

State of the Ville' 2022 – final

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Good afternoon and welcome to the 2022 State of the 'Ville address.

I'm pleased to see so many of you here today.

I want to thank everyone in this auditorium and those who are joining us online. Members of the PASSHE Board of Governors, current and former Trustees, faculty, staff, students, alumni, parents, friends, and community leaders, thank you for being with us.

I want to extend a special welcome to our new faculty members and staff, particularly our new Cabinet members, vice president for student affairs Mary Beth Williams, chief diversity and inclusion officer, Carlos Wiley, and interim vice president for finance and administration, Debbie Newsom.

Other senior administrators who joined us in July include Dr. Lara Willox, dean of the college of education and human services, Dr. Marc Harris, dean of the college of science and technology, and Dr. Carol Runge, assistant vice president of institutional assessment and planning. Kindly join me in welcoming all our new colleagues.

As we look forward to the promise of this new year, I'd like to take a moment to honor the life and legacy of several colleagues we lost last year. In March, we were devastated by the tragic passing of our Interim CDO and AVP for Student Affairs, Mr. Renardo Hall. Renardo was at the top of his game and diligently supporting our students and the larger community. We feel his loss to this day. In mid-August, we were deeply saddened by the passing of recently retired Vice President for Finance and Administration, Mr. Gil Brown. A couple of months ago,

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we held a retirement party for him after a 40-year career in higher education. We also lost one of our staff members in Facilities this past year, Mr. Nick Celia.

Kindly join me in a moment of silence for our colleagues and others we lost over the past year. (PAUSE FOR MOMENT OF SILENCE).

Thank you.

Against the backdrop of the volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity in the past few years, one constant that continues to drive our university is you, the people, the members of our community who help to educate our students. You create the culture of our community. And as we all know, the people and culture of any organization are more important determinants of its success as compared to strategies and policies.

The biggest driving force behind our culture is our EPPIIC values. And I believe that building a strong culture is about keeping our EPPIIC values central in our decisions and actions. These values influence how we interact with each other and with the external world. Our EPPIIC values also determine how we behave and how we strive to meet our mission and realize our vision.

Last Spring when a call was made for nominations of exemplars in each of the six values, about 50 employees or groups were nominated. Congratulations to all nominees for the opportunity to receive the inaugural EPPIIC Value Award! Today, we will celebrate our values and express our appreciation to you as role models to emulate.

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In addition to our core values, our Strategic Plan, “Tradition and Transformation,” serves as a framework for our daily operations. Our values determine where we are going, which represents our north star or compass, and our strategic plan defines what we are doing, which represents our activities. Whenever we have to make difficult decisions, we use our EPPIIC values as a compass and our Strategic Plan as a clock, which together provide both motivation and direction that determines our culture.

So, for the rest of this presentation, I will give a progress report of our strategic plan and conclude with a celebration of colleagues who have demonstrated the qualities of our EPPIIC values.

Let me begin with our first pillar of Ensuring Access, Affordability and Completion.

Of the approximately thirteen hundred first-time students who enrolled this fall, most of them are from Pennsylvania and about ten percent of them are from out of state. The most popular majors for the class of 2026 are Biology, Elementary and Special Education, and Accounting and Finance.

Our total headcount for this fall is about six thousand nine hundred, of which about five thousand nine hundred are undergraduates and the remainder are graduate students. We have about twenty-one hundred students in our residence halls.

We have developed a few new academic programs. At the undergraduate level, these are:

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- A newly organized bachelor's degree in Journalism
- Two new minors
 - English as a Second Language
 - Sport Studies
- Four new online degree completion programs namely
 - Management
 - English
 - Interactive and Graphic Design
 - Emergency Management.

At the graduate level, there are two new concentrations in online master's programs. These are:

- An Accelerated Secondary Teaching Certification
- Inclusive Practices Program

We also have a new workforce development certificate program in Telehealth.

