



2020 STATE OF THE 'VILLE ADDRESS

Hello and welcome to the Winter Center at Millersville University. Under normal circumstances, this auditorium would be packed with an audience to celebrate the beginning of our new academic year. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has upended our plans, so we are doing things a little differently. In the next half hour, I will share our accomplishments from the last academic year and provide some highlights about our priorities for this year and beyond.

Welcome to the 2020 State of the 'Ville address.

I want to thank everyone watching this event, especially members of the PASSHE Board of Governors, current and former trustees, faculty, staff, students, alumni, parents, friends, and community leaders. Thank you for joining us.

To our retired colleagues who were recognized as faculty emeriti in the past year, congratulations on your well-deserved accomplishments. More so, I thank you for your contributions to the education of our students. I invite you to continue your longstanding relationship with our university and look forward to seeing you on campus.

As we all know, the last academic year was unlike any in our history and, indeed, in our nation's history.

In the early months of this calendar year, we saw as the SARS COVID-19 pandemic spread rapidly across the globe. Based on the spread of the pathogen at that time, we activated our Incident Response Team, made up of about fifty people. By the time we received directives from the Governor's office to close our campus in mid-March, we had already started planning how to proceed. As students left campus for their spring break, we announced plans to transition to remote instruction and in the subsequent weeks we enacted measures to protect our students, faculty and staff as well as our surrounding community.

Over a two-week period, our faculty members and IT staff worked diligently to transition approximately 730 courses from face-to-face to remote instruction. Our students, who had to stay at home after the Spring break, adapted to this new instructional modality to the best of their abilities.

As a result of these changes, we reduce student charges and issued housing and dining refunds of nearly eight million dollars.

To help minimize the financial impact of the pandemic, we received CARES Act funding of \$2.8 million dollars for direct distribution to students. Subsequently, we received the same amount to cover some of our pandemic-related expenditures.

Our staff stepped up to ensure the smooth operations and business continuity of our university. Our faculty members participated in training sessions to enhance their remote instruction skills. Together, all our employees responded to the challenges that were posed by the pandemic. I am deeply grateful for their efforts and proud of the way in which our community handled this crisis.

A big thank you to our staff, especially those listed here, the Facilities Department, Housing and Residential Programs, Student Financial Services, and Information Technology for their work.

Our faculty deserve a special thank you. Based on my first-hand knowledge through our conversations, I am impressed by how you have spent each and every day since the start of the pandemic developing new and better ways to serve our students. You have risen to the challenge of transitioning to new modes of instruction and demonstrated the greatness we can achieve when we focus collaboratively on serving our students.

The next few months will present challenges, but I am confident that we will rise to the occasion. This confidence comes from what you did last semester and the groundwork that you laid this summer in preparation for the new academic year. Your cooperative spirit and resilient approach to your responsibilities are laudable.

I am excited to start the new year. I have already had the opportunity to welcome our new students and new faculty members. In addition, I extend a Marauder welcome to all our new staff, especially two academic administrators, Dr. Rachel Finley-Bowman, Associate Provost and Dean of Student Success and Dr. Marc Tomljanovich, Dean for the Lombardo College of Business.

During last year's State of the 'Ville address, I introduced several major planning efforts. This is a good time to give an update on these efforts.

First, the Institutional Accreditation Steering Committee, led by the late Dr. Lisa Shibley, Dr. Laurie Hanich, and Dr. James Delle, completed the Reaffirmation of Accreditation Self-Study. After submitting this report to the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, we were scheduled to have a comprehensive site visit at the end of March. However, the visit was postponed due to the pandemic. But I am glad to share that the site visit will occur next month, from September 13 through 16.

Secondly, from August of last year through April of this year, an 85-member All University Council developed a five-year strategic plan. We used an inclusive and collaborative process that involved five teams working in sequential phases. After a review by the Strategic Advisory Council and my Cabinet, the plan was endorsed by our Council of Trustees at their June meeting.

I am grateful to all the people who collaborated to produce the plan and look forward to its implementation. This plan, named "Tradition and Transformation" will serve as our blueprint for the next five years to move our institution to higher heights.

Thirdly, as we are all aware, in order to deliver the top-notch academic programs developed by our faculty members, our students deserve the right kind of learning spaces. That is why we carried out a Campus Facilities Master Plan. This plan generated a long-term vision for our campus and provides a roadmap for future capital improvements, that will connect and beautify our campus while providing best-in-class instructional and co-curricular spaces for our students.

This Facilities Master Plan is one of several plans that were incorporated into the integrated planning approach we used to develop our new Strategic Plan.

