**AY 23-24 COMPARED TO AY 24-25\* RESOURCE PANTRY USAGE**

\*Numbers Reflect July 1, 2023–June 30, 2024 and July 1, 2024–June 30, 2025 Data

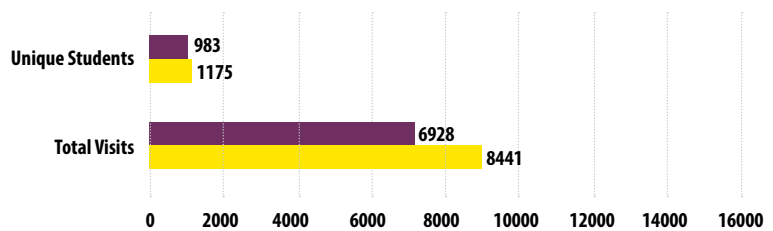


FIGURE 1

**RESOURCE PANTRY ITEMS RECEIVED AND DISTRIBUTED**

AY 2023-2024 vs. AY 2024-2025

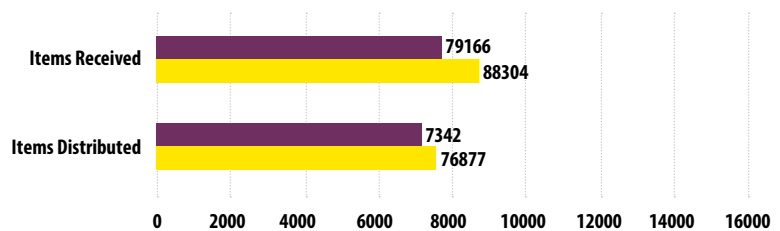


FIGURE 2

**The Benefits Hub** connects students to government benefits, community resources, and peer-to-peer support. The Benefits Hub uses a three-pronged support approach: Instrumental support as a Compass partner for Pennsylvania, allowing the Benefits Hub to enroll students in programs like SNAP and Medicaid in-house; Informational support as a connection point to other aid agencies such as West Chester Food Cupboard and Act in Faith; and emotional support as a space where students do not have to navigate these complicated processes alone.

In 2023-2024, the Benefits Hub was accepted as a Community Site partner for Compass PA, enabling students to enroll in benefits on campus in a centralized location. Initially, it was a site solely for benefits enrollment referrals to external nonprofits. This change enables Benefits Hub staff to upload documents on behalf of Pantry users, ensures students meet submission deadlines for semi-annual reporting, and provides a much faster response regarding program acceptance/denial.

Since bringing Compass in-house, the Benefits Hub has conducted over 70 appointments, and of those appointments, at least 29 students have been approved for some benefit (i.e., Medicaid/SNAP/both). Supervised by a CCEI professional staff member, The Benefits Hub also serves as an internship site, providing WCU students in both graduate and undergraduate Social Work programs with real-world experience.

## Department Spotlight

### HOPE SURVEY

CCESI participated in a Hope Impact Partnership in the fall of 2024. As part of the program, CCESI ran the Hope Center's Student Basic Needs Survey, which offers insight into a wide range of student basic needs (food, housing, homelessness, mental health, childcare, transportation, and internet/technology access). Nationwide, food insecurity has been on the rise, from 12.8% (17.0 million) in 2022 to 13.5% (18.0 million) in 2023.

At WCU, through participation in the HOPE Center Student Basic Needs Survey in Fall 2024\*, we know:

- **47% (43% in 2020)** of WCU students indicated that they are Basic Needs Insecure (Experienced at least one of the following: food insecurity, housing insecurity, or homelessness)
- **30% (20% in 2020)** of WCU students indicated that they are Food Insecure (Experienced limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe food, or the ability to acquire such food in a socially acceptable manner in the prior 30 days)
- **33% (36% in 2020)** of WCU students indicated that they are Housing Insecure (Experienced one or more challenges that prevented them from having a safe, affordable, and consistent place to live in the previous year)
- **9% (12% in 2020)** of WCU students indicated that they are homeless (Did not have a fixed, regular, and adequate place to live at some point during the previous year)

\* Percentages are based on a 14% Response Rate (n = 2,351 undergraduate and graduate students) of students who completed the survey.

