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Plan links up ASU, Hickory area colleges

The new partnership will expand local degree offerings and may lead to new satellite campus.

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HUDSON In what could be a step toward creating a university campus in the Hickory metropolitan area, Appalachian State University on Tuesday announced a partnership with three community colleges to expand degree offerings in the region.

Officials with ASU, Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute, Catawba Valley Community College and Western Piedmont Community College signed papers in a ceremony at CCC&TI to create the Appalachian State University Greater Hickory Partnership.

The new entity consolidates ASU's course offerings in the region, creating an umbrella administration to coordinate course programs, student services, technology and marketing. The courses themselves will still be offered on the community college campuses and at the N.C. Center for Engineering Technologies in Hickory.

Through the new partnership, ASU plans to expand degree offerings in the area, particularly for full-time students. And Hickory-area students can get an ASU degree without having to drive to the university's Boone campus.

The partnership also means the Hickory Metro Higher Education Center, which has offered courses by ASU and other universities, will be dissolved.

Consolidating ASU's local presence into one entity under the university's name will hopefully help the public understand the resources it already has available, as well as better market the offerings to prospective students, said ASU Provost Stan Aeschleman.

Though Aeschleman stopped short of saying the partnership could become a UNC Hickory or an ASU satellite campus, he didn't rule out that possibility. Hickory-area leaders have long lobbied UNC officials to create a public university campus in the metropolitan area.

"I don't want to speculate where we'll be 10 years from now," Aeschleman said after the ceremony, "but this certainly is a significant change and a significant movement to a more systematic and concentrated university presence in the region."

ASU currently offers 39 degree programs in the area serving about 950 students. All but seven of the programs are for part-time students.

Aeschleman said he wants the offerings to look more like those at the Boone campus while still serving part-time students, but "that will obviously take a long time."



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