State of the Ville’ 2026 Address
2026-09-09

Good afternoon, and welcome to the 2026 State of the ’Ville Address.

To the members of the PASSHE Board of Governors, our university trustees, faculty, staff, students, alumni, friends, and everyone joining us online—thank you for being with us.

It is always a privilege to gather as one Millersville community to celebrate what we have accomplished, reflect on where we are, and look with confidence toward where we are going.

And if the energy of these opening weeks is any indication, we are going to have an extraordinary year.

Let me begin by welcoming our newest colleagues.

We welcome Ms. Karen Hume, our new Chief of Staff in the President’s Office, and Ms. Javita Thompson, Assistant Vice President for Campus Culture and Belonging in the Division of Student Affairs.

We also welcome four new faculty colleagues: Dr. Amy Arms; Dr. Emily Davis; Dr. Laura Petravage; and Dr. Henry Zink.

In Athletics, we welcome our new head coaches: Drew Folmar, Matt Shur, Jennifer Smith, and Eric Burns. In addition, Trejon Dinkins and Tyler Jenkins have also joined us in Athletics.

Kindly join me in welcoming all our new colleagues to the Millersville family.

THE STATE OF OUR UNIVERSITY

Today, I am pleased to report that the state of Millersville University is strong and growing stronger.

That strength begins with our people.

Our faculty and staff continue to demonstrate what makes Millersville special: which is an unwavering commitment to our students, a belief in their potential, and a shared determination to help them succeed.

Together, we have stabilized our finances, strengthened enrollment, invested in our academic mission, transformed the student experience, and positioned the university well for the future.
Our Fall 2026 opening-day headcount of 7,236 students is evidence of that momentum and a testament to the hard work of our entire campus, especially our Admissions team.

We welcomed about 1,800 first year and transfer students from 22 states and six countries. More than 620 are first-generation college students, and 225 are student-athletes.

About 1,000 new students currently reside on campus, which is equivalent to a remarkable 98 percent residence hall occupancy rate.

These numbers matter. But what matters even more are the students behind them - their ambitions, their families, and the trust they have placed in our university.

GATEWAY: RENEWING THE PROMISE OF A MILLERSVILLE EDUCATION

For my presentation today, I want to begin our academic story with something fundamental to who we are: the liberal arts foundation of a Millersville education.

For 171 years, our university has prepared students not simply for their first job, but for lives of adaptability, intellectual curiosity, civic engagement, and meaningful contribution.

That is the enduring promise of the liberal arts.

And this year, we renew that promise through our new Gateway General Education Program.

Following last year's pilot, Gateway now becomes the General Education experience for all first-year students.

For decades, our previous General Education program served us well. Gateway builds on that foundation while preparing our students for a rapidly changing world.

At its heart is FYEX 100, our First-Year Experience course, now entering its third year and becoming fully embedded in Gateway.

Through Gateway, students will strengthen the capabilities that matter across every profession, which are: communication; critical thinking; civic and social responsibility; cultural competence; responsible use of technology; and habits that support lifelong well-being.

Gateway also embeds high-impact educational practices throughout the curriculum and creates opportunities for career-ready certificates.

Importantly, Gateway strengthens assessment at both the course and program levels to support continuous improvement while advancing our Middle States accreditation work. This transformation did not happen overnight.

The process began with a self-study during the 2020–21 academic year and continued through years of discussion, planning, debate, revision, and shared governance.

And it unfolded during extraordinary circumstances such as the PASSHE redesign, the COVID-19 pandemic, budget pressures, and significant personnel transitions.

It would have been easy to postpone this work.

Instead, our faculty and institutional leadership stayed on track. They listened to one another, worked through differences, and remained focused on a common objective, that is: What is best for our students and their learning?

I am grateful to the faculty who participated in this deliberative process, voted on proposals, and designed new courses.

I want to especially recognize the chairs and members of the University Curriculum and Academic Policies Committee as well as the General Education and Outcomes Assessment Committee for their stewardship of this work. My thanks also go to APSCUF for collaborating on the local agreement that helped bring this process to a successful conclusion.

This was truly a faculty-driven process and accomplishment.

Kindly join me in thanking our faculty members.

And I want to emphasize one important point.

There is no conflict between a liberal arts education and professional preparation. At Millersville, they reinforce one another. Let me give examples:

- A nurse needs scientific expertise in addition to empathy, communication skills, and the ability to collaborate with a care team.
- A teacher needs mastery of content, and the ability to understand different perspectives in order to reach students with different backgrounds and learning needs.
- Also, an engineer needs technical skills combined with creativity, communication, and teamwork.

Now, as artificial intelligence assumes more routine analytical tasks, these unique human capabilities will become even more valuable.