## Grants and Awards

### HUNGER FREE CAMPUS

CCESI was awarded the Hunger Free Campus Grant by the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) Office of Higher Education (OPHE) to fund programs to address food insecurity on campus. WCU was awarded \$60,000 for the 2024-2025 AY, including the awards the last two years, WCU has received a total of \$174,399 in funding from PDE. The Center is utilizing funds from generous grants to expand the Resource Pantry's capacity to serve West Chester University students experiencing food insecurity, particularly those at the highest risk, through additional programs and infrastructure on the University's campus and at its Philadelphia location.

### CIVIC 50 AWARD

WCU was recognized as one of two higher education institutions in the region as a CIVIC 50 organization for 2025. WCU was previously recognized on the Civic 50 list from 2022 to 2024. CIVIC 50 Greater Philadelphia recognizes civic-minded businesses using their time, talent, and resources to drive social impact in their communities. This regional initiative is an outgrowth of the national Civic 50, led by globally recognized nonprofit Points of Light.



## The Office of External Relations and the Center for Community Solutions

**Mission Statement.** *The Office of External Relations cultivates and sustains relationships with local, state, and federal elected officials and their offices and government entities, and serves as a leading liaison within the community.*

The Office of External Relations completed a successful year of collaboration with government officials and community partners. Following are some of the key highlights and notable collaborations of this area.

### The Office of External Relations

CONNECTING POLICY, STUDENTS, AND COMMUNITY LEADERS

ADVANCING STRATEGIC GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIPS

In collaboration with University Advancement and External Affairs, the Office of External Relations (OER) helped launch a new Borough of West Chester Leadership Task Force, designed to identify shared priorities between the University and Borough and to address emerging challenges. The cohort includes Borough leadership—Mayor, Manager, and three Councilpersons, including the Chair and Vice Chair—and meets monthly to foster consistent communication and joint solutions.

Key progress to date includes:

- Enhancing the borough's presence at the University's Spring Off-Campus Student Housing Fair
- Completing an inventory of WCU's community engagement efforts in the borough and region
- Streamlining public safety communication
- Facilitating high-impact discussions on facilities projects, such as the Uptown Loop shuttle collaboration and the Campus Master Plan

Due to the effectiveness of this model, East Bradford and West Goshen Township Managers have approved similar task force implementations within their municipalities.

## STUDENT ADVOCACY

The University continued to prioritize student civic engagement by supporting meaningful advocacy opportunities that connect classroom learning with real-world policy.

Highlights include:

- Educating Community Nutrition students on engagement strategies with U.S. Senators and Representatives around current nutrition policy
- Preparing and supporting a student selected to represent WCU at Undergraduate Research at the Capitol in Harrisburg, including coordinating visits with five state elected officials
- Partnering with the Student Government Association (SGA) to host the Student and Community Leaders Roundtable, where students engaged directly with civic leaders on topics such as student loans, mental health, sustainability, and government careers. Participants in the Roundtable included three state elected officials, a federal deputy chief of staff, a local municipality manager, a U.S. Department of Homeland Security retiree, and leadership from Chester County Human Services and the County Planning Commission's Sustainability Division.

## LEGISLATIVE OUTREACH FOR INSTITUTIONAL PRIORITIES

The Office of External Relations also coordinated impactful legislative meetings during visits to Harrisburg by President Laurie Bernotsky and Vice President Dr. Zebulun Davenport, securing meetings that reflected both diversity in elected leadership and alignment with institutional priorities.

Key meetings included:

- Majority Leader Rep. Matt Bradford
- Appropriations Chairs Rep. James Struzzi III, Rep. Jordan Harris, and Sen. Scott Martin
- Education Committee Minority Chair Rep. Bryan Cutler

Discussions emphasized WCU's commitment to affordability and access (e.g., ACT 101/Academic Success and support for first-generation students), experiential learning, and equity (e.g., Fund for Unpaid Internships), as well as community-based initiatives such as the Center for STEM Inclusion. These high-level conversations helped ensure that state leaders remain informed about the University's impact and needs during a pivotal time in the budget cycle.



SGA and OER Spring 2025 Student and Community Leaders' Roundtable participants

## LAUNCHING THE COMMUNITY IMPACT ALLIANCE

In a joint effort by the Office of External Relations, the Center for Civic Engagement and Social Impact (CCESI), and the Office of the Provost, West Chester University established the Community Impact Alliance (CIA)—a university-wide coordinating body for community engagement.

