Penn State Mont Alto: A Strategic Performance Review

Data-Based Evaluation of Commonwealth Campuses Using Penn State's Own Metrics
(prepared on 5/21/25; updated on 7/27/25)

Purpose: To provide a transparent, comparative analysis of Mont Alto's
performance across core metrics — including enrollment, academic
outcomes, cost efficiency, and community impact — in the context of the
broader Commonwealth Campus review.

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This document presents our analysis of the data included in the [CWC Workgroup Recommendation](). The evaluation was conducted using the performance indicators outlined in the original report to ensure consistency with the framework provided by the Workgroup.

Our analysis followed the performance indicators outlined in the university's own report. For each measure, we identified the five campuses performing at the highest level and assigned them a score of 1; all other campuses received a score of 0. This process was applied consistently across all criteria, and the scores were totaled to determine an overall performance score for each campus. Based on this analysis, we recommended continued investment in the five campuses with the highest total scores, as they have shown the strongest performance according to the university's established benchmarks. We believe these findings provide a clear, data-driven foundation for making informed decisions about the future of our public higher education system.

Enrollment

Figure 1 is based on Table 1 from page 14 of the [CWC Workgroup Recommendation – Board of Trustees]() document. In the figure, dashed lines indicate campuses recommended for closure by the report, while solid lines represent those identified for continued investment. The Mont Alto campus is shown with a black dashed line. Although Mont Alto experienced a period of enrollment decline over several years, the rate of decline began to stabilize around 2019. More recently, data from 2023 suggest the campus is beginning to show signs of enrollment recovery. Notably, Mont Alto currently has the fourth-highest enrollment among all 12 campuses. In contrast, two campuses recommended for continued investment—Beaver and Allegheny—have shown a consistent and steady decline in enrollment over the same period.

On page 12 of the *report*, it states: "***Each of the 12 campuses under evaluation have enrollment under 900 students (Table 1), below the average/mean enrollment of all Commonwealth Campuses (1,173)***." However, this comparison does not appear to be an accurate or equitable assessment. For instance, Abington Campus, which enrolls approximately 2,899 students as of 2024 and offers 26 undergraduate majors, is included in the average. In contrast, Mont Alto has 613 students and offers 9 majors. Comparing small, regionally focused campuses like Mont Alto to significantly larger campuses such as Abington does not provide a fair or meaningful basis for evaluating performance or viability.

On page 14 of the report, it is noted that "***Campuses with fewer than 500 students face challenges in maintaining a diverse range of academic programs, appropriate services, and a traditional on-campus college experience***." However, the Beaver campus falls just below this threshold, with only 496 students—just four short of the stated benchmark—and Greater Allegheny enrolled only 353 students this past year. In comparison, Mont Alto currently serves 613 students. These figures raise important questions about the consistency of the criteria used in determining which campuses are recommended for closure versus continued investment.
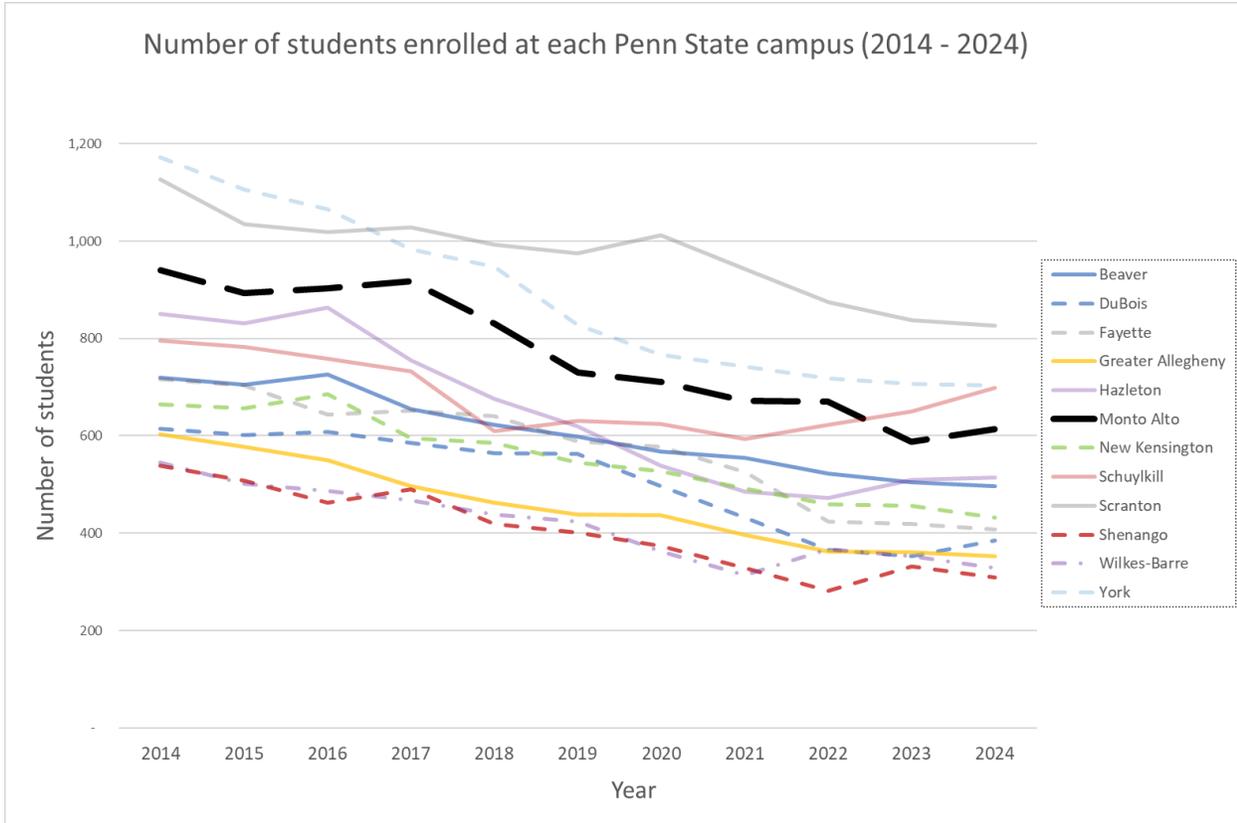
Figure 1 Number of students enrolled at each Penn State campus from 2014-2014

Population

Figures 2 and 3 illustrate population trends in the counties where the affected campuses are located. According to the data, Franklin County (home to Mont Alto) has a projected population increase of 0.5%. In contrast, Beaver County's population has a significant projected decline of 8.9%, Allegheny County is projected to decrease by 1.8%.

When we consider that a significant majority of students at these campuses are Pennsylvania residents—76% at Beaver, 82% at Greater Allegheny, and 84% at Mont Alto—local population trends become a critical factor in evaluating long-term viability. As noted on page 16 of the report, "***Because of this important role of campus location, county-by-county population projections are an important guide in helping us think about long-term campus viability***"

While Pittsburgh is located in Allegheny County, the [city's modest growth rate of just 0.05%](#) has not offset the county's overall population decline. Additionally, despite the geographic proximity of Beaver and Greater Allegheny campuses to Pittsburgh, this has not translated into higher enrollment over the years. In fact, both campuses have seen consistent enrollment declines over the past decade.

