

State of the 'Ville 2021

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Good afternoon and welcome to the 2021 State of the 'Ville address.

It is wonderful to see many of you in person today.

Last year around this time, I was standing on this stage recording our annual State of the 'Ville address. Although I enjoyed sharing our accomplishments virtually at that time, it wasn't as exciting as today with a live audience. What a difference a year makes. We are back!

I want to thank everyone joining me in this auditorium and those who are joining online. 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.

A special thank you goes to our new faculty emeriti, whose names were shown in our opening slide show, and our recently retired Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, Dr. Vilas Prabhu and his wife Sneha.

Welcome to all our new faculty members and staff, especially our new provost and vice president for academic affairs, Dr. Gail Gasparich. Although she has been here for only 2 months, she is already a valued member of my leadership team. Please join me in welcoming Dr. Gail Gasparich and all our new colleagues.

As we reflect on the past year, we have all felt the pains of the pandemic in our own unique ways. We have lived with feelings of anxiety and uncertainty, been stretched by discord in our society, and, for many, personally experienced serious illness, or the loss of a loved one.

Our campus experienced a painful and tragic loss nearly two weeks ago with the death of first year student, Matthew Mindler. In addition, William Mullen, one of our colleagues in Dining passed away last weekend. During such times, it is important for us to support one another. Our thoughts remain with their family, friends, and loved ones. Let us be ever mindful of our EPPIIC values of compassion and inclusion and unite with a renewed focus on the health and well-being of everyone in our community.

Kindly join me for a moment of silence to reflect on the losses we have all experienced this past year.

Thank you.

July 1st marked the start of my fourth year as president of our university. I don't think anyone could have predicted what we've been through in the past year. We had difficult conversations as the State System pursued campus integrations. At the end of February of this year, we were the first PASSHE institution that faced a ransomware cyberattack. We weathered the uncertainties of a volatile economy. And we experienced all of these while navigating a global pandemic, which led to challenges that provided opportunities to find strengths we didn't know we had, and to discover new ways to connect with each other.

This past year required our collective vigilance by monitoring the number of positive COVID cases, encouraging vaccination, and making real-time decisions about mitigation measures. We established several committees and task forces that provided advice to the leadership team. These groups included last year's Fall Reopening Planning Team, the Incident Management Team, the Fall Planning Task Force and finally the COVID Monitoring Team.

On behalf of our entire community, join me to acknowledge the work of these colleagues with a well-deserved round of applause.

I like communicating through stories so let me share some of the highlights from this past academic year.

During last year's address I shared the four pillars of our Strategic Plan, "Tradition and Transformation". For the rest of my presentation today, I will provide an update on our progress for each of these pillars starting with our focus on Ensuring Access, Affordability and Completion.

Our mission, as a public university, is to provide a pathway to a higher quality of life through education. We succeed when that pathway is accessible, and the destination is clear and affordable.

This fall semester, we have 1989 students living in our residence halls on campus. Our total headcount is 7223 made up of 952 graduate students and 6271 undergraduate students. We welcomed 21 new students from 16 countries this fall.

Accreditation lies at the center of what we do because it validates our work. One of our cardinal accomplishments last year was the full reaffirmation of our accreditation by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. This outcome was the result of a two-year process involving hundreds of individuals from across our campus who participated in the planning, self-study, and virtual site visit. Our Institutional Accreditation Steering Committee was led by Dr. James Delle, Dr. Laurie Hanich, and the late Dr. Lisa Shibley. Let's give a round of applause to all those who were involved in the process.

In addition to the regional accreditation, several professional programs were also reaccredited. Among them were the:

- Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation
- National Association of Schools of Music,
- Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology,
- Association of Technology, Management, and Applied Engineering.

With accreditation in place, we set our sights on optimizing our program array. We developed and launched new undergraduate majors in:

- Accounting
- Finance
- Marketing
- Management
- Special Education
- Emergency Management and
- Information Technology.

