

Integrations FAQs

System Redesign - Phase 3 - University Integrations

GENERAL

What do we mean by institutional integrations?

We are developing a plan by which some universities would consolidate their operations and academic programming to affordably and sustainably expand student opportunities. Universities would be integrated into a single accredited entity with a unified leadership team, a single faculty and staff, a single academic program array, a unified enrollment strategy, and a single budget—all while respecting local institutional identity.

At a time when universities across the country are financially challenged, it's incumbent upon the State System to creatively ensure that its institutions are open, vibrant and centered on student success. The goals of the two proposed pairs of integrating universities, including California, Clarion and Edinboro in the west and Bloomsburg, Lock Haven and Mansfield in the northeast, are to maintain or expand premier educational opportunities for students across the state, position institutions for growth, and meet regional economic and workforce needs.

Is this part of System Redesign?

Yes. Integration is an important means of supporting System Redesign by stabilizing the system financially and ensuring our universities together are able affordably to meet the changing needs of all Pennsylvania's students, communities and employers.

Will any institutions close as a result of integrations?

No. Institutional integrations are designed to prevent closures. Integrated institutions are meant to foster more academic opportunities for students in critically important regions of Pennsylvania and in critically important program areas. To do nothing would potentially endanger the universities financially and severely reduce academic opportunities.

What authority does the State System have to explore these integrations?

Act 50 of 2020 was approved by Pennsylvania's General Assembly with near unanimity and was signed by the Governor in June 2020. The Act provides the Board of Governors with authority to restructure the State System's institutions through a consultative and transparent process that includes outreach with local stakeholders and elected state leaders. For more on Act 50, please [click here](#).

Why is the State System exploring institutional integrations now?

Because the well-known financial challenges faced by the System have grown to a point where they now threaten our ability to serve all Pennsylvanians, irrespective of their ZIP code, with high quality, affordable higher education. Integrations give us the best chance to continue this mission and to expand the breadth of educational opportunities available across the state.

What is the key to the success of integrating universities?

The right scale is key to the success of integrations. We aim to achieve a scale that will provide the full breadth of academic programming for students, while also setting the stage for greater efficiency and cost savings than a smaller university could achieve by itself. The initial financial review showed that three-university and four-university integrations could achieve a similar level of success. Given the complexity of the process, we are focusing on a manageable three-university integration in the west and another three-university integration in the northeast.

Are these integrations beneficial to the other eight System universities?

Yes. While the System has traditionally featured 14 largely independent public universities, we are a single corporate structure. If one or more universities are struggling financially, that burden is shared across the System. So, all State System universities have a vested interest in the success of all our institutions.

Why are you considering these six universities, and are you considering any other multi-university integrations?

The choices reflect the data, which suggest there could be significant benefits from these universities working together as regional partners. Benefits would include:

- Potential for growth into new markets to serve more students;
- Ability to leverage their regional proximity to each other; and
- Opportunities for cost savings (thanks to scale) that enhance financial sustainability.

The data we have are not leading us to consider any other integrations at this time.

Will professors or staff lose their job as a result of campuses integrating?

Potential employment impacts do exist. However, while universities work to better align their costs with revenue, we recognize it is not just about balancing budgets but it's also affordability and accessibility. We remain committed to providing affordable, career-relevant, high-quality educational opportunities for students, on every campus.

What do you mean by online learning?

Online or distance learning can take several forms.

- *Synchronous* delivery uses tools such as Zoom or other web conferencing tools to let students participate in a class in real time from a remote location. For example, a student at one campus might use Zoom to join a class taught by a professor on another campus. This delivery mode is sometimes called "remote learning."
- *Asynchronous* delivery allows students to complete coursework on their own schedule, from any location. In addition to completing required readings and other assignments, students in courses delivered asynchronously may utilize instructional videos, discussion boards and other tools to engage with the professor and classmates. This delivery mode is sometimes called "fully online."

Hybrid programs typically require students to take a mix of in-person and online/remote learning courses as they progress toward their degree.

In-person programs, which can be completed entirely on campus, may include some remote or fully online course options to provide more flexibility for students as they plan their schedule. Currently, a majority of students taking in-person programs choose to take at least one online course per semester.

PROCESS

What steps in the process have already been completed?

As part of the multi-year process, we have already completed a financial review and alignment analysis that determined institutional integrations make sense. In February 2021, the chancellor presented an integrations progress report reflecting the work of more than 1,000 students, faculty, staff and volunteers who have contributed to the integrations effort.

What are the next steps in the process?

Upon preliminary approval by the Board of Governors on April 28, a [public comment period](#) of 60 days will begin, starting April 29 and ending June 30. During this period, the System will host two virtual public hearings, on June 9 and 10. Stakeholders are invited to read the plans and offer comments. Additionally, quarterly updates to committees in the General Assembly are taking place. The Board may give final approval of potential integrations as soon as July 2021.

How close are we to having integrated institutions?

The earliest the Board of Governors could approve an integration plan is July 2021. The earliest integrated universities could welcome students is the Fall 2022 semester.

Are implementation plans available for review?

The integrating universities and the State System have engaged with stakeholders throughout the process to keep them informed and help to inform our decisions. The plan development process has been broadly consultative and transparent. Throughout this lengthy process, our charge has been to work together with our sister institutions to develop a plan that follows the State System's vision for university integrations. Prelimarily approved plans presented to the Board of Governors on April 28 are available—[West](#) and [Northeast](#).

Our top priorities have been to keep students at the center of this process, and to maintain access and affordability for students while meeting local workforce needs, leveraging our combined strengths, and improving our financial condition.

