The Path to Success
How philanthropy is opening doors for students on the road to graduation
Just as Mount Nittany soars above Happy Valley, the Mount Nittany Society represents the pinnacle of philanthropy to Penn State. Established forty years ago this spring, the Society celebrates those Penn Staters whose philanthropy has had the greatest impact across the University. From the inaugural group of 136 donors welcomed in 1979 to the more than 3,400 alumni and friends recognized today, the members of the Mount Nittany Society have demonstrated a level of generosity toward Penn State that has been nothing less than remarkable. Over four decades, members have committed a collective total of more than $2.7 billion to support every aspect of the University’s mission, transforming Penn State into the world-class institution it is today. Members receive a lifetime invitation to an annual spring gala, special communications about Penn State accomplishments and goals, and invitations to University-hosted events. Today, the Mount Nittany Society celebrates donors whose cumulative lifetime giving to Penn State has reached or exceeded $250,000 in irrevocable commitments. The Laurel Circle honors those whose giving has reached or exceeded $1 million, and the Elm Circle celebrates donors whose giving has reached or exceeded $5 million.

For more information about Mount Nittany Society impact or membership, visit raise.psu.edu/mountnittanysociety.
In July of 2017, we launched *A Greater Penn State for 21st Century Excellence* and asked you, our alumni and friends: How do we keep a Penn State education accessible? Nearly three years later, and more than halfway through the campaign, your generosity is at the heart of the answer.

Open Doors, one of our current campaign imperatives, represents a commitment to providing every student the support they need to achieve a timely degree. The Open Doors programs were created in response to President Barron’s mandate to address specific challenges that today’s students face in reaching graduation. In conjunction with the launch of *A Greater Penn State*, the University initiated a 2:1 match for scholarships established to support students in these programs. The matching opportunity was fully utilized, but the need to support our students continues—and philanthropic investment in Open Doors scholarships continues to inspire new possibilities for students across the Commonwealth.

This issue of *We Are* magazine celebrates the power and potential of the Open Doors programs and the scholarships that allow students to make the most of their opportunities. You will see numbers illustrating how socioeconomic disparity affects students’ paths to a four-year degree—and how philanthropy is empowering students to overcome this disadvantage. You will meet current Penn Staters who have benefitted from the Open Doors programs, hearing in their own words how the scholarships and other support they’ve received are shaping what’s possible for them at the University and beyond. You will learn about the role that parents are playing in defining the student experience at Penn State, and you will be introduced to a current undergraduate who, still working toward his own graduation day, is supporting his fellow students as an Open Doors scholarship donor himself.

Ensuring educational opportunity has defined Penn State from its founding, and our students have never lacked the ambition to succeed. Thank you for continuing to support and believe in our community. With your partnership, the University’s doors will remain open to every dedicated student who wants to walk through them.

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Rick Sokolov ’74 Lib
Chair, Executive Committee,
*A Greater Penn State for 21st Century Excellence*
Through a matching program that rallied thousands of donors, Penn State is helping students to graduate on time and on track to success—but the need remains great.

The Open Doors programs provide financial support, mentoring, special courses, and targeted programming to students facing challenges at different stages of their Penn State experience:

**RaiseMe** students can earn micro-scholarships and become college-ready while still in high school by meeting specific goals, such as A-level work in their classes, perfect attendance, and participation in testing such as the PSAT.

**Pathway to Success: Summer Start (PaSSS)** helps entering students at all campuses make the transition to Penn State in the summer before their first year, and support, which includes a campus job and academic advising, can continue for a second summer.

**Student Transitional Experiences Program (STEP)** helps undergraduates who will be completing their degrees at University Park after spending their first two years at one of Penn State’s other campuses.

**Smart Track to Success** assists World Campus students, who face many of the same challenges as traditional students as well as experiences specific to distance learners.

**Complete Penn State** is a structured program for students who are within thirty credits of earning their degree and who are identified as at risk of not graduating due to unexpected hardship.

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To make college more affordable, we need to control the total cost of a degree by focusing on timely completion. A tuition increase pales in comparison to going to school for another year. The Open Doors programs aim to help students complete their degrees on time while also having a full Penn State experience.”

