Michael Smerconish Talks Partisan Politics with Communication Studies and Political Science Students

Undergraduate commencement attendees are in for a real treat if Michael Smerconish’s recent on-campus lecture is any indication of how he’ll perform as this year’s undergraduate commencement speaker. Smerconish recently held a lecture in Freedom Hall targeted toward communication studies and political science students to talk about partisan politics and the media’s role in creating such a divisive climate.

Mixing personal anecdotes, statistics about the state of politics today and his own observations, Smerconish delivered both an entertaining and informative lecture detailing how our country’s two main political parties have grown apart. Smerconish described himself as the “talk radio version of Switzerland” in a media landscape that features personalities with far left or right views and networks that cling to these same identities. Smerconish, who hosts The Michael Smerconish Program on SiriusXM and Smerconish on CNN, says that many politicians have taken their cues from these “men with microphones.”

“Realize your entertainment choices have consequences,” Smerconish told attendees. “Don’t rely on one outlet. Sample it all, and entertain different points of view.”

Smerconish said other ways to fix the extreme polarization in politics today are:
1. Finding ways to increase voter participation;
2. Having more states host open primaries in which voters not registered as either Republican or Democrat still get a chance to vote;
3. Drawing boundary lines professionally so that districts are not created to suit a particular party;
4. Pushing for campaign finance reform so that individuals writing “big checks” must be identified;
5. Changing sore loser laws so that losers in a primary can run in the general election; and
6. Expanding debate participation to include a third-party candidate so that the liberal and conservative candidates feel compelled to defend their views for the middle.

Smerconish said that elected officials are more divided than the rest of the nation although it might not appear that way as those with the most extreme political views are often the most vocal. As the media’s “Switzerland,” he’ll continue to do his part to educate the American people about all sides of the issues and push for reforms that can bring the country back together.
Students gave Widener a resounding thumbs-up in a recent national survey of student satisfaction. It seems the pride runs deep with nearly three quarters of Widener students saying they would choose Widener again if they had to do it all over.

Widener met or exceeded expectations for 83 percent of students on the national Noel Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory, and 72 percent of students would choose Widener if they had to make their college choice again. Both are record high responses for Widener in student satisfaction, and are an average of six percentage points higher than the norm for four-year private colleges and universities in the eastern region of the United States.

The university also received the highest-ever average scores for satisfaction in the areas of instructional effectiveness, concern for the individual, student centeredness, recruitment and financial aid, campus climate, registration effectiveness, service excellence, campus support services and campus life.

“This is certainly a point of pride,” said Widener University President Julie E. Wollman. “We achieved the highest levels of student satisfaction since the survey was first launched in 2007. We want Widener to be students’ first choice when they are considering college, and this is a very positive step in that direction.”

Over the past two years, the greatest gains in satisfaction occurred in the areas of campus safety, student centeredness, campus climate and campus life.

In the area of campus safety, the university installed security cameras last summer throughout the Sun Hill neighborhood adjoining campus where a number of students live. In the areas of campus life, Dean of Students Denise Gifford said the university has made a concerted effort to increase student programming on campus, especially weekend events and intramurals.

“The results have been astounding,” Gifford said. “It’s exciting for us and a real validation of the resources we have invested in those areas.”

According to Wollman, just as important as the record-breaking responses in student satisfaction, are those areas where the survey showed room for improvement.

“The survey points to some areas where we can—and will—become even better,” Wollman said. “My goal is for the university to achieve historically high scores in those categories when we administer the survey again in two years.”

Administered during March and April to nearly 2,900 undergraduate day students at Widener, about 20 percent of students responded to the survey, a high response rate for surveys. First administered in back-to-back years in 2007 and 2008, Widener students have taken the survey every other year since then.

The Graduate Student Research Symposium on April 28 and Undergraduate Student Project Day on April 29 showcased the wide range of research and other academic projects students have engaged in while at Widener. The projects emphasized the strengths of a Widener education as they demonstrated the extent to which students are engaged in high-impact educational practices and collaborative learning.

