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America250PA Announces Winner of Eighth & Final Direct Effect™ Innovation Challenge

Statewide Competition Showcases the Creativity and Vision of Pennsylvania's Postsecondary Students

HARRISBURG, PA – America250PA today announced **Ursinus College** as the winner of its eighth and final Direct Effect™ Innovation Challenge. The three-round statewide competition invited students from Pennsylvania's postsecondary institutions to develop an original integrated marketing campaign responding to this year's theme, "Beyond 250." **Ursinus** earned the highest score from a panel of industry professionals after competing in the final round against Cairn University, King's College, Robert Morris University, and Rosemont College.

The 2026 DEIC unfolded across three rounds, beginning with an initial concept submission, followed by a virtual pitch competition, and the in-person finals held November 20 at the Pennsylvania State Capitol in Harrisburg. During the final round, each team presented its campaign to a panel of leaders in marketing, communications, business, government, and community engagement.

This year's theme, **"Beyond 250,"** challenged students to imagine how Pennsylvania can carry the spirit of the Semiquincentennial forward. Teams developed campaigns encouraging Pennsylvanians to continue exploring their communities, serving their neighbors, celebrating local history, and creating new traditions long after 2026.

The event featured remarks from **Cassandra Coleman**, Executive Director of America250PA; **Leslie Gervasio**, Director of Communications for the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission; and **Michael Coran**, America250PA Commissioner and Chair of the Commission's Education and Innovation Subcommittee. **Bri Farrand**, America250PA Director of Branding and Design and a former DEIC participant, served as host.

“For eight years, the Direct Effect Innovation Challenge has given Pennsylvania students a chance to share their ideas, develop their talents, and show us what they believe our Commonwealth can become,” said **Cassandra Coleman**. “As we bring this final competition to a close, I'm especially proud that we've given young Pennsylvanians a voice in this historic anniversary and an opportunity to help shape its legacy. These students give us every reason to believe in Pennsylvania's future.”

The 2026 DEIC was generously presented in partnership with The Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission.

“Congratulations to this year's winners and to every student and school that participated in this year's Direct Effect Innovation Challenge," said PA Turnpike Commission CEO **Mark Compton**. "Innovation has been part of the Pennsylvania Turnpike's story since it first opened as America's first superhighway, connecting communities and motorists in a new way. The 'Beyond 250' challenge invites students to bring that same creativity and forward-thinking inspired by this anniversary to the Commonwealth's future. We're proud to partner with America250PA and give the next generation a platform to share its ideas."

The 2026 DEIC was also supported by the Pennsylvania Department of Education, the Pennsylvania Commission for Community Colleges, the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education, and the Association of Independent Colleges and Universities of Pennsylvania.

To learn more about America250PA and the Direct Effect™ Innovation Challenge, visit **www.America250PA.org**.

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About America250PA

The Pennsylvania Commission for the United States Semiquincentennial (America250PA) was established by the General Assembly and Governor in 2018 to plan, encourage, develop and coordinate the commemoration of the 250th Anniversary of the founding of the United States, Pennsylvania's integral role in that event, and the impact of its people on the nation's past, present, and future. The Commission is made up of current and past Pennsylvania leaders, celebrating the rich history and diversity of the state.