—President Eric J. Barron

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**Graduate Rate and Time to Completion**

Socioeconomic background has a profound effect on graduate rates and timelines. For those who enrolled with the expectation to graduate with the Class of 2015:

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<th>All Students</th>
<th>Pell Grant* Recipients</th>
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<tr>
<td>6 Years 69.2%</td>
<td>6 Years 53.2%</td>
<td>6 Years 33.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 Years 49.8%</td>
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In the fall of 2017, 19,678 (23 percent) of all Penn State undergraduates received a Pell Grant. More than 8 percent of our undergraduate students are both low-income and first-generation.

*Federal Pell Grants offer subsidized aid to undergraduate students who, based on federally defined criteria, present exceptional financial need.*
Scholarships targeted to students in the Open Doors programs are already helping undergraduates from every background to stay on track to graduation.

Numbers as of 3/31/2019

Donors have created 545 Open Doors endowments through gifts totaling more than $31.2 million—and matched by $60.7 million in University contributions.

764 Open Doors Scholarships Awarded
Since the campaign started

|$1.5 million
Total amount awarded through all Open Doors programs
A Student Entrepreneur Makes Philanthropic History at Penn State Behrend

Ahead of the curve
In many ways, Paul Hoffman is a typical Penn State donor. He comes from a family of dedicated Penn Staters. He is a successful entrepreneur with a deep concern for the community in which his business operates. And he has recently partnered with Penn State to provide endowed scholarship support for students. But one thing sets him apart: he’s still a student himself.

Paul, 21, is currently a junior majoring in Accounting at Penn State Erie, The Behrend College. He started his college career at University Park but transferred back to Erie, his hometown, to manage his business, Hoffman United, an Erie-based real estate and construction company, and finish his Penn State career. His recent gift to create an Open Doors Scholarship at Penn State Behrend makes him the first student in the college’s history to establish a scholarship.

Philanthropy of this magnitude may be uncommon for someone Paul’s age, but getting an early start is perfectly in character for him. Hoffman United evolved from a lawn-care service he started when he was just twelve years old. Wanting to make some money, he canvassed the neighborhood and secured three jobs. “Every day after school, I’d mow the lawns and do any cleanup they needed,” he says. “That’s what instilled the confidence in me to be an entrepreneur.” The venture grew quickly through Paul’s high school years and after, eventually adding construction services and then real estate and property management.

Today Hoffman United owns 165 rental units in Erie and employs seventeen people. Its declared goal is to improve blighted areas of the city and enhance and transform neighborhoods by rehabilitating distressed or poorly maintained properties. “We’d rather make less profit and have a bigger impact,” Paul says. “I focus more on my employees, on the stability of the community, and on giving back to people.”

This last impulse drove him to create an Open Doors Scholarship at Penn State Behrend. The scholarship gives first preference to students who attend a program known as PaSSS, or Pathway to Success: Summer Start, which helps entering students make the transition to the college starting in the summer before their first year.

“I think the American Dream is alive,” Paul says. “For many people, going to college allows them to achieve that dream. With this scholarship, I wanted to help people who are not as fortunate as I am to excel in life.”

Paul committed $50,000 to establish the scholarship, and his parents, Tom and Paula Hoffman, in a show of support for their son’s philanthropy, matched his gift. The University’s 2:1 match for Open Doors Scholarships, which ended last year, then took the full amount to $300,000. “That’s a great investment!” Paul says.

To create this partnership, the Hoffmans worked with Kevin E. Moore, director of development and alumni relations at Penn State Behrend. “Paul has a very rare combination of passion, business acumen, and compassion for others,” Kevin says. “It is highly unusual for someone his age to be so worldly and so generous.”

As he runs his business and pursues his degree simultaneously, Paul finds that classroom learning and real-world practice overlap and reinforce each other. And when he graduates next year, he’ll be carrying on a proud tradition in his family. Both his parents are Penn Staters, and his father is the current chair of the Penn State Behrend Gift Planning Campaign Committee and a member of the Penn State Behrend Council of Fellows’ Board of Directors. Paul is also one of a particularly rare breed: Penn State triplets. His sister, Christine, who is also vice president and head property manager for Hoffman United, is attending Penn State Behrend, and his brother, Thomas, is studying hospitality management at University Park.