Projected Population Change, 2020 to 2050

Figure 2: Projected population change across Pennsylvania by county from 2020 to 2050 for the entire population (Source: Center for Rural PA)

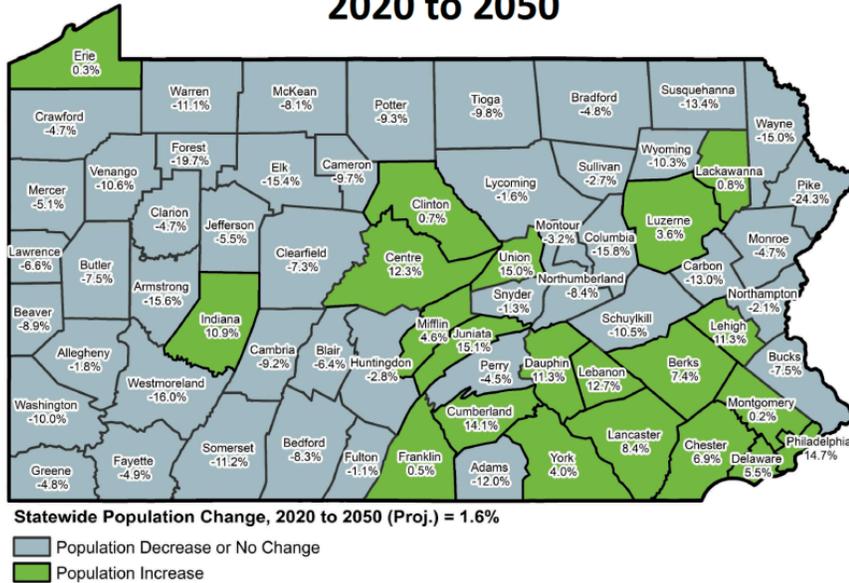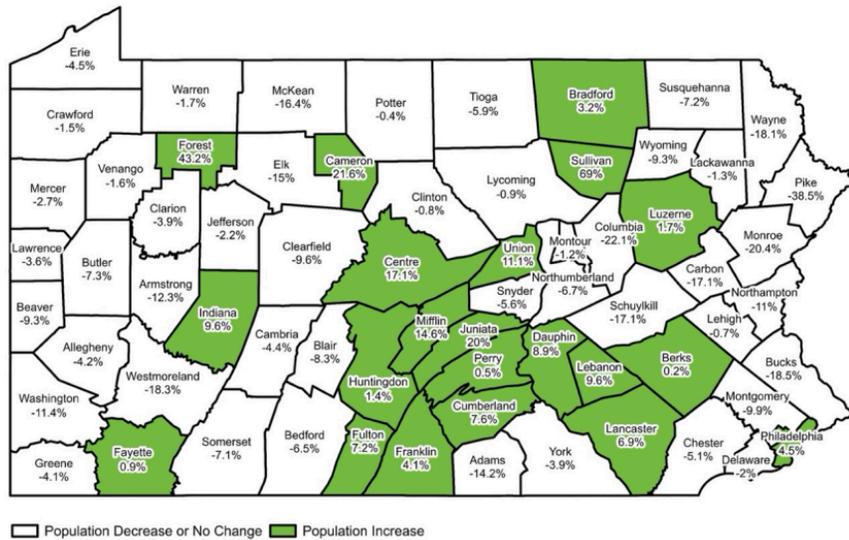Figure 3: Projected youth population (ages 15-19) change across Pennsylvania by county from 2020 to 2050 for the entire population (Source: Center for Rural PA)

Furthermore, the youth population in Franklin County, home to Mont Alto, is projected to increase by 4.1%, while the youth populations in Beaver and Allegheny counties are expected to decline by 9.3% and 4.2%, respectively.

Given these trends, continued investment in Mont Alto appears to align more closely with both population growth and the broader goals of long-term educational access for Pennsylvania residents.

Figure 4 illustrates the population changes in the counties where the 12 campuses under consideration are located. Notably, Mont Alto is one of the few campuses where both the overall population and the youth population are projected to increase between 2020 and 2050.

Projected Population Change (2020-2050)

	Population Change	Youth Population Change
Beaver	-8.9	-9.3
DuBois	-7.3	-9.6
Fayette	-4.9	0.9
Greater Allegheny	-1.8	-4.2
Hazleton	3.6	1.7
Mont Alto	0.5	4.1
New Kensington	-16	-18.3
Schuylkill	-10.5	-17.1
Scranton	0.8	-1.3
Shenango	-6.6	-3.6
Wilkes-Barre	3.6	1.7
York	4	-3.9

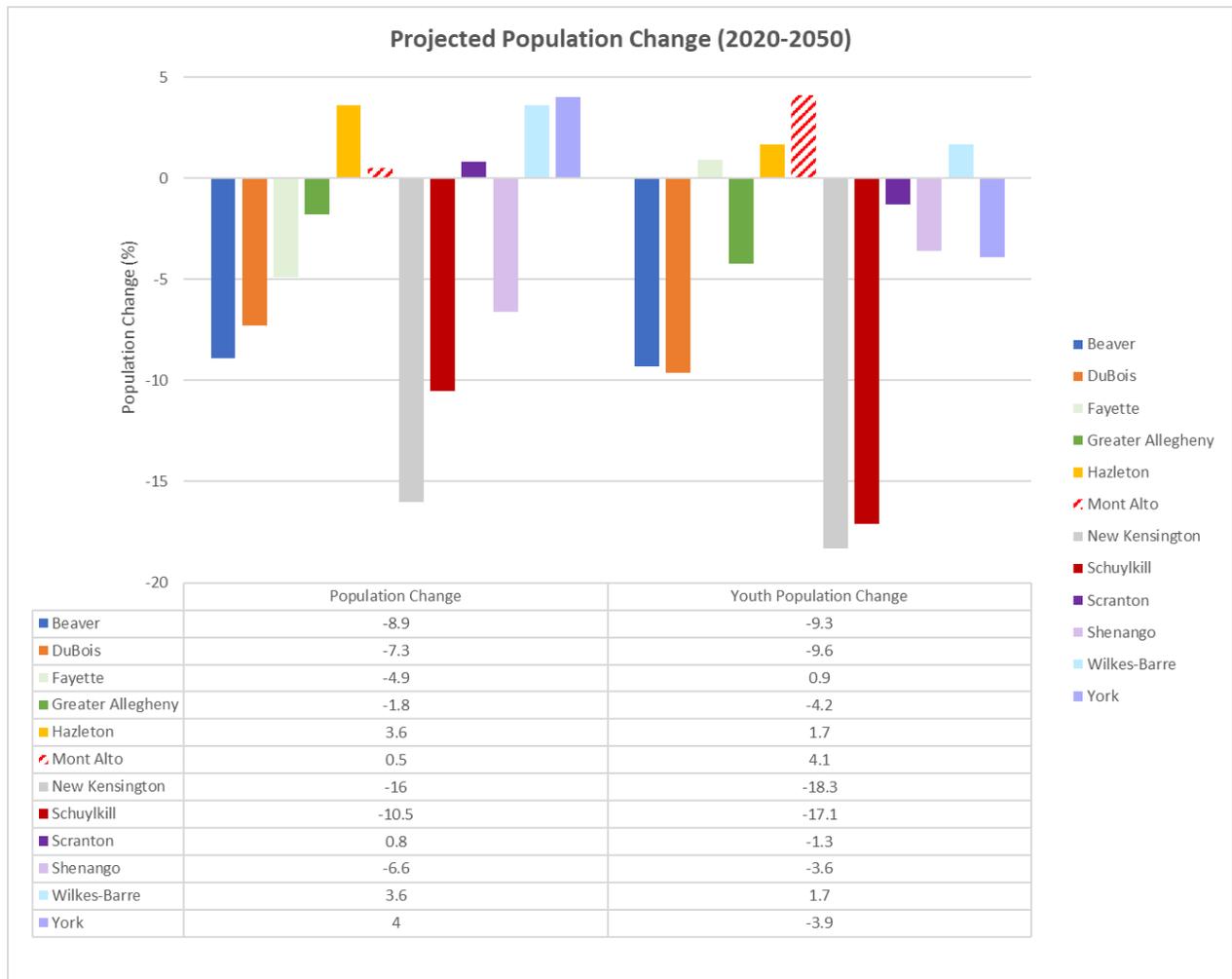Figure 4: Projected population change in the counties where the 12 campuses under consideration are located.