Graduate programs are becoming an important component of our academic offerings with graduate students now comprising 13% of our overall student body. Last year, we launched our first accelerated bachelors to masters programs in Sport Administration and in Nursing, which will enable qualified undergraduates to begin working toward their master's degrees while completing their bachelor's degree. We also developed four new online degree completion programs in:

- Emergency Management,
- Writing Studies
- Marketing, and
- Interactive and Graphic Design.

I appreciate the tireless work of our faculty who developed these new degree programs and new delivery formats. These programs will help our university meet regional workforce needs while providing new pathways for learners.

While these new programs and modalities add to the richness of our educational offerings, providing them at an affordable cost is becoming increasingly difficult. But we are addressing that challenge too.

Last year, the university acquired and refinanced the Village residence halls from SSI. This process has positioned us to save approximately \$60 million dollars over the next 27 years. The savings is being passed on to our students starting this year. We have reduced residence hall rates at the Villages by 8% and decreasing our overall cost of attendance for the third year in a row. We are bending the affordability curve at a critical moment for our students. We are bucking the trend!

Last year I mentioned how we are saving our students tens of thousands of dollars by using Open Educational Resources. I am happy to report that this trend continues. Since the fall 2020 semester, the open textbook initiative led by the Center for Academic Excellence, has saved our students approximately \$900,000.

The success of our students is key to everything we do at. The Office of Student Support Services has implemented Starfish, which is a holistic student success platform. We have also created a Student Success Network that is a partnership between Academic Affairs and Student Affairs. Collectively, their mission is to provide opportunities for the academic, personal, and professional development of our students. The network will provide individualized services such as mentoring, advising, and other high-impact, experiences.

Let's hear from Dr. Margaret Mbindyo, one of our faculty members in this network, who will describe our Academic Resilience Initiative.

One of our signature programs is the Made in Millersville event, a showcase of student research and creative activity. Our virtual event in April included 113 presentations – some live and others pre-recorded – and featured 169 student scholars and artists. Thanks to the faculty and staff who pivoted the format to make this experience so valuable for our students.

With quality academic programs available at reduced cost, our next step was to address other student experiences. For example, our admissions team hit the streets in vans to run a socially distanced welcome to incoming students and keep them connected to the 'Ville. This project increased our new students' sense of belonging and demonstrated our commitment to their success.

We also ensured that in person campus tours for prospective students continued throughout the year. This approach contributed towards an increase in the number of applications submitted.

We know that students' families play an important role in their success and persistence. As such, last year we launched a "Parent Portal" to enhance the involvement of parents and families in the success of our students. The portal, which currently has about 4000 subscribers, provides information to parents that empowers them to support our students.

Now, let me share with you some of the efforts we are making to give our students transformative experiences, which is the second pillar of our strategic plan.

That work begins with our EPPIIC value of Inclusion because a student's success rests on a foundation of belonging. We have established an Inclusive Excellence Advisory Committee, which is made up representatives from all divisions. This group aims to incorporate inclusive excellence into the fabric of our university. They established a Global Perspectives Student Leadership Network, which promotes cross-cultural awareness and cultural intelligence as a necessary skill to succeed as a global citizen.

Kindly watch this short video highlighting our inclusive excellence.

In September of 2020, Millersville won the Diversity HEED Award for the 9th consecutive time. This award, given annually to only 100 universities in the US and Canada, recognizes an institution's commitment to diversity and inclusion.

Further demonstration of our commitment to diversity and inclusion will soon be seen on campus. We broke ground for the Divine Nine and Cultural Greek Council Memorial Walkway behind the SMC recently. Representing traditional Black Greek-lettered organizations and several Latinx and multicultural fraternities and sororities, this installation honors the history, heritage, scholarship and community services of these organizations. Made possible by nearly 200 alumni and friends of Millersville, it will soon become a favorite gathering place on campus.

Although we had a fewer number of students living in residence halls last year, many of them participated in Living Learning Communities. Communities have been established for the Honors College, the Scholars Program, ROTC, Social Advocacy and Creative Writing. And plans for new communities focused on LGBTQ+ Allies and International Connections are being developed.

