

Penn State Student Newspaper Readership Program

Overview of the Program: Created by President Graham Spanier in 1997, the Penn State Student Newspaper Readership Program is currently offered to students at 22 Penn State campuses. Students have access to *USA TODAY*, the *New York Times*, and the local/regional paper at no additional charge. The goals of the program are to enhance the learning environment on campus; increase students' knowledge of community, national, and world events; encourage a lifelong daily newspaper readership habit; and create more engaged citizens in their local communities. The program has demonstrated effectiveness at all Penn State campuses -- commuter campuses with 700 students to residential campuses with 3,600 students, as well as at University Park with 42,000 students.

Hallmarks of the program include a coordinated recycling effort and a university-wide committee including representatives from the newspaper partners. The recycling efforts at University Park produced approximately 190 tons of recyclable paper in 2004-05. Each year, the recycled paper is sold with the proceeds benefiting an endowed student scholarship. The newspaper readership committee provides oversight of the program and is often cited as a primary reason for the overwhelming success of the program at Penn State. The committee, which meets monthly, is comprised of representatives from the newspapers, the distribution agent, Student Affairs, Physical Plant, Public Relations, student organizations, Residence Life and the Commonwealth campuses.

Another important aspect of the program is promoting the use of newspapers in the classroom. Faculty who require the newspaper are eligible for a free subscription, and the *New York Times* and *USA TODAY* provide various resources for faculty on incorporating newspapers into their curriculum. For more information about the program, visit <http://www.newspapers.psu.edu>.

Effectiveness of the Program: In the spring of 2005, Penn State partnered with Educational Benchmarking, Inc. (EBI) to expand previous assessment efforts to more fully measure the use and effectiveness of the newspaper readership program. The survey was conducted on 20 Penn State campuses and at six other institutions from across the country. The following results are highlights from the data collected at University Park where 1,339 undergraduate and graduate students responded to the survey (for a 27% response rate and a 2.63 confidence interval). For a more complete review of the findings, visit <http://www.newspapers.psu.edu/success.shtml>.

The following findings are about the use of and satisfaction with the newspaper readership program:

- 90% had read the paper in the last seven days;
- 89% had picked up a paper directly from the readership program's distribution units;
- 73% had picked up a newspaper that was lying around (indirect use);
- 86% expressed satisfaction with the program;
- 35% had at least one instructor that academic year require them to read a newspaper on a regular basis;
- 91% indicated the availability of free newspapers increased their newspaper readership; and
- 82% indicated they at least "sometimes" recycle their newspapers.

Learning Outcomes Associated with Newspaper Readership: Moreover, there is overwhelming evidence of the relationship between newspaper readership and developing cognitive skills, increasing awareness and understanding of current issues, and developing civic-mindedness. In addition, there is a strong, positive relationship between newspaper readership and student engagement in and out of the classroom and in the community. For example,

- students who read the paper were significantly more likely to be able to articulate their views on major issues and to be civically engaged than those who did not read the paper;
- students who were required to read the newspaper for class were significantly more likely to be informed about local, national, and international issues and to be engaged on campus and in the classroom than those who were not required to read the paper; and
- there was a strong, positive relationship between reading local, national, and international news and developing civic-mindedness and developing cognitive skills.

(Research was conducted by Penn State's Office of Student Affairs Research and Assessment, www.sa.psu.edu/sara/)