Core Business Indicators

The 143-page recommendation includes figures for net revenue, total expenses, and net balance for each campus, but it does not account for differences in student enrollment. Figure 5 addresses this gap by presenting these financial metrics on a per-student basis.

When adjusted for enrollment, Allegheny emerges as the campus with the highest negative balance per student. While Mont Alto generates lower net revenue per student, it also operates with the lowest total expenses per student when compared to campuses such as Beaver and Greater Allegheny.

When comparing all 12 campuses under consideration, Mont Alto ranks among the five with the most favorable (i.e., least negative) net balance per student. The other campuses in this group include Scranton, York, Schuylkill, and Beaver.

Core Business Indicators (2024)

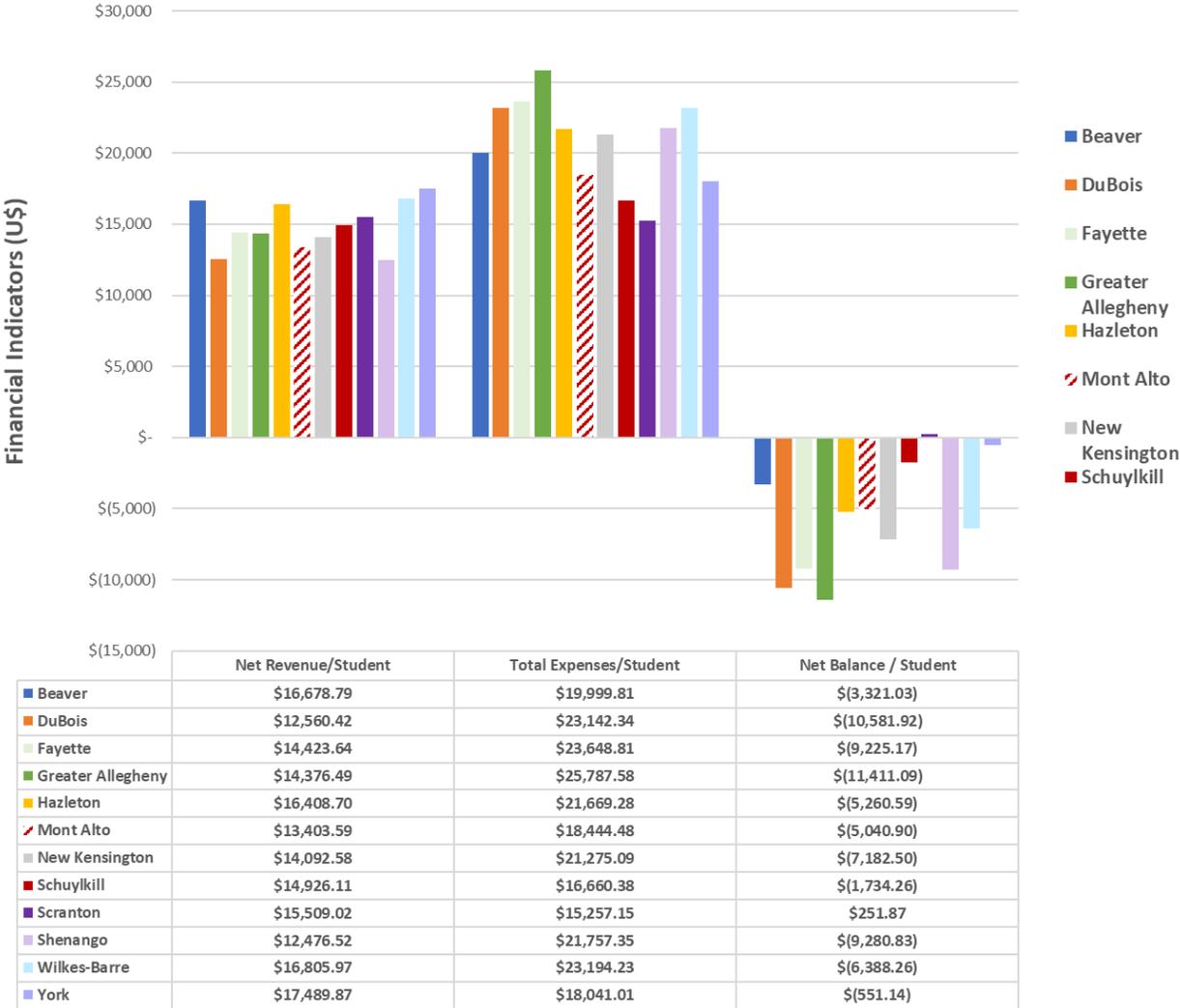|	Net Revenue/Student	Total Expenses/Student	Net Balance / Student
Beaver	$16,678.79	$19,999.81	$(3,321.03)
DuBois	$12,560.42	$23,142.34	$(10,581.92)
Fayette	$14,423.64	$23,648.81	$(9,225.17)
Greater Allegheny	$14,376.49	$25,787.58	$(11,411.09)
Hazleton	$16,408.70	$21,669.28	$(5,260.59)
Mont Alto	$13,403.59	$18,444.48	$(5,040.90)
New Kensington	$14,092.58	$21,275.09	$(7,182.50)
Schuylkill	$14,926.11	$16,660.38	$(1,734.26)
Scranton	$15,509.02	$15,257.15	$251.87
Shenango	$12,476.52	$21,757.35	$(9,280.83)
Wilkes-Barre	$16,805.97	$23,194.23	$(6,388.26)
York	$17,489.87	$18,041.01	$(551.14)

Figure 5: Core business indicators for the 12 campuses under consideration.

Although Mont Alto has the highest overall maintenance backlog (Figure 6), when adjusted for enrollment, it has the fourth-lowest maintenance backlog per student—despite being the oldest campus in the system.

Figure 7 indicates that the Mont Alto campus has the lowest research expenditures among the campuses considered. However, research spending does not appear to have been a determining factor in the recommendations for continued investment. Notably, Wilkes-Barre and DuBois—ranked first and second in average research expenditures over the past five years—were recommended for closure. In contrast, Schuylkill and Scranton, which rank among the five campuses with the lowest research expenditures, were recommended to remain open.
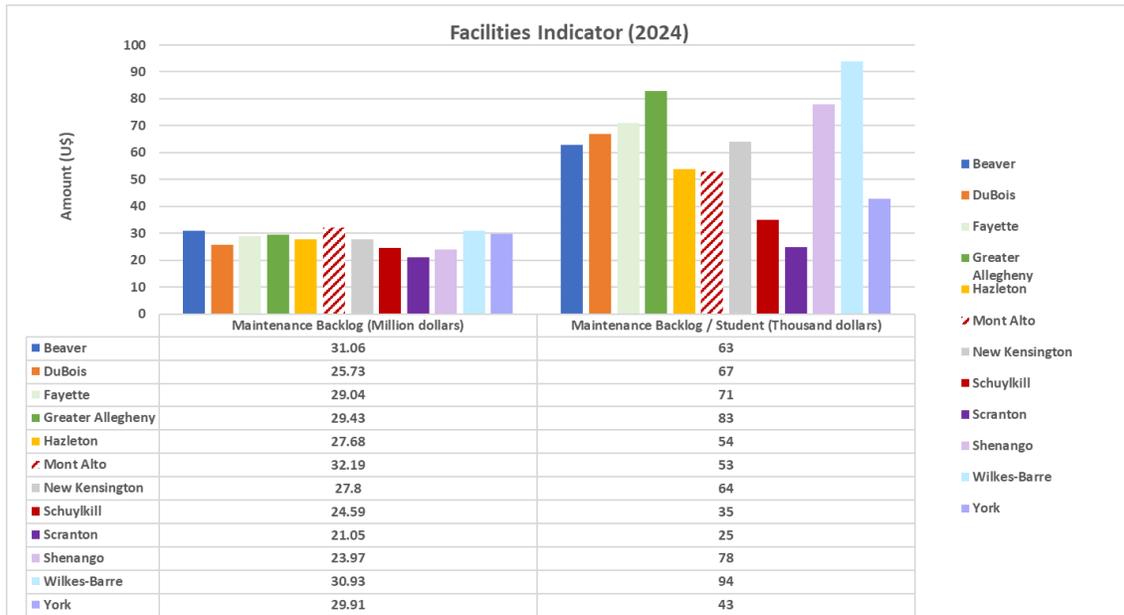

