

Bowles Rice VIEWS & VISIONS

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Dale-Elizabeth Pehrsson
Pennsylvania Western University

Dr. Dale-Elizabeth Pehrsson is the founding President of Pennsylvania Western University (PennWest), created through the integration of three members of Pennsylvania's State System of Higher Education: Clarion, Edinboro, and California University of Pennsylvania. During her 40-year career, Dr. Pehrsson has been a business owner, nurse, hospital administrator, mental health counselor, college professor, dean, and university president – but, above all, she is passionate about empowering students with the knowledge, skills, and confidence they need to transform their lives and their communities.

PennWest: A Groundbreaking Model for Higher Education

A new flag is flying over three university campuses in Western Pennsylvania. After two years of planning and preparation, California, Clarion and Edinboro are united under the banner of Pennsylvania Western University.

In late August, we welcomed our first class of new students to PennWest, a university that is breaking new ground in higher education.

We Offer Education *Your Way*

PennWest looks at education through a student-centric lens, with programs designed to meet the needs and aspirations of learners at all stages of life. Although our three campuses are miles apart, technology lets PennWest students reach beyond campus borders in their pursuit of knowledge and career-focused skills.

Each PennWest location offers a distinctive college experience for residential and commuter students, with face-to-face classes, personalized support, intercollegiate athletics,



Clarion could add specialized courses with professors at California or Edinboro – all without leaving their home campus.

For those who prefer a fully online experience, there's PennWest Global Online. Our "virtual campus" offers flexible, affordable undergraduate and graduate programs ideal for anyone with work or family responsibilities. All courses are taught by qualified faculty, not teaching assistants, so PennWest's online degrees, certificates, and other credentials have the same high academic quality as on-campus programs.

It's a modern approach that meets the needs of today's students and tomorrow's world – and a recent survey shows that our students

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and a wide array of student clubs and organizations. Students choose the campus that suits them best; then distance learning expands their options, letting them study with PennWest faculty across all three locations. For example, a student enrolled at PennWest

embrace it. While our campuses' hometown atmosphere and cherished traditions have an undeniable appeal, 9 out of 10 current and future students say they are willing to take some classes online so they can access a wider range of degrees, majors, minors, and courses.

I strongly believe that within this new model, we must empower students to build lives of passion and purpose. At PennWest, our founding principles call for us to foster a sense of belonging for all members of our community. We meet students where they are and help them navigate through financial, personal, and academic challenges. And we provide a supportive environment where – together – our students, faculty, and staff can learn, work, and thrive.

We are Western Pennsylvania

But there's more to PennWest: With an enrollment of more than 13,000 students and some 1,800 employees, our university is proud to be an economic driver for the Commonwealth and our region. As of today, our three PennWest campuses have a combined economic impact of \$701 million, a figure projected to grow to over \$758 million by the 2025-26 academic year.

PennWest's 100+ academic programs prepare students to succeed in fields where workforce demand is most urgent, including business, education,

healthcare, and STEM. Internships and other hands-on work experiences position our students to contribute immediately to the local economy – and with campuses spanning 160 miles from north to south, we are connecting employers throughout Western Pennsylvania with a pool of well-educated, highly skilled, and community-minded graduates.

For many of our students, higher education offers a route to a more secure and sustainable future. More than 1 in 3 PennWest students are the first in their family to attend college, and 39 percent of our students are eligible for need-based federal Pell Grants. For these individuals, in particular, PennWest makes a real difference. Our academic advisers, student success coaches, and other support staff are at their side every step of the way, from application through graduation and beyond.

In addition, we know that 60 percent of Pennsylvania jobs require some higher education, but only half of Pennsylvanians hold the appropriate credentials. PennWest has flexible



Edinboro Campus



Clarion Campus



California Campus

options to address the commonwealth's shortage of educated workers. Degree-completion programs, certificates, and other industry-recognized credentials allow learners of all ages to move into new fields or advance their careers.

Behind the scenes, PennWest has streamlined operations without sacrificing the services students count on. You'll find financial aid advisers on every campus, for example, but we've reduced costs by consolidating back-office enterprises like purchasing and HR. We operate with one faculty, a single "menu" of academic programs, and one leadership team. These measures, and many more, create pathways to invest in the student experience.

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PennWest: A Groundbreaking Model for Higher Education

In just a few months, our first PennWest graduates will join a nationwide network of 186,000 alumni – proud graduates of Clarion, Edinboro and California University of Pennsylvania. Like their alumni counterparts, our newest grads will contribute to their communities as leaders in education,

business, healthcare, human services, science and technology, humanities, and the arts.

As PennWest evolves over the next several years, we will honor our campus traditions and watch new ones emerge. We'll root for our California Vulcans, Clarion Golden Eagles, and Edinboro Fighting Scots. We'll continue to put students first.

Built on the past and focused on what's next, PennWest is truly driving the future of higher education.

(Visit Penn West on YouTube at <https://youtu.be/jJiuzQf8JLY> to hear “Dr. Dale” discuss what the Penn West flag means to her.) 