Undergraduate nursing students present research posters during Undergraduate Student Project Day. See more photos on Flickr.

Pictured from left to right, Mark Levand, a doctoral student in the Center for Human Sexuality Studies, presents his research to Dr. Brent Satterly, associate professor and director of the BSW Program. See more photos of the Graduate Research Symposium on Flickr.
Faces of Widener: Laura Strickland

Laura Strickland, Assistant Director of Multicultural Admissions

Laura Strickland has held a variety of positions in institutions of higher education, but she says that she has found her passion working with multicultural students as Widener’s assistant director of multicultural admissions.

Prior to joining the staff at Widener, Strickland had worked in student retention and with the Educational Opportunity Fund in New Jersey at Salem Community College. She has enjoyed working with students who need extra support the most.

“Whether it’s working with non-traditional students or those who have limited resources, I have a passion for helping them get to where they desire,” Strickland said. “I really enjoy working with the multicultural population. I like being able to connect with them and show them what Widener has to offer; it’s my greatest joy.”

At Widener, Strickland spends most of her time recruiting students from the region. She covers Philadelphia, Delaware County, Chester County and New Castle County in Delaware. In the fall, she is typically off campus at area high schools meeting directly with students and counselors. Because May 1 was the deadline for deposits, she currently spends much of her time conducting follow-up outreach. Soon, her focus will switch to working closely with the Office of Student Affairs on summer registration.

Strickland also serves as the liaison for the School of Nursing, for which she handles reviewing criteria for admissions. In addition, she is responsible for Presidential Service Corps offers.

Strickland represents Widener off campus, as well. She is the Widener representative at the Delaware County College Access Center and for the Philadelphia College Prep Round Table. She is also part of the “Meet the Multicultural Admissions Counselors (MAC)” consortium, which has events in the fall and spring for a group of 18 liberal arts colleges and universities.

Off campus, the Brookhaven, Pennsylvania, resident takes on the role of “mom” to her son, Kevin, who is in second grade at Coeburn Elementary School. He is very active in sports, so Strickland spends most of her weekends watching him play basketball or baseball. She also enjoys working out and spending time in the kitchen. She loves to cook.

Widener Students Take Back the Night

Widener University hosted Take Back the Night, a day of events to help promote awareness of sexual assault and domestic violence, on April 28. Take Back the Night is an internationally recognized program. Widener’s participation in it this year earned it a “10 Points of Light” designation as it was one of ten locations on April 28 to host a vigil or event demonstrating support for survivors of sexual violence.

Organized by the Center for Social Work Education, the Center for Violence Prevention and the BSW Club, the day’s events included the Clothesline Project, which represents victims and families and friends of victims; self-care activities; and workshops on self-defense and yoga. The day concluded with a talk from representatives from the Delaware County Women Against Rape and Katie Koestner, founder of Take Back the Night. Students also had the chance to participate in a “speak out.”
Community-Based Research (CBR) is a collaborative and consultative research approach that focuses on local issues within an area surrounding the university community (Strand, Marullo, Cutforth, Stoecker, & Donohue, 2003). Widener graduate and undergraduate students who have participated in CBR can attest that studying research questions from the lens of a community partner can shed light on cultural, socio-economic, health and educational issues. Students learn about the social structure of the community and the needs experienced by some Chester residents. This research approach complements the scholarship of academic disciplines across the schools and colleges at Widener.

Faculty who wish to learn about CBR are encouraged to attend the Wednesday, May 18 Bridge Week program facilitated by Trisha Thorne, the director of Princeton’s Community-Based Learning Initiative. The first workshop, “Introduction to Community-Based Research,” will explore the principles and practices of community-based research. The second workshop, “Community-Based Research Principles and Practice,” will engage faculty in community-based research practices and the challenges that emerge during each stage of a CBR project. Recipients of the Hartford Community-Based Undergraduate Research award will share their particular experiences with Chester-based partnerships. Participants will explore how to integrate CBR into new or existing courses and share ideas for partnerships and projects. The session is sponsored by the Office of Undergraduate Research and the Office for Community Engagement and Diversity Initiatives.

