

# **State of the 'Ville 2024**

## **Delivered by Dr. Daniel Wubah**

Good afternoon, and welcome to the 2024 State of the 'Ville address.

Members of the PASSHE Board of Governors, Trustees, faculty, staff, students, alumni, family members, and friends, thank you for joining us on this special occasion. I also want to thank those who are joining us online.

Among our annual traditions at the 'Ville, this event is one of my favorites because we come together with renewed energy to reflect on the previous year and celebrate the beginning of the new academic year.

Last year, we were deeply saddened by the loss of our three students. They were:

- Thea Cassidy
- Michael McCall and
- Sanai Browning

Let's take a moment to remember them and extend our condolences to their families.

I want to welcome our new faculty and staff members joining us today, especially Dr. Kate Corcoran, our new Director of Athletics. Kindly join me in welcoming all our new colleagues.

This summer, I travelled across Africa to represent Millersville University. The trip renewed my commitment to paying attention to our own backyard here in Lancaster. It is often said that traveling can be a powerful catalyst for deepening

our appreciation for home because we experience different cultures, lifestyles, and environments that enable us to see our community with fresh eyes.

As you are aware, Lancaster is one of the few regions in the Commonwealth that is experiencing population and business growth, much of which can be attributed to our location, skilled workforce, and quality of life. And there is no doubt that Millersville University contributes towards this socio-economic vibrancy.

As the Commonwealth's first normal school, we have been a community anchor since 1855; and although we've evolved to become a comprehensive university, our commitment to the Lancaster community has not changed. For the next few minutes, I want to share five ways by which our university has made a difference in our region this past year.

First, we continued to be a cornerstone of the local workforce. Our graduates were in high demand, particularly in education and healthcare. During our May commencement, we graduate about 350 teachers and 130 nurses. And majority of these newly minted graduates entered our local workforce and are already making an impact.

To better prepare our students for the modern workforce, we recently revised our general education curriculum to emphasize practical skills and real-world experiences. And last year, our Career Center had a record-breaking attendance at job fairs and career-focused events. Also, because of close ties to our local industries, about 95% of our students are employed or in graduate school within 6 months after graduation.

Second, we continued to cultivate collaborations for deep and lasting impact. An example is our partnership with HACC to produce more healthcare professionals. This past June, we officially entered a new partnership with HACC to allow their RN students to concurrently enroll in our BSN program. This semester, 26 of the 90 students who received the Wehrheim scholarship, are concurrently enrolled at MU and HACC. Upon notification of the scholarship, one student replied "I truly appreciate it. This will bring me closer to achieving my academic goals." That is the power of collaborative philanthropy.

In addition, we continued our collaborations with Excentia Human Services, Church World Services, Willow Valley and the Lampire Labs. We also developed new corporate partnerships with Precision Cobotics and Climavision.

Third, we were a hub for cultural and intellectual growth in our region. For example, the Ware and Winter Centers hosted exhibitions and performances that showcased international and local talent. In addition, our lecture series and master classes inspired critical thinking and lifelong learning.

Fourth, we engaged our region as an innovative organization with thought leaders and local influencers. For example, this past Spring, we hosted the first Conference on Artificial Intelligence in Lancaster, and our annual United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and Climate Summit brought together experts to address pressing regional challenges.

Finally, we generated a substantial economic impact by contributing over \$250 million directly into the local economy. We were among the top 25 regional employers, and we continued to attract and retain top talent to enhance the economic vibrancy of our region.

Hence, it is safe to say that with our deep commitment to public mission, Millersville's impact extends far beyond our campus to shape Lancaster County's future.

So, you may be wondering why I am focusing on Millersville as an anchor institution.

It is because our region and its many assets distinguish us from our competitors. Over the past year, you may have noticed a deliberate campaign to recapture the vibrancy and spirit of Lancaster in our messaging. We are weaving our Lancaster location into our narrative to tell our story and promote our brand. In the coming years, we will ensure that our programs and initiatives demonstrate strong and mutually beneficial partnerships within our region. That is the hallmark of an anchor university for which we are striving.

Now, for the rest of this address, I intend to present a progress report of our strategic plan, which serves as our clock; and then recognize our colleagues who have been exemplars of our EPPIIC values, which represent our compass. I will then conclude with our priorities for this academic year.

So, here we go:

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

Our Enrollment Management team developed a cohesive strategy and deployed new tactics for recruitment. With a new Viewbook, revised messages, and new

partnerships, we saw a robust applicant pool that led to increased selectivity and yielded a strong first year class.

On opening day of this fall semester, our total headcount was just above 7000, of which about 5900 are undergraduates.