Paul has big plans for expanding Hoffman United in the coming years. He says, “We’ve accomplished a lot here in Erie, with more to come, and we’re looking to take that elsewhere, to provide stable jobs and help strengthen communities across the country.” With his entrepreneurial drive, business experience, and Penn State education, he’s got everything he needs to succeed.

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—Paul Hoffman
Raised in Philadelphia, Anthony set his sights on Penn State in high school through enrollment in the RaiseMe program. He began his college career at Penn State Abington, and today he is finishing the Integration and Applications option of the B.S. program in the College of Information Sciences and Technology at University Park. He is the recipient of the Brook J. Lenfest Open Doors Scholarship at Penn State.

What attracted you to the RaiseMe program?
Being able to take my good grades from high school and turn them into points toward scholarship support. Working hard to do well in school so that you can get into college is one thing, but with RaiseMe, my grades also helped me to afford to go once I was accepted. The program also motivated me to do my best in school—I wanted to keep up straight As and Bs so that I could earn the most support possible.

How would your Penn State experience have been different without RaiseMe?
I would have worried much more about affording my tuition. I have two siblings: my older brother graduated from the University last year, and my younger brother is at Penn State Abington right now, so the support I got through RaiseMe made a huge difference for my whole family. Scholarship support through RaiseMe helped me to focus more on my education and less on how to pay for it.

Angel was inspired to attend Penn State by the show of alumni pride in her hometown of Richmond, Virginia. And through the PaSSS program, she got a head start on her education, enrolling the summer before her first year at Penn State Altoona. Today, she is studying Electro-Mechanical Engineering Technology and serves as a Lion Ambassador and PaSSS mentor for other students at the campus. Angel has received the Dunklebarger Family Open Doors Scholarship.

How has PaSSS made a difference in your Penn State experience?
Every first-year student feels the awkward moment of arriving to campus and not knowing where to start—and for me as an out-of-state student, the challenge felt magnified. PaSSS gave me the chance to get to know my campus and the opportunities here. The tuition support gave me space to focus on doing well in my classes and time to get involved in extracurriculars. The program also placed me in a job that I love and still have today. PaSSS made the transition to college less intimidating, and I don’t think I would be where I am today without it.

What do you think makes the Penn State community special?
The idea of “We Are.” We may attend one of twenty-four different locations, but we are all The Pennsylvania State University, and I think that’s something really special. Coming here, I never imagined that there would be so many people willing to support me and push me to become the best that I can be.
Chelsea devoted four years to exploring her professional ambitions before enrolling at Penn State Hazelton. She credits the STEP program as a reason for her successful junior-year transition to University Park—and ultimately, a part of what’s made her Penn State experience possible. Chelsea is studying Wildlife and Fisheries Science in the College of Agricultural Sciences and is the recipient of both the John and Jeanne Gooch and the Donald L. and Marjorie Resta Young Open Doors Scholarships.

**Why did you choose Penn State?**

I come from a Penn State family. But getting the courage to go to college is something that was a big accomplishment for me. Having earned a GED, I had to put in extra effort to get here. When I made the move to University Park, support from the STEP program gave me both the financial help and confidence I needed to go beyond my comfort zone and become my own happy person here.

**How has the STEP program helped you as a student?**

I spent a lot of time figuring out what I wanted to do with my career before committing money toward a degree. But I knew coming to University Park would be culture shock. Having a group of students to share the experience with was so helpful. It was a relief to have financial support I didn’t have to worry about repaying. As a slightly older student, I worried that I wasn’t going to connect with people or find my niche. But I did. And a big part of that was because of STEP.

Nakia began her Penn State education in 1997 but stopped four courses short of completing her degree, unable to afford her tuition. More than twenty years later, graduation day is on the calendar for this Smeal College of Business senior with help from the Complete Penn State program. Nakia is studying Business Management and is the recipient of the Frederick W. and Elizabeth J. Romig Open Doors Scholarship.

**Why is the Complete Penn State program important to you?**

You never know somebody’s story. Twenty years ago, I only needed to finish four courses, and I couldn’t afford it. When I chose to return to school, Complete Penn State made it possible. I could afford to commute to campus twice a week and keep my full-time job. I could afford to buy my books. I had an advisor looking out for me at every turn. Coming back to Penn State, I found a community that wanted to help me. Words can’t express how grateful I am.

