

## Exchange program starting at WPU

### Dominican leader cites technology

By **ANDREA ALEXANDER**  
STAFF WRITER

WAYNE – Leonel Fernández, president of the Dominican Republic, signed an agreement with William Paterson University on Wednesday to create an exchange program for students and faculty, following a speech by the Caribbean leader on the importance of education in his developing country.

Fernández shared his vision to transform the Dominican Republic with a high-tech-based economy that can become a leader in software production and biotechnology.

The key, he said is “prioritizing education as a basic need we have, to fulfill our dream of a stable democracy.”

Fernández spoke before a crowd of about 600 faculty, staff, students and community members at the university’s Shea Center for Performing Arts. He visited the campus during a side trip to meeting with other world leaders at the United Nations General Assembly in New York City.

William Paterson University President Kathleen Waldron, Fernández and the head of the Global Foundation for Democracy and Development, which was founded by the Dominican leader, signed an agreement to lay the

groundwork for the exchange program. Fernández told the crowd that his country is working toward a goal of sending 10,000 students abroad to study.

The agreement was hailed by some members of the local Dominican community. North Jersey has one of the largest Dominican populations in the country, according to community leaders.

“It’s a tremendous joy for me,” said Beth Marmolejos of Wayne, who grew up in the Dominican Republic. “It will allow students to have opportunities they otherwise wouldn’t have back home as far as obtaining an education they need to progress in a professional field.”

Waldron said the Dominican Republic will likely send master’s degree students to the university. One program Dominican students may take advantage of is the university’s simulated financial trading floor, where they can learn about financial markets. The Dominican Republic’s education minister will visit the university soon to work out more details of the program, Waldron said.

She said the university already has a diverse student body and such an agreement “adds to the richness of the student experience.”

Fernández spoke about the value of such exchange programs for his country when students who study abroad return home to work, even if it’s temporary before traveling elsewhere.

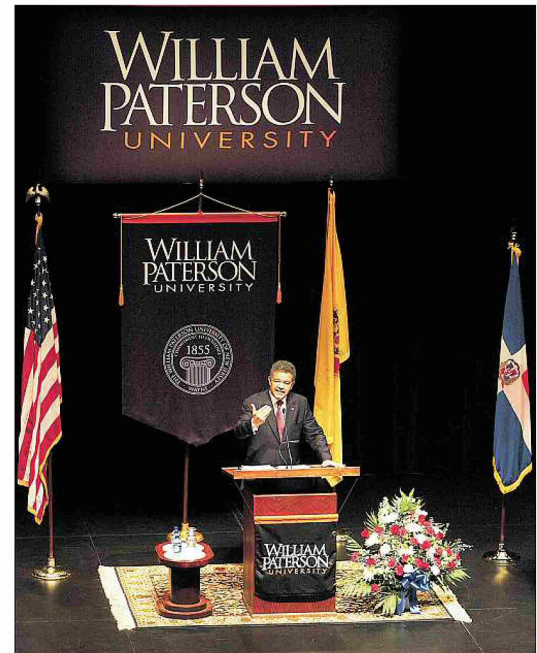
Not only do students earn higher degrees, Fernández said they are “also learning a culture, learning a language, learning a new way of understanding and looking at things.”

“Unless you understand what is taking place around the world, it is not possible to make a contribution to your country,” Fernández said.

He said his vision for the future of the Dominican Republic is a country that attracts attention as a “high tech, knowledge-based economy that brings prosperity and promise for all.”

“This is my dream that I wanted to share with you this afternoon,” he said.

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KEVIN R. WEXLER/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Dominican Republic President Leonel Fernández addressing students. The Caribbean leader and WPU agreed on a student exchange program Wednesday.