

Teaching, Research, and Service

**An Interview with Dr. Graham B. Spanier,
President, The Pennsylvania State University**

EDITORS' NOTE *Graham Spanier was appointed Penn State's 16th president in 1995. His prior posts include Chancellor of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs at Oregon State University, and Vice Provost for Undergraduate Studies at the State University of New York at Stony Brook. He previously served Penn State from 1973 to 1982 as a member of the faculty and in three administrative positions in the College of Health and Human Development.*



Graham B. Spanier

He holds academic appointments as professor of human development and family studies, sociology, demography, and family and community medicine. He has more than 100 scholarly publications, including 10 books, and was the founding editor of the Journal of Family Issues. Spanier serves as Chair of the National Security Higher Education Advisory Board. He earned his Ph.D. in sociology from Northwestern University and his bachelor's and master's degrees from Iowa State University.

INSTITUTION BRIEF *The Pennsylvania State University (www.psu.edu) is one of the nation's largest and most comprehensive universities, with 46,000 employees on 24 campuses, an annual budget of \$4 billion, and a physical plant of 1,700 buildings. Founded in 1855 as an agricultural college, the school admitted its first class in 1859 and has since awarded more than 650,000 degrees. Penn State is a multi-campus research university that educates students from Pennsylvania, the nation, and the world, and improves the well-being and health of individuals and communities through integrated programs of teaching, research, and service. Their instructional mission includes undergraduate, graduate, professional, and continuing education offered through both resident instruction and online delivery.*

How do you define what has made Penn State such an attractive university?

We were founded in 1855 as Pennsylvania's land-grant university with a three-part mission of teaching, research, and service, and that commitment has grown over the years to the point where we have become one of the largest and most comprehensive universities in the world. Penn State's contributions span more than 200 different fields, and we have more than 50 programs ranked in the top 20 nationally. Penn State

is one of the nation's major research universities – last year, we had \$765 million of research expenditures. We're also one of Pennsylvania's largest employers with 46,000 employees.

Is your student base primarily from the Pennsylvania area, or is it much broader?

It's much broader. We are the most popular university in the United States, receiving over 110,000 applications for admission each year, and we're increasingly international: 4,400 of our students this year are from outside the

U.S. Our undergraduate population is about two-thirds in-state and one-third out-of-state. So we have primarily Pennsylvania residents, but we also have thousands of out-of-state residents.

Are there specific programs within your offerings that you're most known for?

Particularly notable would be the fact that we are one of the two largest producers of engineers in the United States; we have the largest College of Communications in the country; we have thousands of students in our Smeal College of Business; and we have great strength in fields like education, health and human development, agriculture, fine and performing arts, and the sciences.

This is a university that is very engaged in the community. How critical is that to the culture of Penn State, and has that been a focus from the early days?

It has been a fundamental part of our mission since the day we were founded. Penn State has the largest unified outreach effort in American higher education. Under the Vice President for Outreach, we offer everything from public broadcasting – both television and radio – which we operate for a very large geographical part of Pennsylvania, to the cooperative extension service, which includes things like nutrition programs, community development, agricultural development, 4-H, conferences, institutes, and our World Campus, which is our online Web-based university college that has 33,000 course enrollments alone this year.

You are well-known for the strength of your athletic teams. How critical has that been to the success of the university, particularly one that puts education first?

The theme of our athletic program is Success with Honor; we put a very high value on integrity in our athletic programs, and that is exemplified by Joe Paterno (Head Coach of

Penn State's football team), who is the most senior employee of Penn State, having served here for 60 years. We've enjoyed great success. We rank very high every year in the Director's Cup, which is the rating of schools by how they do overall across their sports, and we have among the highest graduation rates of any intercollegiate athletics program. This year, our student-athletes had a graduation success rate of 89 percent, and we're very proud of our commitment to the concept of a student/athlete.

We're also one of only a handful of athletic programs in the country that operate intercollegiate athletics on a completely self-supporting basis – no taxpayer dollars, no student tuition dollars, no university funds, and no legislative support. We've been able to do that because of the success of our program, through television contracts, our share of Big Ten conference and NCAA revenue, ticket sales for athletic events like football, and philanthropic support.

This university has a very engaged board of trustees. How critical has that been to the success you've been able to have?

One of the most important features of this Presidency, and one of the greatest attractions to the job, was the opportunity to work with a stellar board of trustees. The way our board operates functionally and how we are constituted structurally are great assets, and our system of governance is often held up as one of the best models in higher education. We have 32 members of our board, and they come from many different constituencies: business and industry, agriculture, our alumni, gubernatorial appointment, and government officials, and together, this is a very committed board that has been highly supportive of its President. It's also a board that operates independently and is able to make very good decisions with a minimal amount of political interference.

With things happening all the time at the university, do you have the ability to ever get away from it?

Not really. I never try to turn it off because this is a seven-day-a-week/24-hour-a-day kind of job, and anyone who is in the position understands that. I deal with it by building my fun and relaxation into the job. I do a lot of events with students – I'm a magician and I play in bands, and we often get invited to perform for student groups. It's about mixing personal and pleasure, but that is the way jobs like this are, and I like it that way. ●