Facilities Indicator (2024)

	Maintenance Backlog (Million dollars)	Maintenance Backlog / Student (Thousand dollars)
Beaver	31.06	63
DuBois	25.73	67
Fayette	29.04	71
Greater Allegheny	29.43	83
Hazleton	27.68	54
Mont Alto	32.19	53
New Kensington	27.8	64
Schuylkill	24.59	35
Scranton	21.05	25
Shenango	23.97	78
Wilkes-Barre	30.93	94
York	29.91	43

Figure 6: Facilities indicators for the 12 campuses under consideration.

Research Expenditures

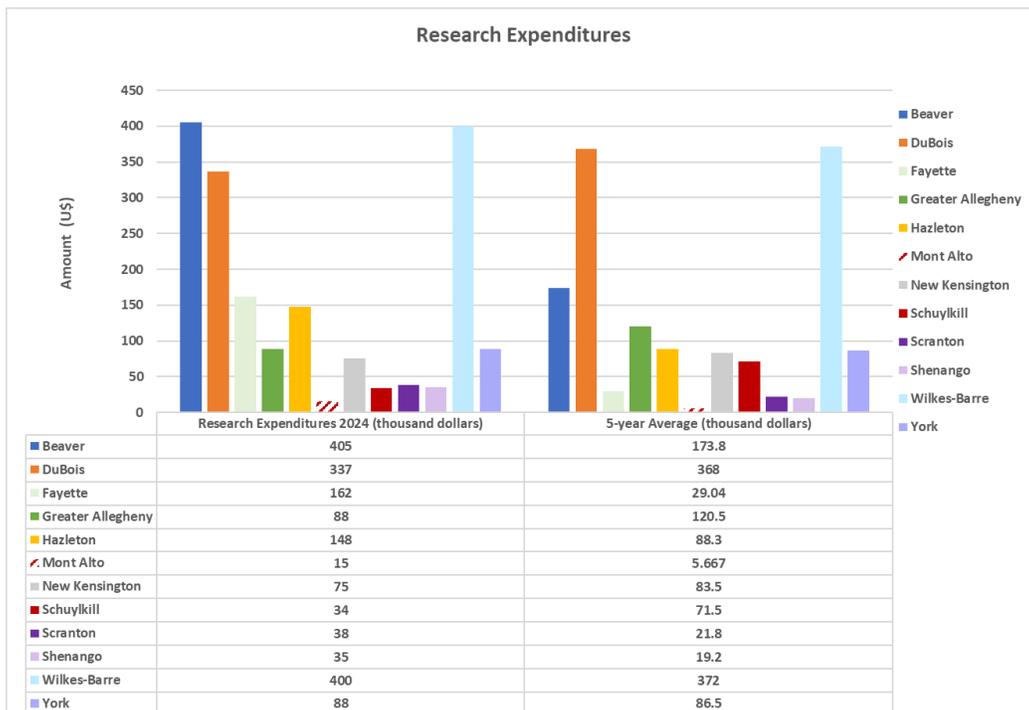|	Research Expenditures 2024 (thousand dollars)	5-year Average (thousand dollars)
Beaver	405	173.8
DuBois	337	368
Fayette	162	29.04
Greater Allegheny	88	120.5
Hazleton	148	88.3
Mont Alto	15	5.667
New Kensington	75	83.5
Schuylkill	34	71.5
Scranton	38	21.8
Shenango	35	19.2
Wilkes-Barre	400	372
York	88	86.5

Figure 7: Research Expenditures for the 12 campuses under consideration.

Figure 8 displays the distribution of higher education institutions in Pennsylvania by sector and type, while Figure 9 illustrates the number of institutions located within a 30- and 50-mile radius of each of the 12 campuses, normalized per 10,000 county residents. This population-based approach provides a more accurate measure of local educational competition. Notably, Mont Alto ranks among the four campuses with the fewest neighboring institutions per 10,000 residents within a 30-mile radius, indicating a lower level of competition and underscoring the importance of maintaining access to higher education in this region.
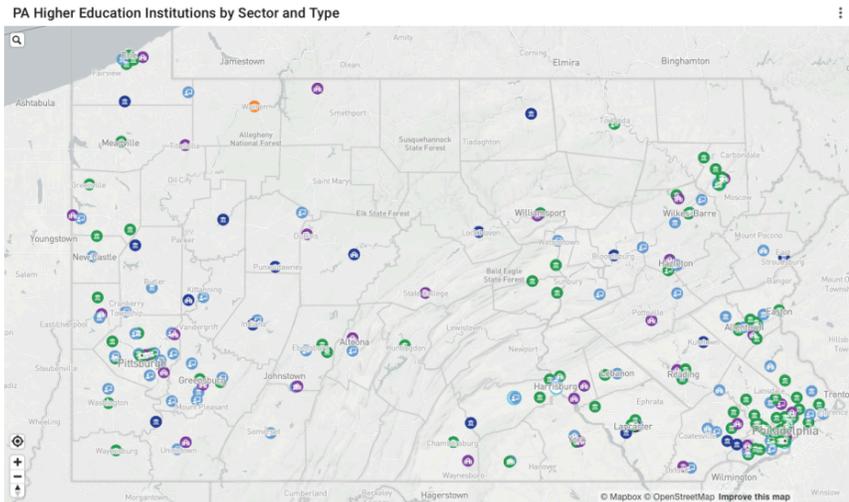

Figure 8: This screen-captured image (143-page recommendation) reflects an interactive online map of PA's higher education institutions, which can be adjusted based on multiple variables including sector and campus type. Source: PA Higher Education Institutions by Sector and Type. Credit: Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. All Rights Reserved.
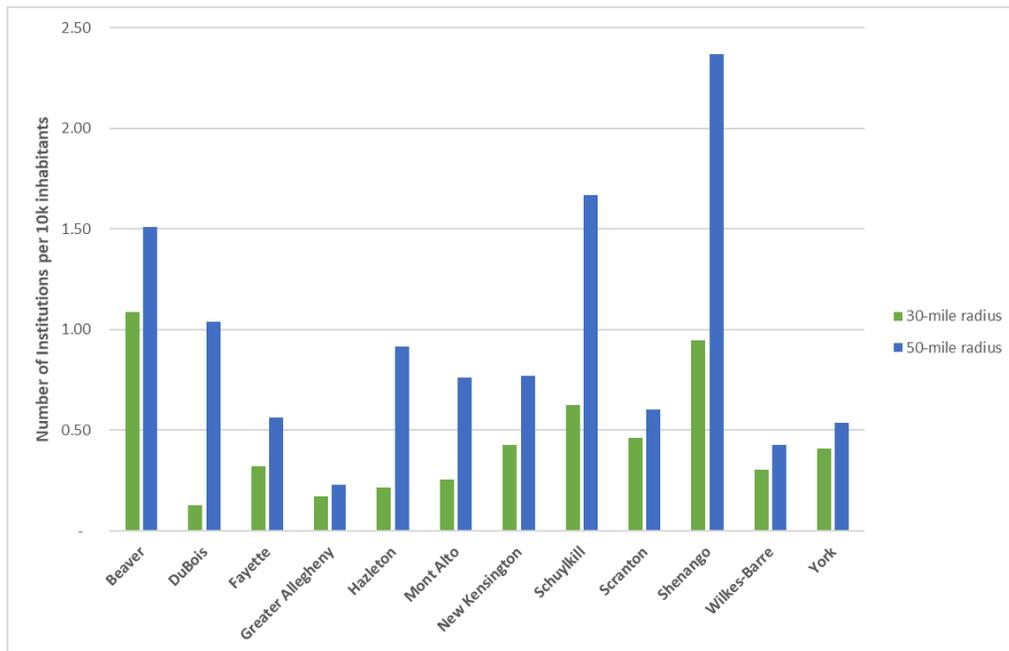