As we all know, the cost of higher education has been escalating and the pandemic added an extra layer of challenge for our students. Affordability is one of our priorities and we made progress toward lowering the total cost of attendance last year. With the help of the PASSHE Board of Governors, we froze tuition for an unprecedented fourth consecutive year. With no increase in tuition, a reduced cost for the residence halls, and a reduction in certain fees, we decreased the total cost of attendance.

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Another method we used to decrease the financial burden of our students was to provide scholarships. Since the beginning of the *Imagine the Possible* campaign, we have established **one hundred and ninety-two** new scholarships, which represents an increase of **sixty eight** percent in privately funded scholarships. Examples of the major scholarship gifts announced last year were:

- A **four-million-dollar** commitment from Nancy Adams '73
- A **two and half million-dollar** commitment from Steve '89 and Lynn '91 Pomponi,
- And a **nine hundred-thousand-dollar** estate gift from our retired music faculty member, Jean Romig.

Last year, about **one million dollars** of new scholarships went directly to students.

Talking about scholarships, we also awarded about **forty-seven thousand dollars** to students in our Integrated Studies program. This program is a marker of our commitment to having a diverse and inclusive community. For example, this program increased enrollment by adding **seventeen** new students to yield a total of **forty** students last year, an increase of **seventy three percent** from the previous year.

Also, a milestone occurred in this program because Grace Hussar became the first Integrated Studies major to graduate with a bachelor's degree; and it was in Social Work. But wait, she is now working toward her master's degree in Social Work. Congratulations Grace, we know the sky is indeed the limit for you and we look forward to your future accomplishments. Following Grace's path, two

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students in the Integrated Studies program have started their bachelor's degree programs this fall. Typically, our Integrated Studies students arrive on campus expecting to graduate with a two-year certificate only. That is the Millersville difference!

Still talking about our Integrated Studies program, last year, we signed the first inclusive postsecondary education articulation agreement in the country with Lehigh Carbon Community College.

Now, let me share some of our efforts to give our students transformative experiences, which is the second pillar of our strategic plan. Often, these faculty-student engagements provide opportunities for students to develop their talents and skills. And now I will like you to hear it in their own words. (PAUSE FOR VIDEO CLIP)

This is just one example of the high impact practices in which our faculty engage our students. Let me talk about other efforts that we made to engage our students.

As we all know, high impact practices are transformative in student learning, and we continue to offer opportunities for our students to participate in independent study and research projects. Last April, Rene Munoz and Andy Welaish organized the 2022 Made-in-Millersville conference. About **two hundred and seventy** students shared the results of their research and creative projects at this

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conference and I would like to congratulate them for the high quality of their presentations.

Taking it one step further, **nine** students participated in the National Conference on Undergraduate Research. As a former councilor of the Council on Undergraduate Research, I am glad to say this was the first time that our university sent a contingent to this conference.

Now let me talk about a change that we made to help our incoming students. We redesigned our summer orientation program to provide incoming students adequate information to enhance their success. Students and parents, who attended one of the eight sessions, spread over the summer, learned about our academic support programs and other campus services. For me, one of the highlights of this new orientation program was the excitement that it brought to campus including taking photos in front of the Biemesderfer Center.

So, how did we do in athletics this past year? I can safely say, we did well. We won three PSAC Championships and finished twice as conference runners-up. This strong showing resulted in a fourth place finish out of eighteen schools in the Dixon Trophy standings. This is our best performance in the past 20 years.

Also, our students and coaches received several accolades including All-American and Coach of the Year awards.

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Finally, **one hundred and ninety nine** of our students were named PSAC scholar-athletes, which is the highest number we have received in our history in a single year.

Overall, one can say we had a spectacular year in athletics.

Speaking of award-winning performances, our university once again showed our strong commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion by receiving the HEED Award for the 10th consecutive time last year. This annual award is given to only 100 universities in the US and Canada.