Boots, the therapy cat, lounged casually between two students as they studied for final exams on Monday in the Pit at Commonwealth Law. Other dogs mingled with law students and faculty making sure to position themselves at the best vantage points for ear scratches and tummy rubs.

Law school is tough. So, to help make final exams a little more bearable, 10 dogs and a cat from Caring Hearts Pet Therapy spent time with law students during the first day of final exams.

“Dogs are always happy to see you. They are energetic and upbeat, and that energy rubs off on you,” said Tiffany Raker, a third-year law student from Northumberland, Pennsylvania. “When you are tired and spending hours studying, having the dogs here is calming.”

Landa Porter, of Allentown, Pennsylvania, who plans to graduate this year, agreed that the animals provide respite from her studies. “I just like seeing their unconditionally loving faces,” Porter said as she was petting Boots. “They make it all OK and are a happy reminder that there are other things in life.”

Mary Catherine Scott, director of student organizations, added that each time the dogs come for a visit on campus she can see the positive effect they have on the students.

“The therapy dogs came on campus for the first time several weeks ago for the Mental Health Awareness Day sponsored by the American Bar Association, and the feedback from the students was overwhelmingly positive,” Scott said. “We knew that having the dogs on campus several times during final exams would help the students get through this stressful period at the end of the semester.”

Caring Hearts Pet Therapy will be on the law school campus again May 14 to visit with students.

Delaware Law students also recently benefitted from therapy dogs during that school’s celebration of Mental Health Awareness Week.
Six Faculty to Begin Integrating Leadership Studies Across Academic Disciplines

The Oskin Leadership Institute has selected six faculty members as Trainer Faculty Fellows with the mission of encouraging the integration of leadership studies across all academic disciplines.

The faculty members were selected from a pool of applicants based on their proposals to adapt existing courses or create new courses with a “Leadership in Context” focus. These courses are an integral part of the minor in leadership studies program, said Dr. Arthur Schwartz, professor of leadership studies and executive director of the Oskin Leadership Institute.

“These courses, which will range across the Widener course catalogue, serve to reinforce and advance the notion that leadership can be examined across a wide variety of disciplines and subject areas,” Schwartz said. “In addition, each course should underscore that leadership is an influencing process.”

As part of the fellowship, faculty will be asked to participate in a three-hour introductory workshop, spend the summer exploring how to integrate leadership theories and concepts into their proposed courses, give a presentation about their courses during a workshop before the beginning of the fall semester and present a future Trainer Faculty Fellowship workshop on the lessons they learned after teaching their first Leadership in Context course.

Dr. Beatriz Urraca, one of the faculty members selected for the fellowship, is creating a course titled Latin American Leaders, which she hopes will demonstrate understanding and recognition of relevant theories and styles and practices of effective leadership.

“It will explore how Latin American culture and social identity have been shaped over the last 200 years by a series of charismatic leaders,” said Urraca, an associate professor of Spanish and director of the Gender and Women’s Studies Program. “Some of them were effective and inspirational, some tyrannical and toxic.”

Other faculty selected as Trainer Faculty Fellows for the creation of these courses include:

- **Kerri C. Brannen**, an associate professor of business administration, who is adapting a course titled *Leadership in Business* and another course titled *Understanding and Working in Organizations*;
- **Kathryn N. Healy**, a professor of psychology, who is adapting a course titled *Groups: Theory and Experience with Laboratory*;
- **Audrey Klein-Kauffman**, a lecturer in the School of Nursing, who is creating a course titled *Contemporary Issues in Healthcare: A Leadership Perspective*;
- **Donna W. McCloskey**, an associate professor of business administration, who is adapting a course titled *Project Management*; and
- **David Ward**, professor of philosophy, who is adapting a course titled *Ethical Leadership*.

The Trainer Faculty Fellows program is named for Nicholas P. Trainer, a former chair of the Widener Board of Trustees and a 1964 graduate. Trainer and his family established the Trainer Leadership Endowment Fund in 2009 to enable faculty to conduct research on topics and themes that intersect with the mission and purposes of the Oskin Leadership Institute.