Figure 9: Number of higher education institutions within a 30- and 50-mile radius of each of the 12 campuses, normalized per 10,000 county residents

Residential Enrollment

Mont Alto ranks among the top five Commonwealth Campuses under consideration in the number of international students (Figure 10). It is also among the top four in enrollment of both Pennsylvania residents and out-of-state students, reflecting the campus's broad appeal.
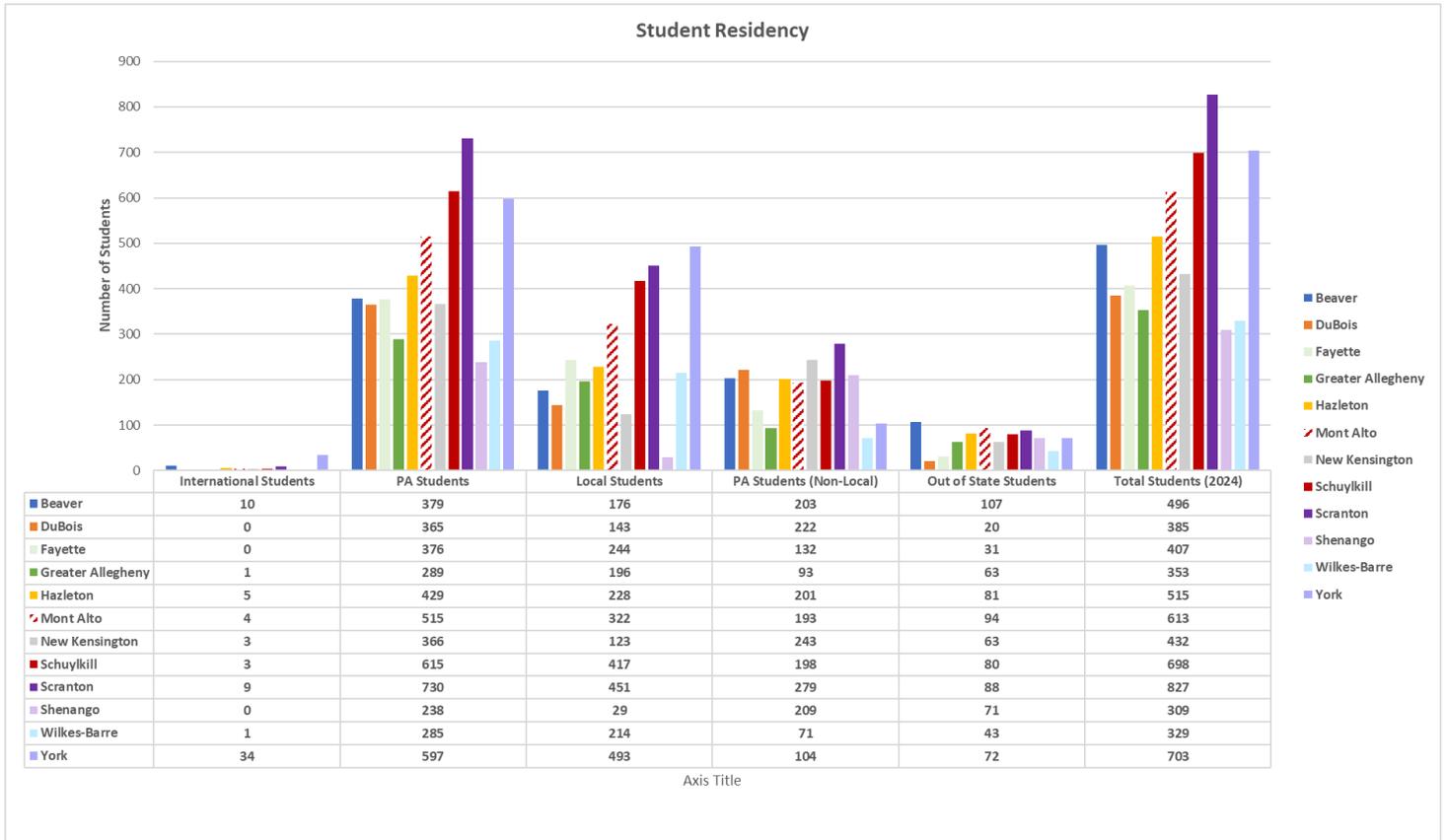

Student Residency

	International Students	PA Students	Local Students	PA Students (Non-Local)	Out of State Students	Total Students (2024)
Beaver	10	379	176	203	107	496
DuBois	0	365	143	222	20	385
Fayette	0	376	244	132	31	407
Greater Allegheny	1	289	196	93	63	353
Hazleton	5	429	228	201	81	515
Mont Alto	4	515	322	193	94	613
New Kensington	3	366	123	243	63	432
Schuylkill	3	615	417	198	80	698
Scranton	9	730	451	279	88	827
Shenango	0	238	29	209	71	309
Wilkes-Barre	1	285	214	71	43	329
York	34	597	493	104	72	703

Figure 10: Student residency for each of the 12 campuses.

Student Drivers

Mont Alto is one of only five campuses—among the 12 under consideration—that offers student housing (Figure 11). While the housing occupancy rate is lower, this may be attributed to a significant portion of students commuting from nearby areas.

As shown in Figure 12, Mont Alto is among the top five campuses with the highest percentage of graduates employed within the first year after graduation. Additionally, Figure 13 highlights that Mont Alto graduates have the highest median earnings one year after graduation and rank third in median earnings five years post-graduation. These outcomes reflect the strong return on investment the campus provides to its students and the Commonwealth.