The CIA is designed to:

- Guide and align institutional community engagement
- Foster internal collaboration and strategic impact

- Advance a culture of assessment and accountability
- Support the University's strategic plan goals

This new entity has already played a pivotal role in exploring robust tools for impact measurement and documentation. Two leading platforms—Collaboratory and GivePulse—were demonstrated to university stakeholders, laying the foundation for data-informed planning and reporting.

By establishing the CIA, West Chester University is strengthening its identity as an anchor institution, leveraging cross-campus expertise to promote innovation, partnership, and sustain community benefits.

## The Center for Community Solutions

### STRENGTHENING INTERNAL & EXTERNAL COLLABORATION

The Center for Community Solutions continued to deepen its mission through strong, intentional partnerships across campus and within the community. Collaborations with faculty and staff—including University Libraries Special Collections, the Departments of Anthropology and Sociology, and Marketing—enhanced the Center's ability to address emerging community needs. Simultaneously, new community partnerships expanded the Center's geographic and thematic impact. As a result, the Center achieved its most extensive project portfolio to date.

***"This year's collaborations activated student learning and directly impacted policy and planning in our region."***

## STUDENT IMPACT IN ACTION

One standout example of student impact featured a Center-affiliated student working with the West Chester Green Team. After being highlighted at the annual WCU Spotlight on Research, the student presented findings to the Borough of West Chester Sustainability Advisory Council, helping shape local ordinance revisions related to sustainability.

In another lasting outcome, a recent Center alumna joined the board of the West Chester Film Festival, her former community partner, exemplifying the long-term value of these relationships.

## REGIONAL VISIBILITY AND RECOGNITION

This year, the Center's work was highlighted during State Senator Carolyn Comitta's Nonprofit Symposium for Arts, Culture, and Historical Organizations, as well as in a regional podcast feature, extending its voice in the public scholarship space.

The Center also hosted its annual Gratitude Reception, honoring students and community partners whose work exemplified collaboration, service, and community-based learning.



**Center for Community Solutions Gratitude Reception**

## HONORING HISTORY THROUGH COLLABORATION 80<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE BATTLE OF THE BULGE PROJECT

A major initiative this year was the Center's collaboration with State Representative Chris Pielli to commemorate the 80th Anniversary of the Battle of the Bulge. In coordination with the Governor's Office, PA Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, PA Historical and Museum Commission, and the Office of House Democratic Leader Matthew Bradford, this initiative served as a model for engaged scholarship and statewide recognition.

In partnership with the Department of Geography and Planning and student researchers, the Center helped develop a public survey, digital dashboard, and dedicated webpage. These tools collected and shared stories from veterans and their families, ensuring that personal histories were preserved and accessible to the public.

**"This project would not have been possible without West Chester University!"**

—Rep. Chris Pielli

# Twardowski Career Development Center

**Mission Statement.** *The Twardowski Career Development Center (TCDC) serves as a bridge connecting students and alumni to the professional world and introducing them to who they can become.*

The Twardowski Career Development Center (TCDC) continued to provide impactful support and resources to West Chester University students throughout the 2024–2025 academic year, with growth and innovation across key service areas.

### STUDENT ENGAGEMENT:

The TCDC's reach has increased year over year since the pandemic. Each year, the TCDC

moves closer to its goal of ensuring all students have access to career readiness education and exposure to career activities. (Figure 3)

TCDC engaged 8,268 unique students during the 2024–2025 academic year, demonstrating continued growth and demand for career services. (Compared to previous years when data is available.) (Figure 3).

Some of the TCDC's newer offerings helped boost engagement. The Career Closet offers free, new, and gently used professional clothing, shoes, and accessories to students who want to look and feel their most confident at recruiting events, during interviews, or in any other professional setting. The Iris Photo Booth offers free, self-service, professional headshots for students to use on their LinkedIn profile, Handshake account, or any other online site. 295 unique students shopped the Career Closet 343 times, and 791 unique students stopped by to get a professional photo 886 times.

In some cases, continued offerings with a new twist helped drive engagement. The TCDC's Prepare for the Fair event is hosted one week before each of the fall and spring Job & Internship Fairs. At the event, in addition to receiving resume reviews, elevator pitch practice, and tips on how to research employers and follow up, students also had access to a wellness expert who shared tips for managing stress and nerves leading up to the fair. A licensed professional barber also offered haircuts. By taking a more holistic approach to ensuring students have the knowledge, tools, and confidence they need to attend recruiting events, students were ready to let their best selves shine through. And employers noticed. 97% said that students were prepared, very prepared, or extremely prepared during the Job & Internship Fair (Figure 4).