Our EPPIC value of inclusion requires creating a sense of belonging for everyone. The Campus Life Office and the Dr. Rita Smith Wade-El Intercultural Center celebrated our graduating students with two special ceremonies, namely the Rainbow Graduation and Graduating Students of Color ceremonies. A total of **three hundred and twenty** students participated in these events last year.

The spring ceremony was particularly moving when a voice recording of one of Mr. Renardo Hall's previous motivational speeches was played. With his family present, everyone in the audience felt his presence and this ceremony was the most touching event that we held on campus last year.

Still on our DEI efforts, among the groups that lead our efforts to create a sense of belonging are the three Presidential Commissions. Now, let's watch this video clip

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showcasing **these** Commissions and the important role they play to improve inclusion on our campus. (PAUSE FOR VIDEO CLIP)

Finally, under the second pillar of our strategic plan, I want to talk briefly about efforts to support our students as they returned from the pandemic. We realized that we needed greater support for our second-year students. So, the Divisions of Academic Affairs and Student Affairs partnered to create a Second Year Experience Program. The goals of this program are to encourage academic success, promote a sense of belonging, foster engagement with faculty, and support the wellbeing of our second-year students.

As I mentioned earlier, the most important asset of our university is our people. In order to meet our mission, it is important to invest in our faculty and staff and provide the proper environment for them to work. That is why the third pillar of our strategic plan is to Invest in our People and Place. To meet the goals for this pillar we need resources, and one of the ways we meet this requirement it through fundraising. So, let's talk about the "Imagine the Possible" campaign.

In June 2020, we extended the campaign by three years and increased the goal to **ninety million** dollars. As of this morning, we have raised **ninety-eight million** dollars, which represents **one hundred and ten** percent of our goal. And we have nine months to go.

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For last year alone, we raised **eleven point six** million dollars, which was **thirty six percent** above our goal. Also, we inducted **four** new members into the Fiat Lux Society, which is made up of donors who have given the university gifts exceeding one million dollars. Welcome to our new members of this prestigious society.

One of our marquis events in the past few years is our One-Day-Give. Once again, our community turned out for a record-breaking event! In 16 hours, we raised about seven hundred and forty thousand dollars. This included generous donations from our students, faculty, staff, alumni, parents, and friends. Thanks to all donors for supporting the 'Ville! This year, we are going to beat that amount!

In addition to our progress in philanthropy, we are also positioning ourselves for new investments through grants and sponsored research.

Last year, our faculty and staff submitted **sixty-two** proposals requesting about twenty-one million dollars in external grants and contracts. Of these, twenty-two were funded, totaling about twelve million dollars.

Still on investing in our people, just after commencement in May, we held one of my favorite events of the academic year, which is our annual All Employee barbeque. It provided an opportunity to relax and enjoy a beautiful summer day

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with friends and co-workers. I think it is the least we can do to enjoy each other's company away from our usual daily professional obligations.

Now let's talk about our facilities. Last year, for the first time in our history, we developed an internal five-year capital plan for construction projects. This comprehensive plan aligns with the University Strategic Plan and the Campus Facilities Master Plan.

Also, we enhanced selected academic spaces. An example is the Briedenstine's 3D Studio, which was renovated to serve as a digital fabrication lab with five 3D printers and three Helix laser cutters.

As part of our efforts to transform learning spaces on campus, we continued the design phase for the future Lombardo Hall and Boyer Hall. When completed, Lombardo Hall will be the new home of the Lombardo College of Business. Our Police Department will move to Boyer Hall to enhance their effectiveness across campus.

Despite our recent challenges with the HVAC system in some buildings, addressing facility needs is an important goal for our university, and we will continue working on it till we get it right.

Finally, professional development of our employees is important to the university. Last year, we created the Dilworth Training Room, which is a new learning space for new employee orientation, training programs and employee meetings.