Housing Occupancy

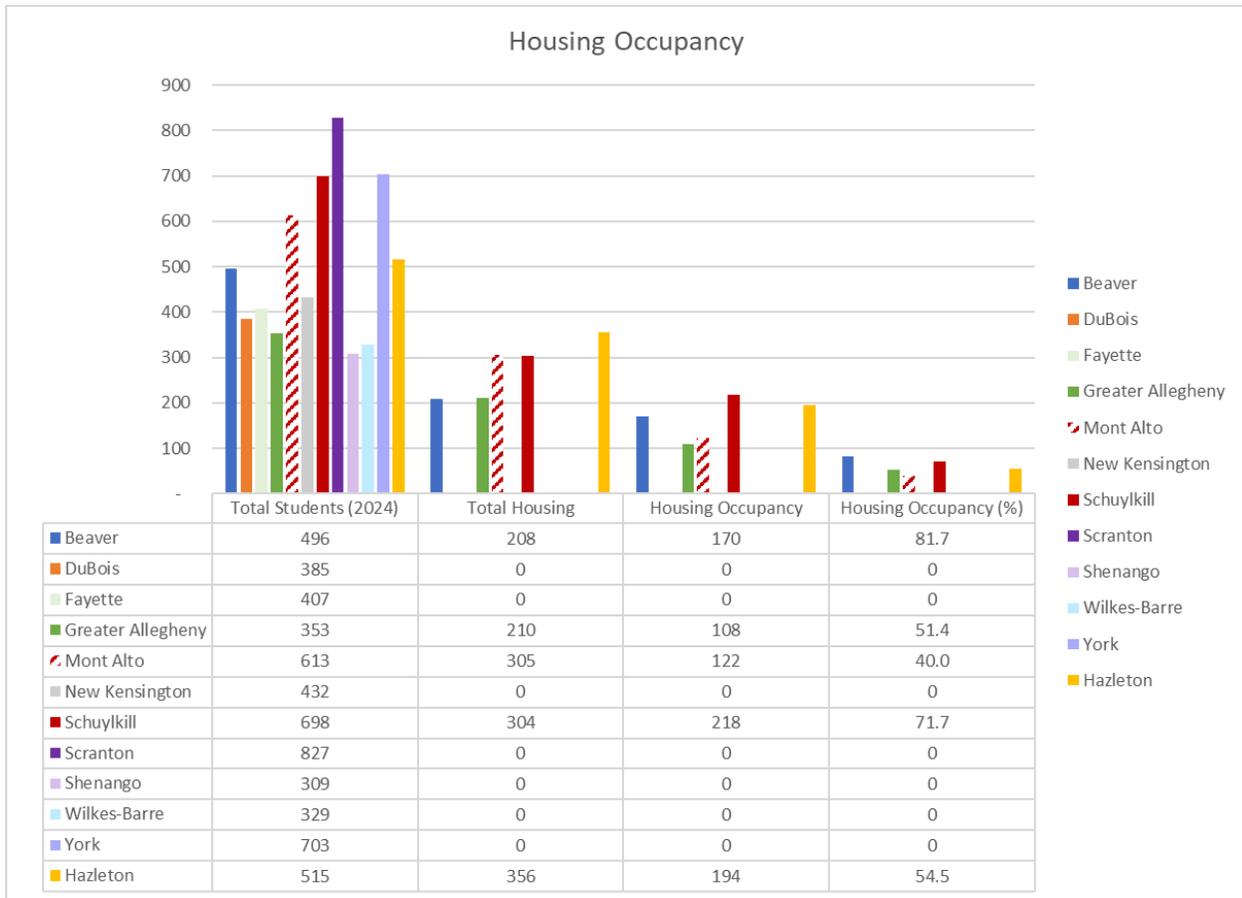|	Total Students (2024)	Total Housing	Housing Occupancy	Housing Occupancy (%)
Beaver	496	208	170	81.7
DuBois	385	0	0	0
Fayette	407	0	0	0
Greater Allegheny	353	210	108	51.4
Mont Alto	613	305	122	40.0
New Kensington	432	0	0	0
Schuylkill	698	304	218	71.7
Scranton	827	0	0	0
Shenango	309	0	0	0
Wilkes-Barre	329	0	0	0
York	703	0	0	0
Hazleton	515	356	194	54.5

Figure 11: Student housing occupancy for each of the 12 campuses.
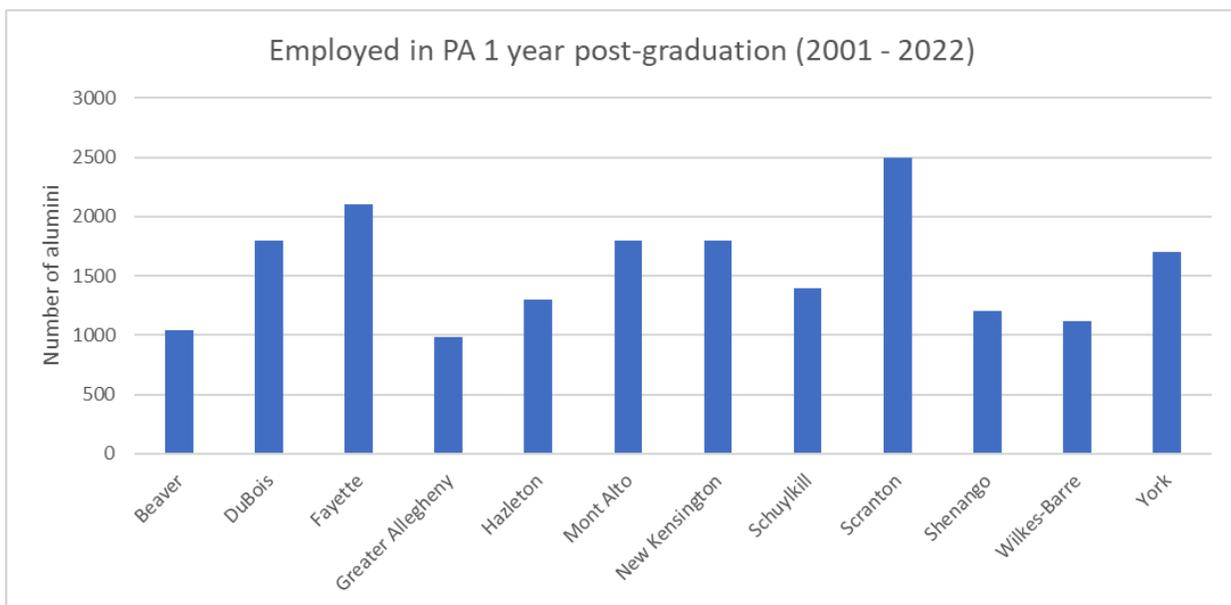

Figure 12: Number of alumni employed in PA 1 year post-graduation (2021-2022) for each of the 12 campuses
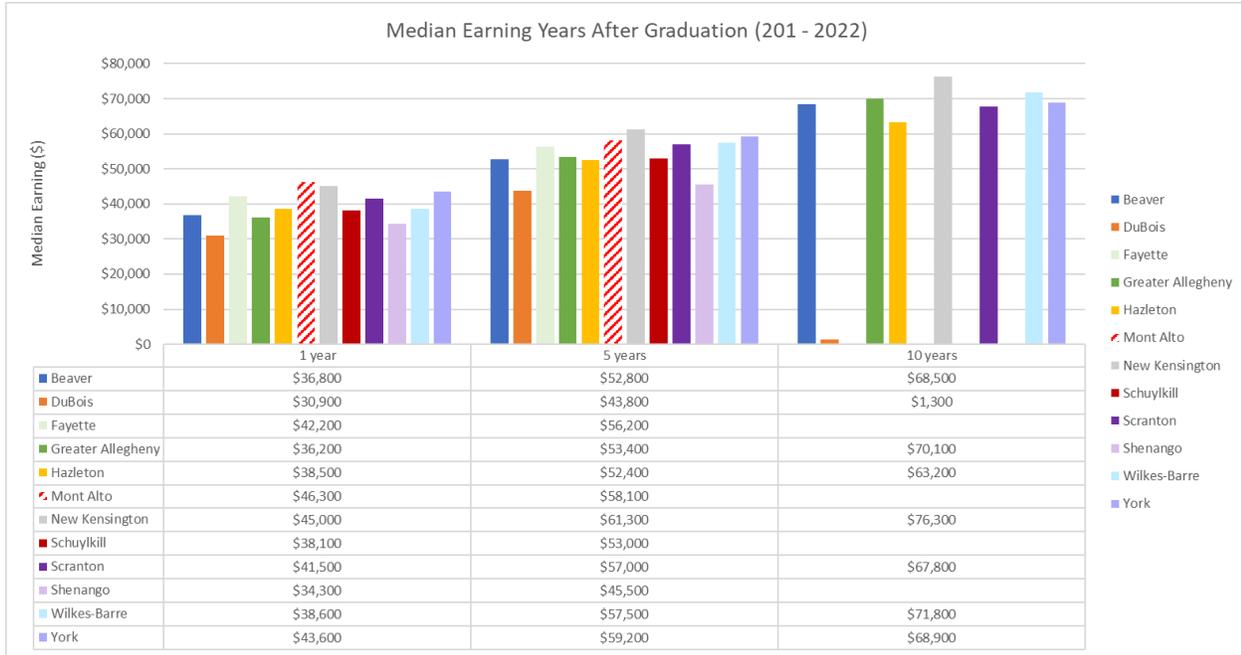
Figure 13: Median earning 1, 5 and 10 years after graduation for each of the 12 campuses.