Another way the TCDC drove engagement was through faculty partnerships in the classroom. The TCDC continued to expand its career integration efforts, which included the launch of a new website for faculty. The site hosts career assignments, D2L modules, and PowerPoint slides that can be easily integrated into the classroom. These efforts ensure that students have access to career readiness education and are prepared to take their next step after WCU.



Experiential Learning Panel participants

Engaging with employers at events proved to be a productive and positive experience for students as well. When students were asked how likely they were to recommend attending a recruiting event hosted by the TCDC to their peers, the average response was 8.1 out of 10, indicating that students are very likely to recommend attending the TCDC's recruiting events (Figure 6).



FIGURE 6

**Employer Perception of Student Preparedness  
Job & Internship Fair**

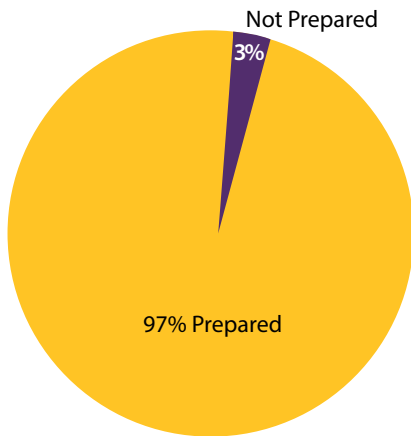


FIGURE 4

In addition to attending recruiting events on campus, employers engaged in several other ways, including Employer Town Halls, the Employer Appreciation Breakfast, and the Employer Advisory Board. Employer Town Halls are hosted over Zoom twice a year and provide new and returning employers with information on the upcoming recruiting season, as well as opportunities to engage on campus. Between 80 and 100 employers are typically present for a Town Hall. The Employer Appreciation Breakfast was hosted for a second year in May 2025. Over 60 employers returned to campus, giving the TCDC team a chance to express their gratitude. As part of the breakfast, the TCDC hosted an Experiential Learning Panel, featuring six incredible students who shared their experiences and the ongoing impact they've had. The Employer Advisory Board has just been relaunched, with 12 employers from various industries serving on the board.

**EMPLOYER PARTICIPATION:**

A total of 403 unique employers participated in 778 recruiting and networking events on campus (Figure 5). These engagements include job and internship fairs, industry meet-ups, information tables, lunch-and-learns, and on-campus interviews that provided students with valuable connections and opportunities. Over 4,400 students attended a recruiting or networking event hosted by the TCDC this year. Employers know that when they come to WCU, they can expect a high level of engagement from students.

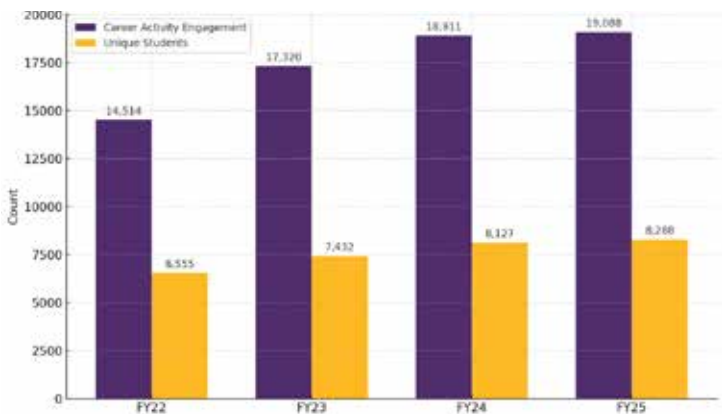


FIGURE 3

Fiscal Year	Unique Employers
FY22	289
FY23	435
FY24	369
FY25	403

FIGURE 5

**SUPPORT FOR UNPAID INTERNSHIPS:**

The Fund for Unpaid Internships awarded \$136,300 to 108 students – the highest number of students and the highest amount awarded compared to all previous years. Employers that hosted students for internships represent a broad spectrum of community-critical industries, including education, healthcare, law enforcement, nonprofit, and social services.