Will institutions have to abandon their local identity?

No. We have entered into this process understanding how important it is to respect the value of institutional identities and what they mean to stakeholders like students, alumni, donors, faculty, staff, trustees, and more. This process continues to honor local identity while creating something new through university integrations.

What will happen to the councils of trustees for each integrated institution?

Trustees are firmly embedded in these conversations and will be throughout the long process, which is designed to answer questions such as this.

Who has a voice in this process?

Everyone. We have already done extensive outreach to stakeholders and will continue to do so throughout the process. Upon preliminary approval from the Board of Governors on April 28th, a [public comment](#) period for at least 60 days will begin, starting April 29th through June 30th, including two public hearings. Throughout this process, students, faculty, staff, administrators, trustees, legislators, and other members of the community are being consulted.

What percentage of courses should I expect to take online if my major is not located at my home campus?

Although this may vary by major or campus, we expect that at least 75% of your courses will be delivered in person, on your home campus. The majority of students currently take at least one online course per semester, so this is consistent with what most students are experiencing now.

STUDENTS

Do students have a voice in the integration process?

Yes. The integration process is designed to include student input. Students have broad representation as part of the System-level advisory group, regional student advisory groups and through individual working group engagement.

When will students begin to benefit from the integration of universities?

Upon final approval from the State System's Board of Governors, which could occur at its July meeting, and other regulatory agencies, students can expect to see the benefits of these changes in Fall 2022.

Will students attending these universities be able to finish their studies and earn their degree?

Yes. In fact, this effort is intended to expand the academic supports and opportunities available to students by taking advantage of the greater scale that results from institutional integrations. This provides our institutions the best opportunity to continue providing a quality education at an affordable price for students.

Will students be able finish their degrees from the campus at which they started?

Yes. A current student will be able to complete the program in which they are currently enrolled, and it is the intent of integrating universities to honor each campus identity, including retaining the campus' name on a student's diploma.

From which campus will prospective students be able to start and finish their degree?

There has never been a better time to be a State System student. Every student, including those enrolled at an integrating university, will be able to finish their program of study and earn a degree from the campus at which they are enrolled. Students will also have access to many new opportunities, experiences, and degree programs that will arise from university integrations.

For transfer students, will credits be accepted by an integrated university?

The transfer process will remain simple and maximize the credits a student can transfer to an integrated university. A transfer student will be able to complete their declared major at an integrated campus and earn a degree.

Will students have to travel between campuses?

Current students will be able to complete their declared major on the campus where they started. Some courses may be delivered through flexible delivery formats, virtually or by faculty located on another campus. Students will not be required to travel between campuses, although a student may choose to do so.

Future students will find that an integrated university with multiple campus locations, including a virtual campus, offers an expanded selection of academic programs, courses and faculty expertise, and potential access to more internships and experiential learning opportunities. This broad selection of academic programs and opportunities creates pathways for a student to start anywhere in the western or northeastern Pennsylvania regions and finish both their undergraduate and graduate degrees at any of the three northeastern or western campus locations, online, or through a combination of online and in-person classes at the campus of their choice. University integration is also intended to expand academic support, so students will have greater opportunities for academic success. No matter which campus a student chooses, State System universities are committed to providing each student with a premier high-quality education at an affordable price.

Will classes be solely online as a result of integration?

Not unless a student chooses to enroll fully online. If a student prefers a traditional college experience, that opportunity is available. As has always been true, a student can expect a residential (or commuter) campus experience at every campus, with many new opportunities on campus and with the close personal interaction with professors for which our campuses are known. Integration will create many new opportunities to access courses, majors, minors, degrees and stackable credentials. Some courses and programs may be conducted remotely or through hybrid modalities across the identified campuses. This is a model that campuses already have undertaken with great success.

Will financial aid and scholarship packages carry forward to an integrated university?

Yes, financial aid and scholarship commitments will carry over. As always, privately funded scholarships will be awarded and disbursed based on the donor's criteria.

Will the cost of attendance change?

By design, integrations are intended to reduce the financial burden on students and their families while supporting the financial sustainability of such campuses.

May a student apply to one or more campus locations and/or indicate a campus preference?

Yes, a single application process is anticipated to be available for students across the integrated universities as part of a seamless admissions process for students enrolling in Fall 2022.

Will a campus retain its name?

Yes. The outcome of university integration is purposeful in its intent to retain a campus' name and preserve its historical identity, brand, campus experiences and value proposition.

Will all majors and minors continue to be offered?

Students will have access to an even greater list of undergraduate and graduate programs and courses of study. The goal is to provide a single portfolio of excellent, career-relevant academic programs to meet the needs of students as well as their future employers. Current students who have declared a major will be able to complete a degree within that major.

What will happen to athletic programs?

Integrating campuses are pursuing a path with the NCAA that allows each campus to retain and continue its current complement of sports and existing sports teams.

Will academic standards change because of integration?

No. Students still must earn a cumulative grade-point average of 2.0 or higher to be considered in Good Academic Standing. Some accredited programs may continue to require a higher cumulative and/or major GPA to be admitted or to continue in the major.

Will student clubs and organizations continue?

Yes. There will be many opportunities for students to engage in student government and other campus activities through which they may grow their leadership skills, no matter which campus a student chooses.

How will the curriculum be developed and implemented?

University administrators, integrations leaders and faculty will work together to develop curriculum and implement it over the course of three years. This is one of the most important aspects of the integration work, and every effort will be made to ensure we produce the best possible product for our students and communities.