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PENNSYLVANIA COLLEGE OF HEALTH SCIENCES

Original president says she's retiring

Simcox has served in role for 22 years; delayed retirement to see merger through

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Pennsylvania College of Health Sciences President Mary Grace Simcox, the college's first and only president, has announced she will retire at the end of the year after serving in the role for 22 years.

Simcox plans to depart the college Dec. 31. The private four-year college in East Lampeter Township that specializes in nursing and health sciences is scheduled to become part of St. Joseph's University, a Jesuit Catholic University in Philadelphia, in January 2024. Simcox was originally set to retire two years ago, but she opted to remain on to see the merger through.

Born and raised in Philadelphia, Simcox currently lives in Conshohocken in Montgomery County. She joined the Lancaster Institute for Health Education, the precursor to Pennsylvania College of Health Sciences, as the dean of nursing in 1997. Seven months later, she took over as dean of the entire institute. She helped lead the charge in turning the institute from a diploma-granting organization into a degree-granting college due to a push at the time within nursing to require nurses to have bachelor's degrees. Simcox became president in



Mary Grace Simcox

2001 when the institute received approval from the Pennsylvania Department of Education to form a college.

Today, nearly 2,000 students attend Pennsylvania College of Health Sciences, the region's only college focused exclusively on health care education. Affiliated with Penn Medicine Lancaster General Health, the college offers everything from certificate programs to doctoral degrees.

"I had the opportunity to do what most people will never have the opportunity to do, and that is to start a college," Simcox said. "Not only put it together, but really make it grow and flourish."

In 2005, Pennsylvania College of Health Sciences received accreditation from the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. Simcox has led the college through two more rounds of accreditation, the most recent in 2021.

Simcox said it was difficult at first to get accreditation from Middle States, as Pennsylvania College of Health Sciences was the first, and is still currently the only, college in Pennsylvania owned

by a health system.

"They literally hung up the phone on me," Simcox said. "We took a big risk in that we would win them over, and win them over we did."

In its most recent reaccreditation from Middle States, Pennsylvania College of Health Sciences received 12 commendations for the quality of its graduates, health and wellness programming, Center for Teaching and Learning, Center for Excellence in Practice and health care core curriculum.

Pennsylvania College of Health Sciences started out in an old elementary school building at 410 N. Lime St. in Lancaster city. As enrollment increased, it grew into a series of buildings throughout downtown Lancaster. But it wasn't convenient for it to be so spread out, so in 2016 Simcox oversaw the college's move to a centralized campus at 850 Greenfield Road in East Lampeter Township.

Merger with St. Joseph's University

Simcox said the merger with St. Joseph's has been in discussion for the past couple years. Even though Pennsylvania College of Health Sciences is part of LG Health, it's been for the most part supporting itself, and across the nation small colleges

have been struggling.

"We wanted to make sure that the college was situated such that it would be in a position to be able to continue to grow," Simcox said.

Simcox said the merger will provide students with new opportunities, such as study abroad.

The vast majority of faculty and staff are expected to stay on after the merger, Simcox said, with only eight back-office positions being eliminated.

Following the merger, students at what is now Pennsylvania College of Health Sciences will have the option of taking classes at St. Joseph's main campus in Philadelphia, but they won't be required to. Tuition will remain unchanged. If annual increases occur, they will match the percentage increase at St. Joseph's Philadelphia campus. Students will continue to be eligible for financial aid as they are now.

In an FAQ webpage on the merger, St. Joseph's says students who enter what is now Pennsylvania College of Health Sciences after the merger will likely have to take some kind of theology coursework as part of a four-year degree. Simcox said that a World Religions class, which the college already offers, would fulfill this requirement.