# The WCU Foundation and Alumni Engagement Highlights

**Advancement goals** for fiscal year 2024-25 included raising **\$10,000,000** in total gift income with a cash goal of **\$5.5 million** and **\$4.5 million** in future commitments. As of June 30, 2025, a total of **\$13,038,323.88** has been secured.

**The 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Day of Giving**, held on March 7, raised over \$321,000, surpassing its goal of \$250,000, with \$125,000 specifically allocated for Athletics. Over 24 WCU Colleges and programs participated, with donations from 1,894 donors.

**The 42<sup>nd</sup> Annual Presidential Gala** was held on Friday, March 28th, at Longwood Gardens, with over 450 attendees, as part of the week-long Inauguration Celebration.

West Chester University has received the largest single gift in its history through an innovative partnership that transforms a generous land gift into both a living laboratory for WCU students and usable public space for Chester County citizens. An anonymous donor gifted a 52-acre farm property, fondly known as Ridley Springs, which has resulted in \$4.7 million for the University through a unique, dual-purpose agreement with East Whiteland Township. This agreement ensures protected open space for the Chester County community.

West Chester University's alumni are deeply engaged across a variety of impactful areas. In FY25, **2,019** alumni volunteered their time—contributing to events, mentoring current students, and serving on advisory boards. Over **1,691** unique alumni attended an event to deepen their connection with the university and fellow alumni. And **2,693** alumni made philanthropic contributions last year, supporting scholarships, campus initiatives, and the university's long-term growth. These numbers not only reflect widespread participation but also a steadfast commitment to giving back and advancing the institution's mission.

# Cross-Divisional Collaborations and Achievements

Members of the UAEA team collaborated with internal constituents throughout the 2024-25 period. This section features collaborations within the university.

## ACADEMIC AFFAIRS-UAEA COLLABORATION

As the academic affairs liaison to UAEA, the Associate Vice President for Communication, Operations, and Strategy (AVPCOS) for Academic Affairs collaborated with UAEA counterparts on several different fronts, including:

- Participated in the extensive application and submission process for the Carnegie Reclassification for Community Engagement, a highly competitive national designation awarded every five years to institutions that demonstrate a deep, sustained, and institutionalized commitment to community partnerships, engaged teaching and research, and measurable impact beyond campus.
- For the fourth consecutive year, WCU submitted a successful application for the **Greater Philadelphia Civic 50 Award** as one of the 50 most community-engaged organizations in the Philadelphia region. WCU was one of only two universities recognized.
- The launch of the campus-wide **Community Impact Alliance**, a supra-coordinating entity with university-wide representation that guides, supports, and advances the University's community engagement comprehensively, efficiently, and effectively. It was designed to facilitate and optimize community engagement and internal collaboration and will be particularly critical for developing a culture of assessment and accountability around institutional community engagement.
- **WCU's America 250 Planning Committee**, a distinguished campus-wide, interdisciplinary team of faculty and staff, tasked with leading the university's comprehensive planning for the landmark 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 2026—an initiative that positions WCU at the forefront of national commemorative celebration and civic engagement. University-Corporate Relations.



*Helen Hammerschmidt, AVPCOS for Academic Affairs, and Dr. Rita Patel Eng, Senior Director for CCEI, accepting the Civic 50 Award for WCU*

In addition to the above collaborative activities, the AVPCOS led the University's corporate partnerships with local, regional, and state chambers of commerce and economic development organizations, expanding the WCU's reach with the business community and highlighting West Chester University as a critical resource for talent and thought leadership. A more intentional and strategic approach to university-corporate relations has contributed to increased high-impact experiential learning opportunities for WCU's students through internships, mentorships, capstone projects, and research, among other initiatives. These partnerships include:

- Greater West Chester Chamber of Commerce
- Chester County Chamber of Business & Industry
- Main Line Chamber of Commerce
- Greater Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce
- Pennsylvania Chamber of Business & Industry
- Chester County Economic Development Council

## Measuring Impact

To measure the success of these relationships, the AVPCOS develops impact reports for each partner that track the programs and events the university sponsors, noting the levels of investment in each and the benefits gained by both parties.

These reports provide a more comprehensive understanding of both parties involved in the investment and the significance of these partnerships, which will help inform decisions about future investment and engagement strategies. They include financial and in-kind support, benefits, a list and description of programs, and the number of students and faculty/staff who engaged this year. During the 2024-25 academic year, more than 30 faculty and staff members, as well as 400 students, were engaged in one or more programs or events.