Attention Chester Residents...

Employees Who Own Homes in Chester Can Apply for Home Improvement Funding

All Widener University employees who own a home in Chester and consider it their primary residence can participate in the Chester City Home Improvement Program. Organized by the Riverfront Alliance of Delaware County, the Chester City Home Improvement Program offers matching funds to help Chester, Pennsylvania, residents beautify the exterior of their home.

Exterior improvements may include replacing doors, windows, fencing and porch railings; landscaping; and painting. To apply for funding, download an application at [www.delcoriverfront.com](http://www.delcoriverfront.com).

For more information, contact Michael J. McGee, executive director of the Riverfront Alliance of Delaware County, at [mikem@delcoriverfront.com](mailto:mikem@delcoriverfront.com) or 610-499-7534.
A groundbreaking new class that turned Delaware Law students and men incarcerated at a state Department of Correction facility into classmates is getting high marks as a powerful educational experience.

The weekly Crime and Punishment in the United States class was held at the Plummer Community Corrections Center in Wilmington, Delaware. Lecturer at Law Romie Griesmer taught the group, comprised of 10 Delaware Law “outside” students and 10 correction center residents, or “inside” students.

The class was part of the Inside Out Prison Exchange Program, an international program that develops partnerships between higher education institutions and correctional institutions to deepen the conversation about, and transform, approaches to understanding crime, justice, freedom, inequality and more. The programs are largely partnerships between undergraduate institutions and correctional systems.

Delaware Law School is among the first law schools nationally to offer an Inside Out course, despite it fitting so appropriately with the curriculum of a law school. Law students carpooled weekly to the corrections center, where class was held in a multi-purpose room.

“This experience has allowed me to question my own beliefs and re-evaluate certain beliefs I hold based on my own life choices,” Delaware Law student Melanie wrote of the class. Students communicated on a first-name-only basis. “I feel as though I’ve gained a greater understanding of what it means to be a part of a community by building relationships and finding similarities between myself and other students. I am more aware of social issues and how race, class and gender are affected by them. This has truly been a one-of-a-kind school experience, and also a life experience that I will carry with me personally and professionally.”

The curriculum involved exchanging ideas and perceptions about crime, justice, the criminal justice system, corrections and imprisonment. Much of the coursework involved reading and discussing scholarly articles, news reports and case law. Students were graded on papers and a group project.

Griesmer conducted a closing ceremony at the final spring class. Dean Rodney Smolla and Department of Correction Commissioner Robert Coupe attended, both pledging support for future Inside Out classes. Students wore matching T-shirts emblazoned with the Inside Out logo created by a former inside student. They presented one class project, read a poem and made powerful remarks about what the experience meant to them. Inside student Quinton said he’s trying to grow as a person.

“I have a great sense of direction now for myself. Surround yourself with great, positive-minded people and smile at the negative and never let it get you down,” he said.

Coupe told the inside students what brought them to the corrections center doesn’t have to define them. “Hopefully this inspires you, when you return to the community, to explore more educational opportunities, because this shows you can do it,” he told the offenders.

Smolla said he was struck by the thoughtful and humble remarks he heard from students during the ceremony. “I’m proud of all the law students—on the inside and the out,” he said.
Noteworthy

Dr. Donna Callaghan, associate professor of nursing, published the article “Implementing faith community nursing interventions to promote healthy behaviors in adults” in the International Journal of Faith Community Nursing on her original clinical research.

Dr. Mary Francis, assistant professor of nursing, presented “A Narrative Inquiry into the Experience of Being a Victim of Gun Violence,” during a conference for the Eastern Nursing Research Society in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on April 15.

Dr. Brenda Kucirka, assistant professor of nursing, participated in the Community Health Fair, held in partnership with Providence House at Widener University, to offer blood pressure screenings.

Dr. Jenny Wyatt, associate professor of social work and director of the Center for Violence Prevention, was honored during a Survivor Assistance and Grief Support Day as part of National Crime Victims Rights Week in Chester, Pennsylvania, on April 27. Wyatt was recognized for her work in violence prevention.