We welcomed approximately 1,550 new undergraduate students, including 1,250 first year students and 300 transfer students. And for our first-year students, about 75% will live on campus and almost 400 have self-identified as first-generation students. Our 45 new international students come from 22 countries including Australia, China, Dominican Republic, Ghana, and Vietnam.

To ensure a strong channel for prospective students, we enhanced our recruitment pipelines by developing a new Early College Program with Penn Manor and McCaskey High Schools. Also, our Office of Student Access and Support Services continued to leverage the TRIO Grant to reach students at ten high schools. This pipeline is expected to produce up to 100 additional first year students in future years.

**Now let me talk about retention.**

Last year, our 1<sup>st</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup> year retention rate climbed to 78.1%, which was the highest rate in about a decade. I appreciate the hard work of our faculty and staff for their support in advancing this important metric. Our commitment to holistic student success will continue to focus on persistence and graduation rates, as well as post-graduation outcomes.

Now what about affordability? We recognize that cost plays a critical role in retention and student success.

With a commitment to make our university affordable, we are grateful to the PASSHE Board of Governors for freezing tuition for the seventh consecutive year. Our thanks go to Gov. Shapiro and the General Assembly, who invested an additional \$35.1 million in PASSHE universities. We are particularly grateful to our two influential and dedicated alums, Senator Scott Martin and Representative Jordan Harris, chairs of their respective chamber's appropriation committees, for their strong commitment to higher education. We are indeed fortunate to have such extraordinary public servants in these key roles.

To further increase affordability, we moved to a flat rate tuition model starting this semester.

In practical terms, going back to a flat rate tuition model will allow our students to take up to 6 additional credits at no additional cost per semester. This change can decrease the time-to-graduation and contribute towards increasing the number of students who graduate in 4 years or less.

So, how would this change impact the bottom line for students? The total cost of attendance dropped by 9.2% for commuting students. Students living on campus with a full meal plan will save about \$500 per semester. Ultimately, we are bucking the trend and truly delivering on affordability.

Finally, our Financial Aid Office worked tirelessly to overcome the challenges of the new FAFSA process faced by our students last year and for that I am grateful.

Now, let me share some of our efforts to give our **students transformative experiences for our student**, which is the second pillar of our strategic plan.

Research shows that high impact practices are necessary for student success.

Last December, our High Impact Practices Task Force made four recommendations, which are:

- Establish the first-year experience seminar program.
- Increase support for student research and creative activities.
- Increase resources for our Career Center and
- Develop student wayfinding to enhance equitable access to high impact practices.

This report has been given to the University Retention committee, and we are already working on it.

Now, which high impact practices do we have in place? Let me share two examples.

First, the tenth annual Made-in-Millersville conference highlighted our commitment to scholarly and creative work. I want to thank the faculty mentors who oversaw the work of 341 students from all academic departments except one.

Second, the Division of Student Affairs partnered with Academic Affairs last year to revamp our Residential Communities. Faculty Fellows led Living and Learning Communities, while Staff Advisors led Affinity Housing.

For this year, we have four of each type of residential community. Each community has established goals, learning outcomes, and assessment plans.

Students in our Integrated Studies Program continued to excel. Catherine Sickler, a student enrolled through Integrated Studies, was inducted into the National Society of Leadership and Success.

Let's hear about how we are enhancing student success through this video.

***VIDEO #1 Insert***

Recognizing the urgent need for our students to be career-ready with cutting edge skills, we initiated several programs to provide micro-credentials last year.

Let me share two examples:

- We enrolled about 120 participants in the Google Professional Certificates program that was launched on our campus last fall by Governor Shapiro.
- We partnered with the Pennsylvania School Board Association to develop a new 6-week micro-credential on School Safety Preparedness that will be launched later this semester.

Still under the second pillar, we continued to make efforts to improve a sense of belonging for everyone. One of our approaches is the integration of the Inclusive Excellence Model across campus. Each division established a team to lead their efforts and my thanks go to our faculty and staff who are serving on these teams for adding their voice and energy to the initiative.

This strong commitment to make our campus a welcoming place was once again recognized when we received the HEED Award for the 12<sup>th</sup> consecutive time last year. This annual award is given to only 100 universities in North America.



Finally, we created a Family Friendly Campus Taskforce to support the unique needs of our learners. So far, we have developed a Family Friendly Campus Toolkit, several Student Parent events, and a new Student Parent Support Group.

Now, let me turn to Athletics. Overall, our student athletes had a great year:

- The men's basketball team won a program record of 18 PSAC games and was crowned PSAC East champions.
- Our **Men's** Golf team, **Men's** Soccer team, and **Women's** Tennis team also won conference championships.