Student Success

As shown in Figure 14, Mont Alto had the second-highest four-year graduation rate among the campuses for the 2020 cohort and ranked sixth in six-year graduation rates for the 2018 cohort. Additionally, Figure 15 indicates that Mont Alto ranked fourth in total degrees awarded in the 2023–2024 academic year. These figures reflect the campus's effectiveness in supporting student success and degree completion.
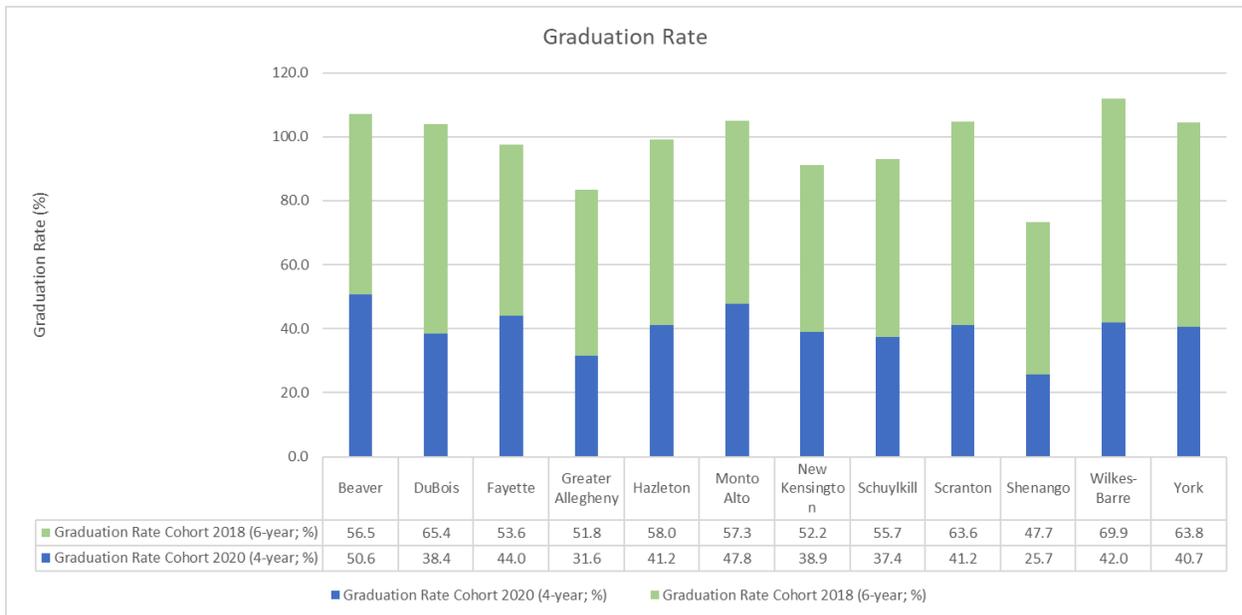

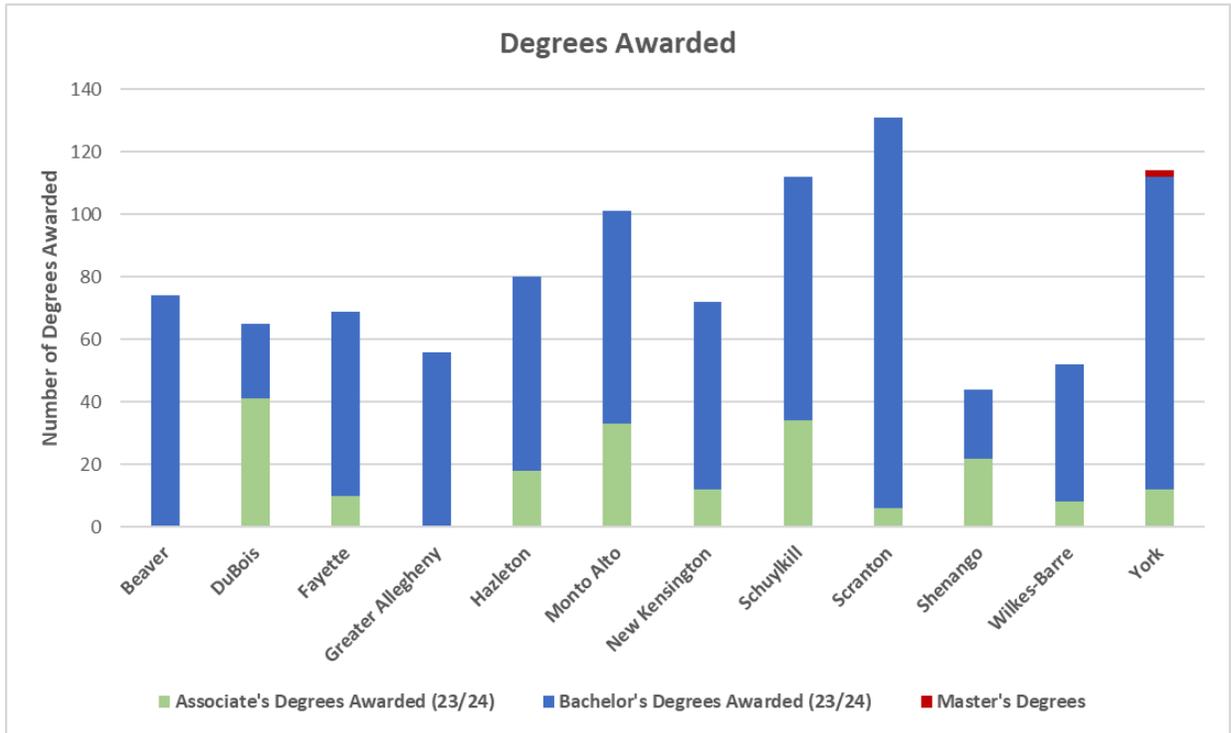Figure 14: Graduation rate for each of the 12 campuses.

Figure 15: Degrees awarded for each of the 12 campuses.

