



**Dr. R. Lorraine Bernotsky**  
*President*  
West Chester University

Dr. R. Lorraine (Laurie) Bernotsky is the 16th president of West Chester University. As a collaborative and inclusive leader who is centered on student success, Dr. Bernotsky holds nearly three decades of progressive experience in higher education. A longstanding champion for public education and State System students, Dr. Bernotsky is a first-generation college graduate who leads the largest R2 (high research activity) institution within the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education. Prior to being named president, Dr. Bernotsky held the position of interim president of Pennsylvania Western University (PennWest) as a loaned executive from PASSHE's Office of the Chancellor. Known for being a transformative leader in higher education, Dr. Bernotsky is prepared to help West Chester University chart its path for the future.

A social scientist, Dr. Bernotsky earned a master's and doctorate in politics from the University of Oxford. She also earned a master's in sociology from Temple University..



## West Chester University

### **What is the value of higher education today?**

Higher education, particularly public higher education, is the great equalizer for individuals to improve their lives. It functions as the most predictable and accessible way for individuals to improve their life outcomes in a society where social class and income inequalities dominate. Ultimately, higher education has the greatest potential to change a person's personal and professional outcomes. As such, higher education leaders must reclaim higher education as a public good where, year after year, colleges and universities produce thousands upon thousands of graduates who contribute to the common good. The true value of higher education is actualized when these graduates go out into the world as our teachers, our social workers, our healthcare workers, our scientists, our engineers, and numerous other professionals, to take on the grand challenges of the world. In the end, our universities and colleges are charged with producing the next generation of thinkers and doers, and this noble commitment merits the continued investment of our stewardship, mentorship, and scholarship.

I have often said that West Chester University (WCU) proudly educates the 99%. There are lots of universities and colleges fighting it out for that top 1% of students who can pay top dollar for a college education. West Chester University focuses its attention on the remaining 99%. We are proud to have strong partnerships with our local community colleges, such as Delaware County Community College and Montgomery County Community College, along with others in our region. These partnerships allow us to help students transfer seamlessly to WCU so they can secure a higher education that is second to none.

### **What existential mind-shift needs to occur on our university and college campuses in order to truly benefit students?**

Our world is changing all around us at an unprecedented pace. Students will be coming to our campuses from more ethnically diverse backgrounds, more racially diverse backgrounds, and more socioeconomically diverse backgrounds, among other identities. Universities and colleges need to be ready for that change. We must stop asking if these students are ready for our institutions of higher learning and start asking if our institutions of higher learning are ready for these students. In other words, universities and colleges need to be student-ready.

Universities have received praise for increasing the number of diverse students on their campuses. While these universities are enrolling an increased number of traditionally underrepresented students, they are not always retaining or graduating these students at the same rate. Let me be clear: This is an institutional deficit and not a deficit among students. Our intent at West Chester University is to close racial and socioeconomic achievement gaps while simultaneously maintaining high retention and graduate rates for all our students. That's advancing diversity the right way, and it is a moral obligation and an ethical imperative for all of us to do so.

WCU is fortunate to be part of the Moon Shot for Equity, a mission that uses research-based practices, policies, and technology to reduce and eliminate equity gaps while supporting community engagement to enhance postsecondary student success. The Moon Shot for Equity mission asks the entire campus community to develop an equity-minded framework, identifying and addressing barriers that our institutions inadvertently throw into students' paths that can hamper their time to degree, or worse, cause them to step away from a college credential at all.



### How do we prepare today's students for change?

Students graduating today will change careers 5 to 7 times. In the past when a student graduated with a certain degree, say an accounting degree, it was clear that they would have a career as an accountant. Periodically, they might change jobs — moving from one accountant firm to another. That's not the common career story of a student graduating today. Today, that same student might start out as an accountant and then move to a job in HR, then to a job in computer coding, and finally end up starting a business that provides a service that hasn't even been imagined yet, let alone one for which we could have provided an education.

How do we prepare students for that? One way is to deepen our commitment to helping our students learn how to learn. Said another way, we must double down on our general education goals that prepare our students to think critically and be resilient in a constantly changing environment.

Political scientist Benjamin Barber has observed that our world is no longer a world primarily divided between "the weak and the strong" or "the successes and the failures." Instead, the central division that defines our world is between "learners and non-learners." At West Chester University, we are committed to making certain that our students are squarely situated on the learner side of that divide.

### What contributes to West Chester University's success?

Faculty. Faculty are the heart of any university or college — particularly at West Chester University. WCU faculty are recognized for their professional contributions, as well as their scholarly and creative activities. This level of excellence has positively impacted the experiences of students and produced a learning environment that is dynamic, inclusive, and focused on their success.

Delivering on the promise of student success every day, the hallmark of West Chester University's faculty is the emphasis on the teacher-scholar model where faculty produce research, engage..

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...students in that research, create new critical-need graduate programs, and commit to students in intentional ways that allow them to cross the finish line to receive their degrees.

West Chester University is in the enviable position of producing impressive student learning outcomes, while at the same time being recognized as an R2 institution by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education; R2 universities have "high research activity" in academic settings where teaching is the priority. Regarding its R2 classification, WCU's story is particularly interesting. Becoming an R2 institution was never a specific goal; it was something that grew naturally out of the mission-driven work of the University's faculty, staff, and students related to graduate education and research.

Supporting research and creative activity can and should be a core part of an institution's student success agenda. While West Chester University will always prioritize teaching excellence, faculty make it a practice to involve students in their research and creative activities. Through these types of learning opportunities, student success and faculty research not only thrive, but are enhanced simultaneously.



## THE POWER OF PURSUIT

With 180+ undergraduate and graduate academic options from certificates through doctoral degrees, you're empowered to pursue your passions and your purpose at West Chester University.

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Learn more at [wcupa.edu](http://wcupa.edu).

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