### WEST CHESTER'S FIRST

West Chester's First Committee is made up of dedicated faculty and staff who volunteer their time to support and advocate for first-generation students. Their commitment to our students has been instrumental in fostering an inclusive & welcoming environment for all of our WCU first-gen students.

Over the last few years, a member of UAEA has served on the West Chester First steering committee leadership. In 2024-2025, Yessica Gutierrez, Assistant Director for the Twardowski Career Development Center, served her first year as a Tri-Chair.

In the Fall 2024 issue of WCU Magazine, West Chester's First was the featured Cover Story, entitled "Trailblazers First-Generation College Students Succeed with Support and Encouragement." Visit [wcupa.edu/communications/magazine-fall-2024/cover-story.aspx](http://wcupa.edu/communications/magazine-fall-2024/cover-story.aspx) to read the full article.

In addition, below are some of the highlights, educational and celebratory programs, for the 2024-2025 academic year:

- Welcome Week First Fryday Event
- Tri-Alpha Induction Ceremony
- National First Gen Day Celebration
- Flying First Symposium
- First Gen Graduation photos
- Winter Welcome Event
- First Gen Posters (Featuring First Gen Faculty & Staff)
- First Gen Students of Color Internship Prep Program
- First Forward Educational Programs

- D2L First Gen modules
- Participated in WCU Day of Giving
- West Chester First committee member highlights on Instagram

## Community Event Sponsorships

Throughout the year, WCU supported the community through event sponsorship with many local chambers and organizations. Highlighted below are three diverse events for which WCU partnered as a key sponsor, along with the benefits received from the university's participation.

### CHESTER COUNTY HISTORY CENTER ANNUAL HISTORY MAKER AWARD

On April 25, 2025, the Chester County History Center hosted its annual History Maker Award & Dinner honoring Mr. Ray Bently, Jim Moore, and French & Pickering Creeks Conservation Trust for their work, dedication, contributions, and preservation in the discovery and excavation of four Revolutionary War cannons hidden for centuries in Chester County. As a sponsor of this event, WCU contributed to educational awareness, marketing, and event tickets for event participants.

### THE PENNSYLVANIA SOCIETY RECEPTION

The annual gathering in New York City has been a tradition of the PA Society for more than a century, bringing together members of the Commonwealth for an evening of community, civility, and charity. On December 6th, 2024, WCU hosted a reception with the Chester County Chamber of Business & Industry (CCCBI) and several other contributing organizations honoring Steve Aichele and former Senator R. "Tommy" Tomlinson at the Midtown Hilton.

### SWEET CHARITY

West Chester University provided sponsorship to the annual Sweet Charity fundraising event hosted by The Chester County Community Foundation (CCCF) to support CCCF's mission to connect with people who care about the causes that matter. This event is a dessert competition between the finest caterers, restaurants, and bakers. As an event sponsor, WCU's advertising was featured in digital, print, and online advertising. WCU also received four tickets used by university members.

## Individual Spotlight

UAEA is proud of all its team members and their commitment to education and excellence within the university and beyond. Here are a few of their impressive individual achievements during 2024-25.

**Dr. Julie Dietrich**, the Executive Director for External Relations, was selected as one of fifteen international educators from a competitive pool for an Educating Character Initiative professional development opportunity held at Wake Forest University through its Program of Leadership and Character in Summer 2025.

**Yessica Gutierrez**, Assistant Director for the Twardowski Career Development Center, facilitated a presentation at the NACE conference about the First Gen Students of Color Internship Prep Program.

**Lauren Linder**, Assistant Director for the Twardowski Career Development Center, earned her M.Ed. in the Higher Education Policy and Student Affairs program at West Chester University.

**Jen Long**, Executive Director for the Twardowski Career Development Center, completed a certificate in Fundraising Leadership from the IUPUI Fundraising School.

**Dr. Rita Patel Eng**, Senior Director, and **Katie Clay**, Associate Director, for the Center for Civic Engagement and Social Impact, served on a panel hosted by PA Representative Emily Kinkead at the state capitol in Harrisburg, focused on "Hunger and Learning: How Hunger Impacts the Ability for Students of Every Age to Learn."



**UNIVERSITY ADVANCEMENT & EXTERNAL AFFAIRS**

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