In addition, we implemented several initiatives to support enrollment, affordability and engagement.

To support persistence and help shorten time to graduation, we launched the 30-to-Graduate initiative. This initiative raised awareness of the importance of taking 30 credits per year to stay on track to graduate in four years. Despite the pandemic, we graduated over 1,300 students but had to postpone our commencement to next spring.

We also opened our Student Success Center in Lyle Hall. This center is made up of the Registrar's Office, Student Financial Services, Learning Services and Tutoring, International Programs and Services, and the College of Education and Human Services Advisement Support Center. The center is also the new home for the Center for Academic Excellence and our Instructional Design team, which will have spaces to create a synergistic faculty training center this fall.

Affordability remains one of our top priorities.

As the pandemic unfolded last spring, we recognized the immediate need to cut cost for our students. As a result, we reduced spring 2020 campus fees by nearly 50%.

We also established the EPPIIC Student Compassion Fund, which raised over \$40,000 from employees, alumni and friends to support students in need of emergency assistance caused by the pandemic.

To ensure that we keep the cost of attendance within reach for our students and their families, last month we reduced the General Fee for this fall semester by 27%. With this reduction, our university has decreased the cost of attendance for our students for two years in a row, which is unprecedented in higher education, especially under the current financial climate. That is the Marauder way. It is another demonstration of our commitment to provide our exceptional education at an affordable cost, which incidentally is our vision statement in our new strategic plan.

Our donor community continue to support our university. Last year, the Imagine the Possible campaign continued its upward trajectory with the support of our generous donors. Allow me to share a few highlights of the third year of the campaign.

Last December, we received the single largest gift in the 165-year history of our university. This gift came in the form of a \$3.5 million dollar check toward nursing scholarships from Ms. Liselotte Wehrheim, class of 1974. She was an adult student, who attended Millersville University as a non-traditional student. The legacy that she has left will benefit future generations of students who choose nursing as a career.

My dear friends, Sam and Dena Lombardo, are setting new standards of generosity toward our university. Last spring we announced their astounding gift of \$3 million. This kind of generosity doesn't occur by accident. The Lombardos gift will forever provide opportunities for students who will otherwise not be able to attend our university.

Still on fundraising, we exceeded expectations during our One-Day-Give event. In the seventh year of this much-anticipated event, we surpassed last year's numbers, both in total dollars raised and in total number of donors. Over 1,150 donors gave or pledged nearly \$292,000 in just 24 hours.

On the behalf of our university, I want to thank all the people who participated in this remarkable community event. In particular I would like to recognize the over 150 student athletes who made gifts this year. This was a clear demonstration that generosity exists throughout our institution. I look forward to reaching new heights during next spring's One-Day-Give event

Through the deep generosity of our donors, we ended the third year of the Imagine the Possible campaign with a total of about \$52.8 million, which exceeded our goal of \$32 million by 65%. Once again, thank you for your support.

Last year, we made progress in developing new partnerships to benefit our students. For example, our Student Access and Support Services program was awarded \$345,000 for the GEAR-Up grant. This program empowers local partnerships between K through 12 schools and institutions of higher education to better prepare and support students from low-performing school districts.

Also, we designed a new academic program in collaboration with Lancaster General Hospital to support their employees and other professionals in the growing field of population health.

As the saying goes, the only place that rewards appear before work is in the dictionary. At Millersville University, our ethos is to work hard and allow the rewards to follow. Congratulations to all our faculty who received grants and awards. Their efforts bring recognition to our university and strengthen our institution.

Faculty members such as Drs. Karen Rice, Thomas Bell, John Wallace, Mark Snyder, Tim Mahoney, Leonora Foels, Barry Atticks, Kirsten Bookmiller, Stacey Irwin, and many more have helped elevate our profile regionally and beyond.

Our university was also recognized for some of our exemplary initiatives and services.

We were re-approved for the prestigious Carnegie Community Engagement Classification for another five years. This designation is the highest standard of recognition for community engagement efforts at institutions of higher education.

Our Police Department continues to gain national recognition. They developed a Community Policing Specialist position, the first in PASSHE and among the first in the nation. According to YourLocalSecurity.com, this award recognizes the training and qualitative differences between community policing and traditional police patrol officer duties. Forward-looking actions like these make us one of the nation's safest schools and the safest campus in Pennsylvania.

In October, the American Association of State Colleges and Universities awarded Millersville University the "Excellence and Innovation in Sustainability and Sustainable Development" award. This award not only recognized the Lombardo Welcome Center's

exceptional zero energy performance, but also our efforts to incorporate sustainability into the curriculum.