In addition, several athletes were recognized for individual achievements.

Amongst them were:

- Timothy Peters, who won the PSAC Men's Golf Athlete of the Year and Freshman of the Year awards.
- Devin Flannery became a three-time All-American and finished in third place at the NCAA Wrestling Championships and
- Aleese Angelo won the PSAC East Softball Athlete of the Year award.

In addition to their performance on the field, our athletes excelled in the classroom by earning a new record of 222 PSAC Scholar-Athlete awards.

In terms of team grade point averages, our women's volleyball and cross country teams topped with a GPA of 3.57 and for the men, the tennis team topped with a GPA of 3.64.

Now turning to the **third pillar of our strategic plan, we invested in our People and Place.**

Several of our faculty members received awards for their contributions to their disciplines. Let me share two quick examples:

- Dr. Joe Behun received the Counselor Educator of the Year award from the Pennsylvania School Counselors Association.
- Dr. Duane Hagelgans was awarded “The Blanket of Honor,” which is a national award given to first responders and veterans. This award has been given to only 332 individuals since its inception.

Another key driver of success in this pillar is meeting our fundraising goals.

Last year we raised almost \$7 million in philanthropic support. Highlights of our fund raising efforts included:

- Our One–Day–Give event in February, which raised about \$826,000 from about 2200 gifts in 24 hours which was a record for the highest fundraising total in the event's eleven–year history.
- We relaunched the Ville Visionary Society and saw an increase of 22%.

Still on fundraising, the Fiat Lux Society is the University’s highest society that honors the extraordinary contribution of donors who have given transformational gifts. Today, I want to pay a special tribute to the generosity of our newest Fiat Lux members – Mr. Ben Cooper, Mrs. Joanne Cooper, Mr. Tom Densmore and Ms. Betty Snyder. They join an elite group of philanthropists who continue to invest in Millersville’s future. Let’s give them a big round of applause

In addition to philanthropy, our faculty and staff received several external grants last year.

Among these were two federal grants:

- Dr. Cynthia Taylor and her colleagues received \$1.2 million from the NSF to establish Noyce Scholarships for STEM teachers.
- Dr. Beth Powers and Dr. Deborah Tamakloe received \$974,000 from the US Department of Education for research in Early Childhood Education and Early Intervention.

What about our physical spaces? In this area, we made several upgrades and renovations. Let me share a few examples:

- Added new lighting at Cooper Baseball Park through a grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development. This will enable us to host regional and national tournaments. Senator Martin was instrumental in securing this funding.
- Installed a new HVAC system at the Pucillo Gym through a \$2 million grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Education.
- Renovated Boyer Hall to become the permanent home of IT and Campus Police.
- Recommissioned Bard Hall to provide an affordable housing option.
- Demolished four houses on East Frederick Street to create new multi-use green space beside McComsey Hall and finally
- We created a new 24/7 study area for students in McNairy Library.

For this academic year, our top priority is the renovation of Brooks Hall to house the Lombardo College of Business. The final design work and initial site preparation have commenced.

Last but not least, we have started feasibility studies for a new Science Center.

Still on pillar 3, we engaged in several activities to accelerate innovation. Let me give two examples:

- We established an Innovation Task Force to improve the utilization of Artificial Intelligence in our operations and
- We offered a new Summer Institute for regional K-12 educators that focused on Artificial Intelligence to help them learn how to effectively manage the emergence of AI in their classrooms.

Finally, under this pillar 3, we took steps to support our employees throughout the year. Examples include developing a new Flexible Work Arrangement policy, improving the clearance renewal process and initiating an All-Employee EPPIIC Breakfast last January, which was attended by about 300 employees.

**What about the last pillar of our strategic plan? This pillar focuses on telling our story to our community and stakeholders.**

As I mentioned earlier, our location is a distinguishing characteristic of our brand, so we are focusing on our backyard. Let me share some examples.

- The report of the Branding Task Force emphasized opportunities right here in Lancaster County and
- We increased our partnerships with the Lancaster Office of Promotion, Discover Lancaster, and Lancaster City Alliance, to create more opportunities for students to engage with local businesses and recreational opportunities.

Now, let's hear from our students, in their own voices, about what our Lancaster Region means to them.

## ***Video #2 Insert***

Other initiatives to Tell Our Story this past year included:

- Enhancing the Review Magazine by adding two digital editions.
- We created new visual imagery and storytelling for the Ripples of Generosity giving theme and
- We also told compelling stories about some of our noteworthy community members. For example, we had stories about:
  - Dr. Brandon Danz, our trustee, who was appointed to the PASSHE Board of Governors
  - Police Chief, Pete Anders, who won the Domestic Violence Services Catalyst for Change Award
  - Dr. Janet Bertoni, chair of the Special Education department, who volunteers on cruises and at resorts to help families traveling with special needs kids.