**How do you imagine it will feel to walk across the graduation stage?**

I hope that I can control my emotions, because I know I’m going to scream, holler, shout—this will be such an accomplishment for me. It takes so much more than good grades to be successful in college and in life. Getting a Penn State degree has always been my goal, and with the financial and personal support I’ve gotten through Complete Penn State, I’ll be so proud to look around on graduation day and say that I’ve finally made it.
Penn State’s Office of University Development (OUD) helps alumni and friends to achieve their philanthropic goals. In every issue, we’ll feature a different leader from OUD and ask your questions. Please email DevComm@ddar.psu.edu and tell us what you want to know about giving to Penn State.

Kimberly Neely
Director of Parent Philanthropy and University Programs

As the University’s first director of parent philanthropy, Kimberly Neely is dedicated to helping parents engage in and enhance their student’s experience at Penn State. With an undergraduate degree in English and a master’s degree in Public Relations, Kim began her career as a communications coordinator at the Pennsylvania Medical Society in 1989. Most recently, she served as executive director for the Foundation for Mount Nittany Health. Today, Kim is leading the way in connecting Penn State families with opportunities not only to further the success of their students, but also to enhance the collegiate experience for all undergraduates at Penn State.

Q: As University donors, what makes Penn State parents unique?
A: At the heart of a parent’s relationship with the University, whether or not they are alumni themselves, is their deep dedication to the depth, breadth, and quality of their student’s Penn State experience. Parents witness firsthand the impact the University has on their children and on their children’s peers as well. The reasons why their students love and chose Penn State become a part of their own lives, too. As donors, Penn State parents are motivated by their children’s pride in the University—and their own pride in what their students achieve here. Parents who give—to scholarships, study abroad experiences, student organizations, and more—are inspired by what makes their sons’ and daughters’ Penn State experiences so special.

Q: What impact does parent philanthropy have on the Penn State community?
A: Giving to the University empowers families to become an active part of their students’ educations. Many parents also give in order to support undergraduates who share the same passions and interests as their children, but who may not be able to afford to pursue them. Philanthropy brings parents into the Penn State family, a family that cares passionately about the success of every undergraduate, both present and future. And even though their child is the one earning a Penn State degree, philanthropy makes parents feel like Penn State is their university, too.
THE LONG GOWN. THE PHOTOS AND HUGS. The tassel moved from right to left. The classic traditions of graduation day—and the immeasurable pride of that achievement—have bound Penn Staters together for generations.

Keeping this moment accessible has always been at the heart of the University’s land-grant mission. But for many students today, the pathway to graduation has become more complicated, and often, less linear. For aspiring graduatesShouldering commitments like military service, full-time jobs, or raising a family, Penn State’s World Campus keeps a University education within reach. Because these students often face challenges that campus-bound students do not, Smart Track to Success, a featured Open Doors program, offers World Campus students the type of support that many need in their first two years in order to stay on track to graduation—mentoring, special classes, customized academic schedules, and more. And with philanthropic investment, Smart Track is positioned to have an ever greater impact. Through the Open Doors Scholarship Program, alumni and friends can prioritize scholarship support for Smart Track participants, lightening the load for those rising to a challenge—and showing today’s students that no matter where they live, Penn State is a place to call home.

To learn more about Smart Track to Success and the Open Doors Scholarship Program, visit: greaterpennstate.psu.edu/open-doors

Above left, a 1940s Penn State graduation ceremony. Above right, Casey Staley-Bingaman ’18 with her family on graduation day at Penn State Mont Alto. Casey earned two degrees—in finance and accounting—from World Campus while raising twins and supporting her husband, an active-duty Marine.
To Angela Connors ’16, giving back to Penn State is a true honor. A former THON dancer, member of the national champion Lionettes Dance Team, and graduate of the College of Health and Human Development, Angela knows firsthand how the generosity of the Penn State community can change students’ lives. As a student-athlete, the support she received from dedicated donors enabled her to perform her best on the dance floor and in the classroom—and now as an alumna, she is proud to extend that very same support to current and future Penn Staters. Although she gives for many reasons, Angela’s top priority is ensuring that students know one thing: the Penn State community always has—and always will have—their backs.