Last December, Millersville established a Chartered Circle of the National Leadership Honor Society, Omicron Delta Kappa (ODK). Our university is the second institution in PASSHE to have an ODK Circle. Establishment of this circle on our campus is a reflection of our efforts to provide excellent educational experiences for our students because only 15% of all four-year universities nationwide have an ODK Circle.

A major focus now and in the years ahead is to align our curriculum with regional workforce needs. Last year, we added seven new undergraduate academic programs to our curriculum.

We also added a new graduate program, Educational Specialist in School Psychology, as well as four new minors, five certificate programs, four undergraduate program concentrations and two graduate program concentrations.

These programs were developed in partnership with local industries. Hence, they align with regional and national workforce needs and will help us respond to the growing economic challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic.

A special highlight for our university this past year, was to establish the Lombardo College of Business. This is the first college to be named in our 165-year history. Through the generosity of Sam and Dena Lombardo, we have established this college, which has already graduated 93 students and is positioned to impact the local, regional and national business landscape.

We also continued to excel on the stage, on the court and on the field.

In the fine arts, we welcomed world-renowned Grammy-award winners, Chanticleer, enjoyed performances that celebrated the life of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and entered the microworld of *Genetic Moo*.

Our athletic department fulfilled its vision of providing a championship experience that develops leaders who will change the world. We had many successes in the fall. And

while our spring competitions were cut short by COVID-19, our student athletes performed well in the classroom. 169 student-athletes achieved a GPA of 3.0 or higher.

One of the key characteristics of an institution that focuses on the liberal arts is mentorship for students. As an institution that is committed to preparing our students for successful careers, we made progress last year in providing mentorship opportunities. We established the Mentorship Office and implemented an online career mentoring initiative which engaged over 70 alumni, who supported and coached over 200 juniors.

Our alumni are so important to the success of this university. This past year, through the work of the Advancement Division, we engaged over 2,000 new alumni through communications, events, volunteer opportunities, and philanthropic programs.

We even started a new virtual alumni book club with over 100 members in June.

All alumni start as students. The community we share begins with establishing and maintaining a sense of tradition among our students and here are examples of programs that we implemented in this area this past year.

I have shared quite a bit about what we accomplished this past academic year, now let me tell you what we are going to do in the year ahead.

Last year, I talked about turning a vision into a reality, beginning with developing a strategic plan. With a fresh copy of our new Strategic Plan in our hands, we are ready to execute our vision.

Also, we must be mindful and aware that the world in which we lived when I spoke with you last year is not the world in which we live today.

The pandemic and its resulting economic impacts have revealed social injustices in our society. As an institution, we must lead the community by taking action to address such longstanding injustices in productive, inclusive approaches.

In light of these challenges, it can, at times, be hard to be optimistic.

But I am optimistic, and I am confident.

I am optimistic because of our people.

I am confident in the strength, determination and resilience of our faculty and staff.

I have seen reasons to be optimistic in the eyes of prospective students as they tour our campus.

I have heard reasons to be confident in the voices of our students as they express joy while facing adversity.

Within those reasons lie the ability to turn a crisis into an opportunity. We will create opportunity for our university, but more importantly, for our students.

We will create opportunities that **Ensure Access, Affordability and Completion**. Beginning with establishing the Office of Community Engagement, Government and Economic Development and completing the accreditation process.

This office will more closely align our academic and professional programs with regional labor needs in order to strengthen the pathway between our academic programs and regional job opportunities.

We will create opportunities that **Transform Student Experiences and Foster Innovation**.

For example, we will invest in the technologies that support remote instruction and develop a culture of innovation. We will develop policies and practices that address innovation throughout our university to deliver exceptional experiences for our community and South Central Pennsylvania.

We will create opportunities that **Invest Strategically in People and Place**.

For example, we will expand the career mentoring program and implement a first-year student mentoring initiative using undergraduate peer mentors.

And we will create opportunities by **Communicating Our Value**.

Herein lies my ask of all Marauders. Our mission, as articulated in the new Strategic Plan, is to be a “community dedicated to high quality education at exceptional value.”

The challenges we face are real, but so too is our commitment to our mission and our community. We will come out of this pandemic stronger if we all take responsibility to communicate our value.

We should not hide our strengths because a lit candle under a basket will not light a room. We must all look for opportunities to get involved, to share our story and to connect more closely to our region and to each other.

In closing, let me once again thank each of you for your heartfelt passion and for your resolve to make our university a great place to be.

We are explorers, we are professionals, we are inclusive. We act in support of public mission. We act with integrity and compassion. We are EPPIIC!

We are Marauders.