Gateway is therefore not simply a set of requirements students must complete. It is preparation for a lifetime.
Let's take a moment to learn more about the Gateway general education program from two colleagues who led the process.

CELEBRATING FACULTY EXCELLENCE

While a well-designed curriculum is important, it ultimately comes alive because of exceptional faculty.

Today, we recognize two faculty members selected by their peers for exemplary service.

First, our 2025–26 Educator of the Year is Dr. Andrew Bland of the Psychology Department.

Dr. Bland nurtures, mentors, and inspires students as they prepare for graduate study and professional careers. He is an internationally recognized scholar in humanistic and existential psychology with an extensive record of publications and presentations.

Dr. Bland, thank you for your extraordinary commitment to our students. Congratulations, and kindly join me on stage.

We also celebrate Dr. Aileen Hower of the Department of Early, Middle, and Elementary Education, as the 2025-26 recipient of our Outstanding Faculty Service Award.

Dr. Hower is being recognized for her outstanding dedication to student success, innovative curriculum development, and extensive leadership across the department, college, and university.

Dr. Hower, congratulations, and kindly join me on stage.

BEYOND BOUNDARIES: OUR FIRST-YEAR PROGRESS

Now, let me give an update of the progress of our strategic plan in this past year.

Last year, we launched Beyond Boundaries, our strategic plan for 2025–2030.

I described Beyond Boundaries as our clock, which sets the pace of our progress and our EPPIIC values as our compass, which directs and guides how we make that journey. One year later, we have tangible evidence of that progress. So let me start with:

Strategic Direction One: Ensure Access, Affordability, and Completion

We began last year with ambitious goals for enrollment and student success, and we exceeded expectations.
Last fall, our opening-day headcount reached the highest level since Fall 2020, and enrollment momentum continued through the spring semester.

Growth was particularly strong in areas that are critical to our region's workforce. For example, Nursing has become the largest department in the College of Science and Technology by headcount. Our RN-to-BSN pathway has grown by 50 percent since launching our collaboration with HACC.

But recruiting students is only part of our responsibility. We must help them persist and graduate.

First-year students who participated in our mentoring programs persisted from fall to spring at 94 percent, compared with 89 percent among non-mentored students.

Building on the recommendations of the President's Task Force to Increase the Four-Year Graduation Rate, which was co-chaired by Professor Janet Bertoni and Dean Marc Tomljanovich, I appointed Dr. Karen Halfhide as the University's first Retention Coordinator, to lead the 30-to-Graduate initiative.

We also launched Edify, to provide a unified data platform to strengthen advising, student success, and our efforts to improve four-year graduation rates.

Now let me talk about access, which is expanding.

We received Dual Enrollment Innovation Grant of $736,000 from the Pennsylvania Department of Education to help us build pathways with partner high schools, including Penn Manor, McCaskey, and La Academia.

Also, through the Pennsylvania's Grow PA Scholarship Grant Program, about 130 students majoring in high-demand careers received annual scholarships of about $5,000 each.

And our expanded Credit for Prior Learning policy is creating new pathways for adult learners and transfer students in business, education, emergency management, and nursing.

Let me talk about affordability, which remains central to our efforts. This year, the Millersville University Foundation provided nearly $2.9 million in scholarship and program aid, and we created 16 new scholarship endowments.

That brings us to completion. This past May, we celebrated 909 bachelor's and 245 graduate degrees at Commencement.

And behind every degree is a story of persistence and a reminder of why student completion remains among our highest priorities. Now let me talk about:

Strategic Direction Two: Advancing a Distinctive MU Student Experience

While Gateway may represent our most significant academic transformation this past year, we made progress in other areas across our campus. For example:

- Dr. Timothy Trussell and 36 archaeology students uncovered the remains of Lancaster County's first tavern, which dates to approximately 1725, at the Galbraith Ordinary site.
- The Made-in-Millersville event and its companion journal featured 48 published articles by 57 student authors representing 26 majors.
- The Robotic WorX Lab engaged about 3,000 students and secured its first major commercial sponsorship through a three-year agreement with AA Tech.
- Our health sciences programs received a new cadaver laboratory in honor of our alum, Dr. Stacey Fink.

Also, our students continued to distinguish themselves nationally. For example:

- Chemistry graduate Tim Lerch, received an NSF Graduate Research Fellowship Honorable Mention,
- And meteorology major Emily Werley was selected as a NOAA Hollings Scholar.

At the global level, 129 Millersville students studied abroad from Iceland through Kenya to Morocco, while we expanded international relationships across Asia, Africa, Europe, and South America.

With regards to support services to promote a sense of belonging for our students, the Dr. Rita Smith-Wade-El Center for Intercultural Student Engagement, recorded more than 1,350 student visits in its first year.