Mont Alto ranks fifth among the campuses in the percentage of students who remain at their original campus throughout their academic program (Figure 16). This reflects a strong level of student retention and satisfaction with the campus experience.
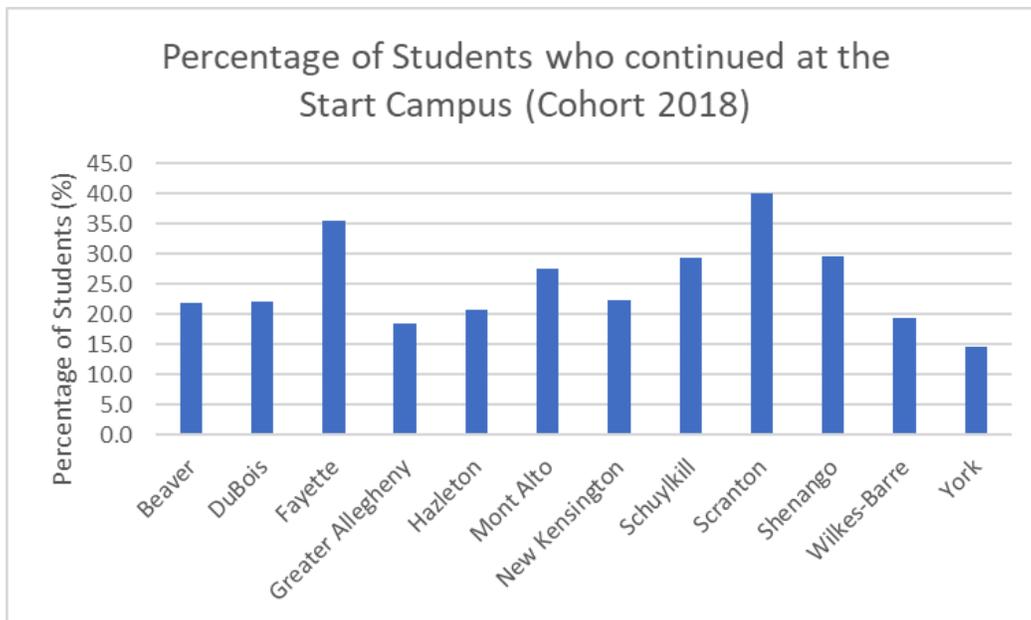

Figure 16: Percentage of students who continued at the start campus for each of the 12 campuses.

As illustrated in Figure 17, Shenango had the highest level of student-athlete participation, Schuylkill enrolled the greatest number of first-generation college students, and Hazleton had the highest percentage of underrepresented minority students and Pell Grant recipients. While Mont Alto did not rank among the top five campuses for student-athlete participation, its level of participation was comparable to that of Beaver and Allegheny campuses, reflecting a healthy level of student engagement in campus life.
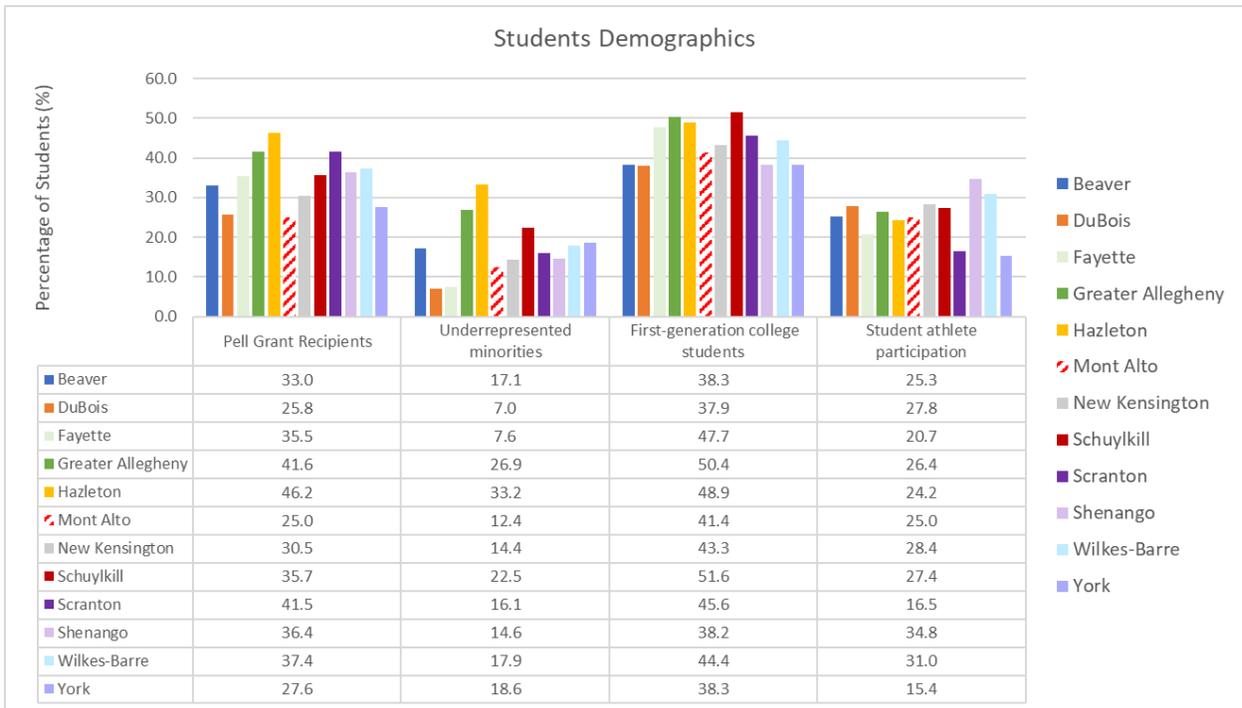

Students Demographics

	Pell Grant Recipients	Underrepresented minorities	First-generation college students	Student athlete participation
Beaver	33.0	17.1	38.3	25.3
DuBois	25.8	7.0	37.9	27.8
Fayette	35.5	7.6	47.7	20.7
Greater Allegheny	41.6	26.9	50.4	26.4
Hazleton	46.2	33.2	48.9	24.2
Mont Alto	25.0	12.4	41.4	25.0
New Kensington	30.5	14.4	43.3	28.4
Schuylkill	35.7	22.5	51.6	27.4
Scranton	41.5	16.1	45.6	16.5
Shenango	36.4	14.6	38.2	34.8
Wilkes-Barre	37.4	17.9	44.4	31.0
York	27.6	18.6	38.3	15.4

Figure 17: Student demographics for each of the 12 campuses.

Conclusion

For each of the key metrics outlined above, the five top-performing campuses were awarded one point, while all other campuses received a score of zero. Table 1 presents the campuses that ranked in the top five for each measure, along with the total score accumulated by each campus across all metrics.

Based on the total points accumulated across all criteria, we recommend continued investment in the following campuses:
1. Scranton
2. Mont Alto
3. Hazleton
4. Schuylkill
5. York

Table 1: Points for the top 5 performing campuses on each criterium.

Criterium	In-Scope Campuses											
	Beaver	DuBois	Fayette	Greater Allegheny	Hazleton	Mont Alto	New Kensington	Schuylkill	Scranton	Shenango	Wilkes-Barre	York
Total Number of Students	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	1
Net Balance / Student	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	1
Maintenance Backlog / Student	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	1
Research Expenditures (5-year average)	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
PA Students	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	1
County Students (regional)	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	1
Housing	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
Graduation Rate (4-year)	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
Total Degrees Awarded	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	1
Number of institutions (within 50 miles) per 10K inhabitants	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1
Students who continued in the start campus (cohort 2018)	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	0
Employed in PA 1 year after graduation	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0
Median Earnings 1 year after graduation	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	1
Pell Grant Recipients	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	0
Underrepresented minorities	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	1
First-generation college students	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0
Student athlete participation	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	0
Population Change	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	1
Youth Population Change	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
Total Points	4	3	8	6	12	13	3	11	15	3	8	10

Suggestions for Mont Alto Campus Improvement:

Below is a list of suggestions to improve Mont Alto campus enrollment

1. Community-driven initiatives could play a valuable role in supporting the future of campuses like Mont Alto. For example, local "Save Our Campus" campaigns could be launched in surrounding cities, where donors and community members come together to organize fundraising events such as festivals, with all proceeds benefiting the university.
2. Given that Mont Alto was founded in 1903, the campus may also be eligible for grants aimed at preserving and renovating historic buildings—an opportunity worth exploring to help offset infrastructure costs.
3. Additionally, there is potential for student-led innovation. Business and marketing students could take part in a campus-wide challenge to develop strategies for increasing enrollment. A friendly competition among Commonwealth Campuses could incentivize participation, with the winning team receiving a prize that would directly benefit their home campus. Initiatives like these foster creativity, community investment, and real-world learning opportunities while supporting the long-term sustainability of regional campuses.