As an institution that is committed to inclusion, our facilities should reflect this core value. Last year, we completed the Unity Plots and the Divine Nine and Cultural Greek Council Memorial Walkway. This edifice, which was made possible by the generous support of about 200 alumni and friends, contributes towards our efforts to make our campus welcoming to all. It is important to note that except for Cheney University, we are the only campus in PASSHE with a Unity Plot.

As part of our effort to provide the best environment for our employees, our technology must align with and support the needs of our community. Last year, we

- Redesigned the campus network to promote security and segmentation.
- Launched the new myVille portal, which provides a one-stop shop for student and employees.
- Formed an IT Advisory Council to solicit feedback and advice from our constituents.

Continuous improvement is our goal as we work to position ourselves for a vibrant future.

The final pillar of our strategic plan is to share our story. But before I share examples of what we accomplished under this pillar, I want to express a special thank you to the members of the COVID Monitoring Team who monitored our conditions and guided our decision-making throughout the year.

Now let's talk about how we communicate our value by intentionally telling the world what we are doing.

One of the ways we do so is reflected in our rankings. Examples of these rankings are:

- Study.com ranked four of our programs in the top 50. These are
 - Bachelor's degree in communications
 - Bachelor's degree in early childhood education
 - Bachelor's degree in music production
 - And the online master's degree in emergency management.

Still talking about telling our story, last fall, more than two thousand alumni and friends attended our Homecoming celebration, which helped to connect our students, alumni, employees, and friends.

- Also the Millersville Parade returned to George Street.
- And the Block Party was a huge success.

Closer to home, one of our greatest assets to tell our story is the Ware Center. In addition to celebrating a week-long series of 10th Anniversary special events last year, we hosted sixty-seven performances and exhibits.

Also, the Ware Center hosted two major conferences.

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- The first was The PLACES 2040 conference, which brought together community leaders and planners from across south-central Pennsylvania.
- The second event was the two-day annual UN Sustainable Development Goals Conference. On the first day, Professors Oliver Dreon and Timothy Mahoney organized a summit on how to address the teacher shortage crisis and on the second day, the School of Social Work discussed how to tackle the shortage of behavioral and mental health professionals.

In our modern age of social media, we can all be story-tellers about the wonderful environment we have at the 'Ville. Here's a short Tik Tok clip by students in a botany class that went viral. (PAUSE FOR VIDEO)

Thanks to Dr. Chris Hardy and his students for this inspiring story of learning excellence.

As we emerged from the pandemic, we transitioned back to campus and continued implementing our strategic plan with our EPPICC values as our compass. Based on the examples I have shared so far, it is safe to say that our activities in the past year revealed the strength of our community and the resilience of our people.

So now, it is time to pause and recognize the special individuals and groups that exemplify this strength and resilience in our EPPICC values.

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Before we start this new tradition, I want to express my sincerest appreciation to the EPPIIC Value Awards Committee, particularly our Provost Gail Gasparich and Wendy Bowersox from Human Resources. And I am excited to announce that we will extend this initiative with a new monthly employee recognition program. Additional details will be released soon.

Now, everyone who was nominated deserves our gratitude for being an exemplar of one or more of our core values. Let's give all our nominees a round of applause.

Moving to our first award – Exploration.

Our inaugural winner of the Exploration award is a team of colleagues from Information Technology who developed a new technology, the myVille portal, that has quickly become the “go to” site for faculty, students, and staff. The Exploration award goes to the IT Web Team, Mike Dulay, Kim Broskie, and Will Gausmann. Congratulations and kindly join me on stage!

Our second award is for Professionalism

During the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic, this award winner provided compassionate health care to campus and inspirational leadership to her team. The professionalism award goes to Ms. Lauren Blevins. Congratulations Lauren!

Our next award is for Public Mission

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Our public mission calls us to respond to the critical needs of our region and beyond. The public mission award goes to a colleague who responded to community concerns by facilitating collaboration between the campus and the Community Action Partnership to advocate for the expansion of the MU Headstart STEM Center. Congratulations to Dr. Beth Powers!

