

Lock Haven University

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LHU student makes presentation on Pennsylvania higher education to Senate Appropriations Committee

It was standing room only on November 3 when the Pennsylvania Senate Appropriations Committee held a hearing funding for the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE), and one of the highlights was a presentation by Lock Haven University senior Austin Mohney on LHU's nanotechnology program.

The hearing at Millersville University of Pennsylvania drew audience members, including faculty, staff and students, from all of the PASSHE institutions, as well as a large number of interested citizens from the area.

The hearing consisted of a full slate of presentations. The purpose of the hearing was, in the words of Chairman Jack Corman, to look at "return on investment." "What," he asked, "are the citizens of Pennsylvania getting in return for their investment in higher education?"

The committee heard remarks from Guido M. Pichini, Chair of the PASSHE Board of Governors; John Cavanagh, Chancellor of PASSHE; and Dr. Francine G. McNairy, President of Millersville University; and other dignitaries. A series of panel discussions focused on various aspects of PASSHE contributions to the Commonwealth and its students. The first panel focused on how PASSHE relates to the Commonwealth, its regions and its communities. A student panel and a faculty panel provided information on how PASSHE transforms the lives of students.

For the panel session on the academic experience, five PASSHE institutions were invited to make presentations on their outstanding signature programs. Lock Haven University Professor of Physics and Director of Nanotechnology, Dr. Anura U. Goonewardene sat with Austin Mohney, who gave a presentation on LHU's renowned nanotechnology program.

Austin Mohney is majoring in traditional physics and applied physics/nanotechnology. He explained that nanotechnology is the science of manipulating matter on the nano scale. How small is that? A nanometer, he said, is a billionth of a meter – about the amount a person's fingernail grows in one second. He added that by 2015, nano products are expected to create some 2 million jobs worldwide.

Austin then gave a brief overview of the LHU nano program. At Lock Haven University, the nano program takes a "hands-on" approach, he said. As a result, LHU nano students have made 19



presentations on their research at national conferences. The National Science Foundation has given multiple funding awards to the program since 2008, totaling over \$750,000. He added that 50% of students in the Nano program are first-generation college students.

To illustrate the impact of the LHU nano program, Austin described his own experiences and the opportunities that the program has opened for him. He, too, is a first-generation college student. He came from a small town and didn't have a stellar academic record in high school. However, when he discovered a natural talent for physics and became involved in the LHU nano program, things took off. He has presented projects at six national conferences and this past summer did a fully-paid REU (Research Experience for Undergraduates) at Georgia Tech. Recently he made a poster presentation in San Jose, California, and while there, was invited by representatives from some of the nation's top research universities to visit their campuses.

In the audience to support Austin was fellow senior Nick Hilton. Nick made national headlines in March when he and other runners on the LHU cross-country and track-and-field teams ran to Harrisburg to take part in a demonstration in support of full funding for Pennsylvania public higher education.

Other members of the LHU delegation were Dr. Zak Hossain, Interim Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences; Dr. Linda Koch, Vice President for Student Affairs; and Mary White, Director of Marketing and Communications.

Lock Haven University is a member of the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE), the largest provider of higher education in the commonwealth. Its 14 universities offer more than 250 degree and certificate programs in more than 120 areas of study. Nearly 405,000 system alumni live and work in Pennsylvania.

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