Additionally, we created a new MU Red Folder Initiative to help faculty and staff recognize and support students experiencing distress.

Student involvement is also thriving. Our 180-plus student organizations continue to grow, and Club Sports expanded to 21 organizations serving more than 500 students.

When it comes to athletics, our Marauders excelled in the classroom and on the field.

Two hundred and forty-six (246) student-athletes earned PSAC Scholar-Athlete status, which was equivalent to 51.7 percent of our student-athlete population; this is a department record.

- Our baseball team won its second consecutive PSAC Tournament Championship.
- Chloe Enck won the PSAC hammer throw title;
- Milan Snell captured the 400-meter championship;
- Mary Weiss earned the prestigious PSAC Champion Scholar distinction;
- And Zander Leik was named to the United Soccer Coaches First Team All-America.

Let's watch a short video which highlights the power of experiential learning at the 'Ville. {VIDEO}

Providing such transformative student experiences requires resources. So, let me talk about our third strategic direction:

Strategic Direction 3: Align Resources with Priorities

We made meaningful progress in supporting our employees, improved our efficiency in operations and strengthened our physical and financial foundation. For example:

- Information Technology completed an institutional AI Maturity Assessment, piloted AI applications, and refreshed 617 laptops.
- They also saved about $300,000 by managing our security camera upgrade internally.

Our physical campus is changing as well because:

- We made significant renovations at the Biemesderfer Stadium and completed the transformation of Brooks Hall into Lombardo Hall, the new home of the Lombardo College of Business. This Lombardo Hall project demonstrates how we

can honor our past while preparing for our future. And our university remains deeply grateful to Sam and Dena Lombardo for their generosity.

- We also continued our Space Optimization Study, advanced our deferred-maintenance strategy, and identified operational savings to strengthen our long-term stewardship of campus resources.

Financially, we continued building a more sustainable foundation. For example,

- Our inaugural Presidential Gala raised more than $1.4 million for scholarships, while quietly launching our five-year countdown to Millersville's 175th anniversary.
- Our Conference Services generated $1.33 million in revenue, and we increased Homecoming participation by 46.5 percent.

Most importantly, despite continued fiscal pressure throughout higher education, we ended the year with a balanced budget, while initiating a five-year strategy to rebuild our reserves.

Now let me talk about the last strategic direction, which is:

Strategic Direction Four: Communicating Our Value

This strategic direction is about telling the Millersville story and giving others compelling reasons to believe in our mission.

- Alumni engagement events increased by 75% and private giving was about $5.2 million from nearly 4,900 donors, with about 50% being first-time donors.
- We rose three places in the U.S. News & World Report rankings this year, which is an 18-place improvement since 2024
- And our Lancaster AI Symposium attracted 270 registered participants, the largest audience for the conference and further positions us as a regional leader in responsible AI adoption.

Our regional workforce partnerships also grew. Working with Precision Cobotics and the Lancaster County Workforce Development Board, we secured $350,000 from the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry to launch a robotics technician pre-apprenticeship program.

Finally, our faculty continue to tell the Millersville story through their scholarship, teaching, and service. Let me list a few:

- Dr. Cynthia Taylor published Powerful Mathematicians Who Changed the World from A to Z.
- Drs. Persida and William Himmele released the third edition of their bestselling book, Total Participation Techniques.
- Dr. Aaron Haines published wildlife research with five Millersville undergraduate students.
- Dr. Alex Redcay became a certified Warrior Advocate Leader for the Wounded Warrior Project.
- And Dr. Deborah Tamakloe traveled to Ghana to train 60 teachers in inclusive classroom practices.

These are Millersville exemplars—scholars, teachers, mentors, innovators, and citizens whose work tells our story far beyond our campus. We thank them for their continued dedication to our students.

EPPIIC VALUES AWARDS

We now come to one of my favorite parts of the State of the 'Ville: recognizing colleagues who bring **our EPPIIC values** to life.

More than 40 employees were nominated this year.

Before announcing the recipients, kindly join me in recognizing all our nominees.

For **Exploration**, our recipient is **Allison Yarrow** from Student Affairs, whose energy, creativity, and continuous innovation in campus recreation enrich the student experience.
Congratulations, Allison. Kindly join me on stage.

For **Professionalism**, we recognize our **Admissions and Recruitment Team**: Chad Baker, Rebecca Boyer, Kyki Bobotas, Lucia Garabo, Terri Hollister, Joni Klopp, Breanna Seitz, Megan Swisher, and Miranda Tripus.

Their strategic, disciplined, and student-centered work has helped produce successive years of enrollment success.

Congratulations. Kindly join me on stage**.**

For Public Mission, we recognize Lieutenant Arthur White of University Police.

For more than two decades, Art has served this community with dedication and a deep commitment to keeping our campus safe.