Integrity is our next core value to be recognized.

A dedicated faculty member who was integral in the development of our strategic plan and who provides her students with exceptional support to enhance their professional lives, the Integrity award goes to Dr. Jennifer Wood. Congratulations, Dr. Wood!

Our next award is for Inclusion

This colleague actively engages the Pre-Scholars Summer Institute (PSSI) and the Latino Student Leadership Institute to support our students while advancing the ideals of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Our winner of the Inclusion award is Ms. Christina Williams. Congratulations!

And finally, we have the award for Compassion

Today, we recognize a dedicated employee of more than 40 years who makes everyone with whom she interacts feel valued and is always available to listen to students and co-workers in McNairy Library. Our first Compassion award goes to Ms. D'Ann Ressler, Congratulations D'Ann!

Let's give another round of applause to all our award winners.

Now looking into the future.

Over the next year, there are three broad areas in which we will focus collectively to ensure that we meet our mission.

The first area is **ENROLLMENT** with a focus on student persistence, retention, and graduation. Across the nation, the pandemic has contributed towards the loss of about a million students in higher education. But before the pandemic started, our retention and persistence rates were declining while our four-year graduation rates remained below forty percent. Also, our total enrollment has declined over the past five years.

Therefore, we need to take steps to stabilize our enrollments this academic year.

We have begun to address this challenge by:

- First, moving Enrollment Management to the Division of Academic Affairs and adding Financial Aid to this unit. We are hiring an Assistant Vice President for Enrollment Management to oversee the new team.
- Second, we've reorganized our student support services into a University College and introduced *Starfish*, which is a holistic platform for student success with emphasis on advising, mentoring and career guidance.

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- Third, we are working with a consulting firm (Ruffalo Noel Levitz) to analyze the impact of the per credit tuition model on enrollments.

We will keep a laser sharp focus on addressing our enrollment decline. Most importantly, it will take the collective effort of every employee working together to make it happen. Ultimately, I have confidence that we will make progress this year.

Several projects that we initiated during the 2019-20 academic year were impacted by the pandemic. While some of these projects were completed, others had to be reactivated last year. For this academic year, our **SECOND** area of emphasis would be to refocus our attention on these projects and modify them to address post-pandemic realities. Examples of our efforts will be to:

- Complete the implementation of new academic programs that were approved by the Chancellor's office.
- Increase the number of students with access to co-curricular activities such as the mentorship program and global education experiences.
- Institutionalize diversity and inclusion efforts and enhance collaboration across divisions to ensure a welcoming campus.
- Accelerate the renovation of Lombardo Hall and initiate a project to improve Pucillo Gym.

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FINALLY, we will complete the “Imagine the possible” campaign and increase alumni and donor engagement. As a result of our donors’ generosity, we exceeded the **ninety-million-dollar** goal a year ahead of target date. Despite our successes so far, we have not hit our mark for the fourth campaign goal of revitalizing campus through capital projects, and we still need to generate more scholarships to support our students.

Because visits to donors and alumni were adversely affected by the pandemic, for this final year, I shall resume traveling across the country to reconnect with alumni and donor prospects.

In closing, let me return to the beginning of my speech and reinforce my unending confidence that our people are the key ingredient to seeing progress and meeting our mission. Each one of us has a role to play to make this possible.

Ultimately, we have the power to move the needle on enrollments and ensure that each student who enters our university will thrive in our community, get the best education, and walk across the commencement stage prepared to change the world. This is why we do what we do! (PAUSE FOR VIDEO).

Best wishes for a great academic year. I hope to see you on campus at one or more events, or in the new faculty/staff dining room, or the new Evergreen Café.

Finally, my deepest gratitude to everyone on campus for your relentless efforts to advance our mission and serve our students and the community. You are the ‘Ville! **Thank you!**