



Photos courtesy of MATT MANFRED

Above — Receiving medals for finishing in the top 25 in the Hood College Open for Penn State Altoona included, from left, Kristen Cummings, Michael Lock, Chaz Ramos and Missy Scandrol. Michael finished 18th, with a time of 30:56.

Left — Michael runs in the Coach Achtzehan Classic in York, where he finished 46th, with a time of 31:22.

"I really think joining the cross country team was one of the best choices I've made. I've made strong friendships and also proved to myself that I could overcome the challenge."

— Michael Locke

# Transition to cross country successful

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Matt Manfred, the coach of Penn State Altoona's cross country team, watched Michael compete at districts, which were held at Altoona's Mansion Park in May, and felt the athlete had a future with the program. Michael contacted Manfred and expressed interest in becoming a member of the cross country program and was offered a spot on the team, which he accepted.

Because Penn State Altoona does not have a conventional track program, cross country was Michael's only option, albeit one that excited him. But, since Juniata did not have a cross country program, Michael says he felt apprehensive about getting involved in a new sport at the collegiate level.

"In the summer before the season started, I really didn't know if I was going to stick with cross country because I had no idea what to expect and I just didn't know if I was going to be any good at it or not," he says. "My goal was to not be last on the team."

Michael began to feel like he belonged in the program when he placed fourth out of nine on his team in a preseason two-mile time trial.

He gained more confidence in the season-opening 5 kilometer event in Winchester, Va., where Michael placed third on his team and 15th overall.

As his freshman year progressed, Michael had to overcome some obstacles that could have put a damper on his success. Balancing 8:15 a.m. practices with a tough course-load and his involvement in the university's work-study program was not easy, but Michael persevered and he says was able to enjoy his first semester of college anyway.

Michael soon learned the intricacies of tackling cross country courses, which were roughly 5 miles in length and a much bigger challenge than anything he had faced in high school. He quickly realized that he enjoyed cross country more than he enjoyed track in high school, which surprised him, considering his skepticism before the season began.

"In high school, at practice I

would basically just do what everyone else did," Michael says. "In cross country, practice is focused just on distance running, and we would have stuff like tempo runs and harder workouts to improve our 8K times."

Michael says the differences in practice styles between cross country and track appeals to him.

Penn State Altoona's season consisted of seven events from the beginning of September to early November. Races were held in Maryland, New York and Virginia, as well as in Pennsylvania. Michael's personal record came at the William Smith College Championship in Geneva, N.Y., where he posted a time of 30:44 in the 8-kilometer race.

The season ended on a posi-

tive note for Michael when he finished 23rd out of 84 participants in the Allegheny Mountain Collegiate Conference championship meet in Grand Island, N.Y. He was then named to the AMCC all-conference team, an honor that made a great season even better.

"I was ecstatic when I got the results," Michael says. "It's a huge honor because it was my first cross country season ever."

Michael will be on the team next season too, and he plans to train throughout the year to better his times. He intends to

transfer to Penn State's University Park campus after his sophomore year, so plans for his running career beyond next season are uncertain.

Michael says being part of the cross country team is one of his favorite things about college, and he is excited for the future.

"I really think joining the cross country team was one of the best choices I've made," he says. "I've made strong friendships and also proved to myself that I could overcome the challenge."

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