I write to express my deep appreciation to the faculty and hundreds of Millersville University students who were able to attend the faculty-sponsored rally and/or the Student Senate Town Hall meeting. You expressed your concerns and commitment in a first-class manner. Civility characterized both meetings and exemplified the University’s best tradition of civil discourse on matters of great public importance. The University is indebted to the leadership of the faculty and Student Senate for sponsoring these events.

The town meeting, under the very capable leadership of Student Senate President, Sarah Darling, was intended to provide factual information regarding the proposed 2011-12 budget that Governor Corbett introduced for consideration by the Pennsylvania Legislature. Students had an opportunity to hear the information about the budget as we know it today and to ask budget-related questions in an open forum.

Our top priority has been, and will continue to be, our students and delivering the best possible educational experience, which is the hallmark of Millersville University. It is important for all students to hear about the management-related activities and proactive advocacy position the University administration and its trustees are pursuing.

Let me begin with some important background information. As a result of declining State support to publically owned universities and the relatively small tuition increases (averaging 4.3% annually over the past ten years), your university has taken a strategic approach to prudently manage Millersville’s assets and reserves. Over the past three years, we have cut more than $11 million from the operating budget. The budget reductions have come from a variety of strategies including energy savings programs; but the majority of the savings have been realized through the aggressive management of staff, administrative, and faculty vacancies. To balance the University’s budget this academic year, we permanently eliminated 28 staff and administrative positions, all but four of which were vacant.

We are modeling many possible scenarios of funding cuts and corresponding tuition increases - neither of which the University controls. We are mindful of the challenges that a significant tuition increase represents to all students, and we are exploring different approaches that might mitigate some of the increase for students who receive financial aid and who might be most seriously challenged by a larger-than-average tuition increase. However, it is fair to say that unless the proposed cut to our appropriation is not significantly reduced and there is a correspondingly significant tuition increase, we might not be able to handle the budget shortfall through continued management of faculty, staff, and administrative vacancies. In that environment, everything will be under review, and deep cuts will be unavoidable.

On the advocacy front, Vice President for Finance & Administration, Roger Bruszewski and myself have spoken to various media outlets regarding the University’s concern with the proposed budget. On Wednesday, March 23, I joined Chancellor Cavanaugh and another PASSHE university president to testify before the State Senate regarding the effects of the proposed cuts on our students. In addition, we have met with state senators and house members, who represent the University’s service area. We have asked for support and
received endorsement from important University stakeholder groups, including the boards of the Millersville University Foundation, the Alumni Association, and the Capital Campaign, for the advocacy statement authorized by our Council of Trustees.

We understand that the Commonwealth’s current financial crisis is daunting and that the Governor and legislature have no choice but to expect a shared sacrifice among the many worthwhile and vitally important agencies and institutions that serve the needs of Pennsylvania’s citizens. We are deeply disappointed with the proposed budget and the disproportionate burden it exacts on public universities. This concern has led to the posting of a set of talking points accessed from the University’s home page that those who share the concerns of the Millersville University administration and trustees – students, their families and others – might wish to use as a resource in contacting their elected state legislators.

Please keep in mind that the process to produce Pennsylvania’s 2011-12 operating budget is one of deliberation, debate and compromise. The final budget bill will require approval by majorities of the House and Senate, and the concurrence of the Governor. Voicing your respectful concerns will help shape the final contours of the budget bill and the funding that is vital to ensuring that Pennsylvania residents continue to have access to an affordable, quality public university option at Millersville University and the other PASSHE universities.

Francine G. McNairy
President