

Looking for ways to make college more affordable

Many high school students considering college now wait anxiously for their acceptance letters. Students, often with the help of parents or family members, try to decide which college is best for them.

When I speak to prospective students and their families about their goals — their hopes, dreams and looming challenges— career preparation and entry into the future workforce are always uppermost in their minds. In addition to those goals for the future, they share their concerns about finances and debt.

Since becoming president of Millersville University in 2018, both affordability and workforce development have been my top priorities. As a community, we need to educate and prepare our citizens to meet the needs of businesses in central Pennsylvania and the commonwealth. At a Lancaster Chamber event in December, more than half of our local legislators listed workforce development as their No. 1 issue. As a university, Millersville is committed to helping students get the preparation they need while incurring as little debt as possible.

According to the College Board, the rapid escalation in published tuition and fees at America's colleges and universities between 2001 and 2013 has slowed considerably. While the last five years have seen smaller annual price increases at public two- and four-year institutions, I understand that any increase can have a profound financial impact on our students and their families.

Education are making to offer an affordable college education.

Last month, our council of trustees set the cost for room, board and fees. For the 2020-21 school year, charges for room and board will not increase and fees will go up just \$6 a semester. That comes on the heels of a vote by the state system's board of governors last July to freeze tuition for only the second time in the system's 36-year history.

The cost of textbooks has been skyrocketing for years and many universities, including Millersville, are looking for alternatives.

We are part of the nationwide OpenStax movement that encourages the use of free, peer-reviewed electronic textbooks. In addition, we support our faculty using free materials that are available through websites, the library or grant-funded databases. We provide incentives to encourage our faculty to use online materials. For example, faculty members who are selected to participate in workshops training them to use free open education resources receive \$1,000 toward their professional development. The return on investment for last semester was impressive — it saved our students over \$250,000 in textbook expenses for an investment of approximately \$20,000 in faculty incentives.

In addition, PASSHE universities are developing new majors and programs to ensure our students are ready to be key contributors in the workforce. Millersville University has

prepared for both existing career opportunities and for jobs that do not yet exist.

Eventually, students and their families will narrow the list of potential colleges and a final selection will be made. I encourage families to understand the important message of finding "excellence without elitism." There are many high-quality institutions across this region, the commonwealth and the nation. Students can explore institutions of different sizes, with different areas of focus, where excellence and value are synonymous.

My advice for parents and families is to be engaged partners in the college selection process. There is not one ideal institution for your student, but rather many fine institutions that can provide a solid foundation for your student's future. I offer you my best wishes with the college selection process.

• *Daniel Wubah, Ph.D., is the 15th president of Millersville University.*



DANIEL WUBAH

SPECIAL TO LNP

The Institute for College Access and Success reports that seven out of 10 students will graduate with some form of student loans. The U.S. Department of Education reports that in 2017 the typical student borrower owed an average of \$28,600 — a 4% increase from 2014.

Let me share some of the efforts Millersville University and Pennsylvania's State System of Higher

created eight new degree programs in the last two years. These programs were developed in partnership with local industries.

Our faculty and staff are also working to strengthen existing partnerships and we are constantly building new collaborations with our friends in the Lancaster business community. Examples include building upon the work that we have started with Clair Brothers, along with Rock Litz, Eurofins, Penn Medicine Lancaster General Health, Landis Communities, and the Lancaster STEM Alliance, just to name a few. These opportunities further ensure that Millersville students will be sufficiently