The Delaware Valley Section of the American Institute of Chemical Engineers announced the Outstanding Student and Donald F. Othmer awardees for each class in the six chemical engineering departments in the region that AIChE DVS serves. The Widener University School of Engineering student recipients are sophomore Erik Smeltz, junior Marie Herb and senior Taylor Englert.

Delaware Law School Dean Rod Smolla presented the paper “Professional Speech” at Yale Law School on April 30 for the school’s Freedom of Expression Scholars Conference. The conference is sponsored by the school’s Floyd Abrams Institute for Freedom of Expression and is the premier annual gathering of First Amendment scholars in the United States. Conference participants receive substantive feedback on their work through lively group discussions.

Education Alumna Represent at PA Association of School Administrators Women’s Caucus

Spotlight on Sports: Three Named Capital One Academic All-District Selections

Widener University’s Alie Alkins (pictured below, left), Alexis Schengrund (pictured below, right) and Bob Barnett (pictured above) have been named to the Capital One District IV Academic All-America Team in the sports of softball and baseball, as announced by the College Sports Information Directors of America (CoSIDA) on May 5. They were chosen to the all-district first team and are now eligible for Academic All-America laurels.

Widener has now had five student-athletes who have made the Capital One Academic All-District Team in their respective sport during the 2015-16 academic year. The other honorees include football standouts Ryan O’Hara and Blaine Price.
**Inauguration of Dr. Julie E. Wollman**

**When:** May 13, 2 p.m.

**Where:** Memorial Field

Dr. Julie E. Wollman will formally be inaugurated as Widener University’s 10th president during a ceremony on Memorial Field. The entire university community is encouraged to attend.

The Inauguration Ceremony begins with a formal processional of delegates from many Pennsylvania colleges and universities, additional institutions with which Dr. Wollman has been affiliated and Widener students representing undergraduate and graduate student groups and athletic teams. Delegates will process with ceremony speakers; the Widener University Board of Trustees; university executive officers; faculty and deans from Widener’s eight schools and colleges; and government and community representatives. Following the formal installation, Dr. Wollman will deliver the inaugural address on the theme *Listen. Lead. Transform.*

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**Two-Week Peek**

**A Look at the Next Two Weeks in Widener Events**

**Friday, May 13**

2 p.m. *Inauguration of Dr. Julie E. Wollman*; Memorial Field

9 p.m. *Stargazing*; Widener Observatory

**Saturday, May 14**

12–1 p.m. *Puppies in the Pit*; Widener Law Commonwealth, The Pit

**Sunday, May 15**

1:30 p.m. *ROTC Commissioning*; Veterans Memorial

**Monday, May 16**

9 p.m. *Stargazing*; Widener Observatory

**Wednesday, May 18**

11 a.m. Town Hall for faculty and staff announcing Eckard Awards; Alumni Auditorium (Videoconferenced to Delaware Law room L-126 and Commonwealth Law Room L-205)

**Thursday, May 19**

12 p.m. *Nightingale Ceremony*; The Springfield Country Club

4 p.m. *Graduate Student Awards*; Lathem Hall

7 p.m. State Street Reading Series; Media Arts Center Gallery

**Friday, May 20**

9 a.m. *Graduate Student Commencement*; Memorial Field

3:30 p.m. *Undergraduate Academic Awards*; Alumni Auditorium

4:45 p.m. *Graduation Reception*; University Center Atrium

**Saturday, May 21**

9:45 a.m. *Undergraduate Student Commencement*; Memorial Field

3 p.m. *Delaware Law’s Annual Commencement Ceremony*; Delaware Campus Lawn

**Sunday, May 22**

11 a.m.–12:30 p.m. *Widener Law Commonwealth’s Annual Commencement Ceremony*; The Forum Auditorium, 500 Walnut Street, Harrisburg, Pa.

**Monday, May 23**


*We have a variety of graphics available for graduates, parents and members of the Widener community to use on social media to mark this year’s commencement. Also, please use the hashtag #widener2016.*