University of Pittsburgh | PRSSIM Project Office of the Provost

PRSSIM Year 1 Updates

The University of Pittsburgh's Partners for Rural Student Success Impact and Mobility (PRSSIM) Project aims to support rural students by increasing pre-college engagement, university enrollment, retention, graduation, and internship attainment. This page summarizes Year 1 achievements and progress toward these goals.

Staffing, Project Launch and Campus and Community Engagement

In Year 1, four key staff members were hired: a Rural Student Recruiter, Project Coordinator, Program Manager, and Senior Academic Coordinator. With full staffing by Quarter 3 (Q3), the team began executing core initiatives.

The project was formally introduced to the University of Pittsburgh's Chancellor, Board of Trustees, and broader campus community at the beginning of the year, with listening tours and student focus groups held across Pitt's regional campuses (Bradford, Greensburg, Johnstown) to gather input and foster partnerships, thereafter. To enable targeted outreach and institutional focus on rural students, the University added a "rural" identifier to its student success platform.

The team participated in student events and hosted surveys to understand rural student needs and promote project resources. Professional development funding supported academic advisors' training at a national conference and certification programs in academic coaching and project management to further socialize project initiatives and objectives and garner regional campus buy-in.

Initiatives with direct impact on Project Objectives

1. **Recruiting Rural Students -** In collaboration with the Office of Admissions, a vital partner for the project, the recruiting team successfully engaged with rural students through a range of initiatives, including events at local education agencies, libraries, and community gathering places in rural Pennsylvania.
2. **Financial Wellness and Literacy Programming** – The team collaborated with the Financial Aid Director and Financial Wellness team on the Pittsburgh campus to understand the financial aid department landscape on the regional campuses and explore potential partnerships for supporting financial literacy for rural students. In this intentional partnership, scaling of financial literacy resources for prospective rural students and their families occurred, contributing to project objectives 1 and 2, increasing rural students served in pre-college programming and increasing rural students enrolled at the University.

3. **Major Mentors at Pitt-Greensburg** – In Quarter 4 (Q4), the project began funding the Major Mentors program, which connects Pitt-Greensburg students with mentors in their majors, who host different mentoring events throughout the academic year.
4. **Pitt Commons at Pitt-Bradford** – The Pitt-Bradford campus, which is the campus with the largest ratio of rural students of all University of Pittsburgh campuses, launched a pilot of an online mentorship program in Q3 with a group of students and alumni. 100% of mentors and mentees matched and connected.
5. **Degree Finder for Pitt-Greensburg –** In Q3 the Greensburg campus Degree Finder tool started to be built. It will launch early in 2025.
6. **me3 –** In Q4, the Program Manager for Student Success started work necessary for the scaling of the career inventory assessment tool to the regional campuses. Access to free career exploration tools and assessments, like me3 as currently is essential for rural students as they make key decisions about academic and career paths.
7. **Experiential Learning Academy –** Throughout Q3 and Q4, the Experiential Learning Academy (ELA) was developed. ELA is a 4-hour career preparation course housed in Pitt's learning management system (Canvas), designed to prepare students with the essential skills to represent themselves and the institution with professionalism as they enter the working world.
8. **Internship Stipend Funding** – In Q4, the team began laying the foundation to create an internship funding program for rural students. This work will continue throughout the course of year 2 with students being funded for the first time for unpaid internship experiences in year 2.