Another experience that we provided to our students was mentorship. Throughout my career, I have benefited from mentorship and I believe in its power to transform lives. Last year, we established a new peer-mentorship program for first-year students in partnership with the Mentor Collective. This program connects first-year students to upper-class peer mentors for one-on-one guidance and advice. So far, about 500 students have signed up for the program.

Our students didn't excel only in the classroom because they did so on the field too. Although athletics was impacted by the pandemic last year, we had some noteworthy accomplishments in spring 2021.

- Our men's baseball team won the PSAC East championship for the second time in a row.
- Hannah Woelfling was named the PSAC Rookie of the Year in track and field
- Our women's tennis team advanced to the PSAC championship match - their first appearance since 2004.

Last weekend, our fall student athletes were back on the field for the first time since 2019. I am thrilled to see fall sports return this semester and look forward to more victories this year.

One of my core beliefs is that people are the greatest asset of any organization and at Millersville, we are blessed to have top talent among our faculty and staff. It is our responsibility to continue investing in our people to propel our institution forward.

That is why the third pillar of our strategic plan is to Invest in People and Place. To do so, we need to increase our resources. Philanthropy is one of the ways to generate additional resources needed to accomplish this goal.

In June 2018, the Imagine the Possible campaign had raised \$14 million towards a goal of \$32 million dollars with two years to go. By June of last year, we exceeded that goal by 65%. So, what do we do after meeting our goal? Of course, at Millersville University set a new goal, even loftier than the previous one.

That's why this past summer we extended the campaign by three years and increased the goal to 90 million dollars. I am glad to announce that we are already 89% to our new goal. [CLAP]

We could never have raised this level of support without the generous gifts of our community members. These include:

- The largest gift ever to Athletics, a \$1.5 million commitment from alumna Lois Morgan
- An estate gift of \$4.3 million from our alumna, Lisolette Wehrheim to the School of Nursing
- The single largest gift in our university's history—a \$5 million gift from my friends, Dr. Samuel and Mrs. Dena Lombardo

Due to the outstanding work of our Development Office and our collective efforts, giving to Millersville has tremendous momentum. There is excitement around our plans and our message, and we are working hard to increase our endowment. But don't take my word for it. Let's listen to why our benefactor, Dr. Sam Lombardo, supports our university.

I was particularly thrilled by our One Day Give event. Last year marked the third consecutive year of substantial growth in both total giving as well as the number of gifts we received. We raised about \$608,000 in 24 hours. Everyone contributed! Gifts came from our students, faculty, staff, alumni, parents, and friends. This was truly a campaign of the community and I thank everyone who participated. Plans are underway for next Spring's event.

In addition to our progress in philanthropy, we are also positioning ourselves for investment through grants and sponsored research. Last April, Mr. Jeffrey Porter joined us as our Associate Vice President for Grants, Sponsored Programs and Research. We have established a new office to support this area and we now serve as the new coordinator of system-wide grants. So how did we do this past year? We received over \$11 million in awards - the highest in terms of dollars awarded in the past decade.

Another indication of our faculty member's success in seeking external grants is their success in PASSHE's Faculty Professional Development Council grant competition. Out of the 15 proposals that we submitted, 8 were funded. This represents the largest number of awards ever received by Millersville and overall, it was equivalent to nearly 20 percent of all FPDC awards given across the state system.

As part of our response to the challenges imposed by the pandemic and cyberattack last year, we increased our investment in technology. Among these enhancements were:

- Implementation of new security measures such as multi-factor authentication
- Equipping 60 classrooms with new technologies that better support remote instruction
- Installation of future technologies in our classrooms such as the Oblong Mezzanine in the meteorology lab

As you can tell, we are working hard to position ourselves for a vibrant future, in our offerings to students and in our commitment to their success. The final pillar of our strategic plan is to share information about our role as an engine of socio-economic mobility in Central Pennsylvania.

Communicating our value requires an intentional approach to telling our story. During the past year, our communications and marketing team developed and implemented a media campaign to advertise our new academic programs through television, radio, social media and billboards. I heard stories from people who saw or heard our messages on these platforms. We have exceptional stories to tell and I am excited about the renewed effort we made this year to tell them.