Congratulations. Kindly join me on stage.

For **Inclusion**, we have two recipients: **Dr. Laura Granruth** of the School of Social Work and **Frank Vitale** of McNairy Library.

Laura consistently creates environments in which students and colleagues feel seen, valued, and supported. And Frank collaborates with campus and community partners to ensure that histories and perspectives are shared authentically and respectfully.

Congratulations. Kindly join me on stage.

For **Integrity**, we recognize **Dr. Aileen Hower**.

As I noted earlier, her service is exemplary, but equally noteworthy are the integrity, kindness, and professionalism she demonstrates in that service.

Congratulations. Kindly join me on stage.

Finally, for **Compassion**, we recognize **Darlene Newman** from Student Affairs.

Throughout her many years and roles at Millersville, Darlene has consistently demonstrated warmth, kindness, and an unwavering willingness to support students and colleagues.

Congratulations. Kindly join me on stage.

Kindly join me one more time in congratulating all our EPPIIC Award recipients.

My sincere appreciation to the EPPIIC Value Awards Committee, led by Wendy Bowersox, for coordinating this year's process.

LOOKING FORWARD

We have accomplished much, but we have more work to do.

As we enter the second year of Beyond Boundaries, seven priorities will guide our work.

First, Middle States accreditation**.** We will advance our reaffirmation process and build on the approved Self-Study design and the excellent work already underway. This is more than a compliance exercise. It is an opportunity to tell our story, examine ourselves rigorously, celebrate our strengths, and identify opportunities to become better.
Second, belonging and engagement**.** We will deepen students' connections to Millersville through traditions, mentorship, campus involvement, and events such as our EPPIIC Weekend and the EPPIIC Journey Celebration.

Third, career readiness**.** We will expand internships, co-ops, employer partnerships, and experiential learning opportunities while continuing signature initiatives such as our SDG Conference, AI Symposium, and Robotic WorX partnerships.

Fourth, innovation**.** We will move from AI experimentation toward responsible, governed, and sustainable applications that improve our work and strengthen student success. Tools, such as Edify, will enhance our capacity for data-informed decision-making.

Fifth, fiscal sustainability**.** We will build on this year's balanced budget by implementing our five-year reserve plan, optimizing space, controlling costs, and identifying opportunities to generate new revenue.

Sixth, degree completion**.** We will advance the 30-to-Graduate and retention initiatives by strengthening advising, improving course availability, reducing degree-completion

bottlenecks, removing financial and institutional barriers, and expanding early intervention.

Our goal is clear: more Millersville students should persist, graduate on time, and become engaged citizens who live a meaningful life.

Seventh, philanthropy and our physical future. We will lay the groundwork for our next fundraising campaign and advance the vision for our new science complex as we move toward our 175th anniversary.

These are ambitious priorities.

But ambition has always been part of our story.

So, in CONCLUSION

As we begin this academic year, we should be clear-eyed about the environment around us and the challenges that we can turn into opportunities. Let me list just three of these:

- First, we have a level-funded state budget, rising costs, and continuing fiscal pressures, which will require discipline, creativity, and careful stewardship.
- Second, artificial intelligence will continue to reshape teaching, learning, work, and society. Our responsibility is neither to fear it nor embrace it without caution, but to use it responsibly and intentionally in ways that will advance our educational mission.
- And third, our students have changing expectations, diverse experiences, and a profound need for belonging, flexibility, meaningful relationships, and preparation for a world that continues to change around them.

These challenges are real.

But so is our resolve.

And the evidence of what we can accomplish together is all around us.

- It is in the students who joined the Millersville community this fall.
- It is in the faculty who redesigned our General Education curriculum.
- It is in the staff member who intervened when a student was struggling.
- It is in the researcher who invited an undergraduate into their research.
- It is in the coach who insisted on excellence in the classroom as well as on the field.
- It is in the alumnus who gave back.
- It is in the donor who invested in a student they never met.
- It is in every member of this community who put our mission and our students first.

Last year, I said that every boundary we cross makes the next one easier to overcome. Every collaboration strengthens our collective impact. And every innovation moves us forward.

One year later, those words are becoming visible across our university.

Transformation has begun.

Now, we must sustain it.

So, as we enter year two of Beyond Boundaries, let us move forward with confidence, not because the road ahead will be easy, but because we know what this community can accomplish when we work together.

Let us remain guided by our mission.

Let us live our EPPIIC values.

Let us continue investing in our people and our students.
And let us have the courage to imagine what Millersville University can become as we approach our 175th anniversary.

Together, with determination, creativity, and an unwavering commitment to our students, we will continue moving Millersville beyond boundaries and toward a future worthy of our highest aspirations.

The state of the 'Ville is strong. And our future is even stronger**.**

Thank you very much.