One of the many features that makes Millersville special is our proximity to, and connection with, the City of Lancaster. The Ware Center serves as our gateway to downtown Lancaster. This Center celebrated a very special milestone this past year—a 10-year anniversary. And here’s a small clip from the anniversary video:

One of the outcomes of the pandemic was the need to develop new ways to interact with each other. Our alumni hosted several virtual events including a book club and behind the scenes campus tours. Additionally, we created a new volunteer platform, Volunteer at the ‘Ville to connect our alumni to our students.

Millersville University is committed to sustainability. This past academic year, we convened our first regional business conference focused on the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). About 140 attendees and six partnering organizations participated in this conference.

In recognition of our accomplishments, we were among the first 45 higher education institutions in the US, and the only PASSHE institution, to be ranked in the Times Higher Education Impact Rankings—a global ranking system that measures performance toward achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

A recent article in the Economist highlighted how the pandemic has deepened socioeconomic inequalities across the globe. It states that “Those on low incomes who are fortunate enough to find employment face other inequities. Greater dependence on in-person forms of work puts the low-paid at higher risk of exposure to covid-19. And as the pandemic keeps children out of schools, many poorer workers face a terrible choice between going to work or looking after their children’s education. The digital divide, too, weighs on low-income students without access to online resources or reliable high-

speed internet. But the most important and distressing source of pressure on poorer families will be the return of persistently high levels of joblessness”.

To address this challenge, our Office of Community Engagement, Government and Economic Development led our efforts to help unemployed people reskill, upskill and retool to re-enter the job market. The Office partnered with the Lancaster Workforce Development Board. They received a grant from the BBT Bank/Truist Foundation for information technology training targeting unemployed and underemployed individuals in Lancaster County. Another grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry focused on digital literacy skills, in partnership with Adamstown and Quarryville Public Libraries. This is a good example of our Public Mission value in action.

Our College of Graduate Studies and Adult Learning developed innovative programs to serve the needs of our regional workforce. For example, our master's program in Assessment, Curriculum and Teaching launched a one-year online pathway to full teacher certification. This program will serve teachers working on emergency teaching certificates and will provide school districts with a cost-effective program to fully credential their emergency teachers.

Throughout the last academic year, the zenith for me was our three-day commencement events in May. The challenges of the year dissolved as I looked at the faces of our graduating students and saw joy, pride and the gratification that comes with perseverance. Over 1,200 graduates participated in the four ceremonies, which marked the beginning of the return to a full and vibrant campus life. I'm excited to share some video highlights with you.

It is safe to say that the pandemic didn't slow us down in the past year. We surpassed targets and bucked trends, and we confronted challenges we never anticipated. In every sense, we acted in EPPiC fashion.

So, as we embark on the second year of our Strategic Plan, we have wind in our sails, and we know our direction. Success breeds success, and people naturally want to be part of a winning team. And there is a role to play for each member of our community as we seek to achieve new heights.

So what are our plans for this year?

- We will Ensure Access, Affordability and Completion by further assessing the total costs of attendance while improving retention and graduation rates.

- We will Transform Student Experiences and Foster Innovation by introducing our university to new audiences and new partners with whom we can create and expand workforce development.
- We will Invest Strategically in People and Place by increasing our fundraising and friend raising efforts in addition to catalyzing new grant opportunities.
- We will Communicate Our Value by further increasing our presence and reach in Lancaster County and across the globe.

Working together in a spirit of cooperation and innovation, we will meet the aspiration of our vision - to inspire learners to change the world.

The good news is that I've witnessed your passion and enthusiasm on display in the early days of this semester. We are a community gifted with an intangible quality of togetherness, but I have never felt that togetherness quite as strongly as I have these past few weeks. Our yearlong separation has only worked to strengthen our bonds and bring us closer. In the days ahead I encourage each of you to draw energy and strength from it.

Let me conclude by expressing my deepest gratitude to everyone for the many gifts you gave to our community this past year.

You gave your time, your talents, and your treasure to serve the well-being of our students, those seated around you and those joining us remotely. You have truly been EPPIC!

Thank you.