Ultimately, telling our story is vital to our success as an institution and allows us to celebrate our people.

Now, speaking of celebrating our people, it is time to announce this year's winners of the annual EPPIIC Awards. As I often say, the strongest driving force behind our Millersville culture is our EPPIIC values.

Today, we will celebrate our values and express our appreciation to the nominees, who deserve our recognition for their unique contributions. I appreciate you and applaud your dedication and passion to Millersville.

For this year, more than 50 employees were nominated, and their names are listed on the Awards website.

Let's give our nominees a round of applause.

Now, the excitement builds ...

Moving to our **first award – Exploration.**

This year's winner of the Exploration award is Dr. John Haughery from Applied Engineering, Safety and Technology for his exceptional efforts to link our students with exceptional learning opportunities in the Robotics and Automation industry.

Congratulations and kindly join me on stage!

Our **second award is for Professionalism.**

This year's winner of the Professionalism award is Andy Welaish from the McNairy Library and Learning Forum for his flexible and creative problem solving and commitment to providing excellent service to our campus.

Congratulations and kindly join me on stage!

Our **next award is for Public Mission**

This year's winner of the Public Mission award is Dr. Laura Granruth, faculty member in Social Work. She is a role model for our students in civic engagement, compassion and social justice, and she continues to spearhead our civic and community education programs.

Congratulations and kindly join me on stage!

**Integrity is our next core value** to be recognized.

This year's winner of the Integrity award is the Electrical Team from our Facilities Department. This dedicated group of colleagues includes William Rockey, Dan Trzaska, Glenn Swan, Sam Fonzi, Yousef Lundi, Anthony Hoopes, and Corinne Dyer. This team works behind the scenes to ensure our campus is operating at full capacity and ready for each new day.

Congratulations and kindly join me on stage!

**Our next award is for Inclusion**

This year's winner of the Inclusion award is the Ware Center team. This excellent group is led by Robin Zaremski and includes Nathan Cottrell, Barry Kornhauser, Cori Jackson, Julie Pyle-Childs, Abby Imm, Wes Bullock, Emily O'Shea, Steph Witman, Chris Jackson, Brian Fetterhoff, and Josh Redd. The team provides our community with a diverse array of artistic and cultural programming that embodies the "welcoming" spirit of the region.

Congratulations and kindly join me on stage!

And finally, we have the **award for Compassion**

This year's winner of the Compassion award is Dr. Margaret Mbindyo. Dr. Mbindyo has dedicated her career to enhancing the success of our students with educational, economic, social, and personal challenges and serves as a staunch advocate for their needs.

Congratulations and kindly join me on stage!

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

I want to express my sincerest appreciation to the EPPIIC Value Awards Committee, particularly Wendy Bowersox from Human Resources, who coordinated the process this year.

This year marks the fifth and final year of our current strategic plan. That means we must initiate the development of a new five-year plan. Based on feedback from across campus, we already have strong building blocks in our mission, vision, values and four strategic pillars.

I invite the entire Millersville community to participate in the upcoming open sessions as we solicit ideas and feedback for the new plan. Everyone brings unique disciplinary and professional perspectives, and I encourage you to participate in the planning process.

Now let me share our four major priorities for this academic year:

**First, we will continue our relentless focus on Enrollment and Recruitment.** How will we do this?

- We will expand graduate and adult learner enrollments and leverage new partners, knowing that traditional age undergraduate enrollments will be challenging as we approach the projected “demographic cliff.”
- We will strengthen and expand international student recruitment.

**Second, we will continue to enhance academic and extracurricular experiences for our students by:**

- Accelerating strategies to improve student retention, with a particular focus on the first two years of the student experience.
- We will secure additional internships and career-building opportunities.



- We will promote global experiences so that every student is aware of the available opportunities.

**Our third area of focus will be on our people and place. We will:**

- Enhance support for faculty and staff professional development.
- We will accelerate projects that will enhance facilities such as the renovations of the Biemesderfer Stadium and the Lombardo Hall.
- We will continue to enhance the university's financial health through resource optimization.

**Finally, we will focus on our public mission, specifically addressing key aspects of workforce development. We will do so by:**

- Aligning our academic programs with workforce needs.
- We will seek new business partners, and develop new innovations.
- We will continue develop non-credit training opportunities for the upskilling and reskilling of the region's workforce.

So, as I get to the end of this presentation, let me conclude with this message.

Since our founding over 170 years ago, a Millersville University education has been a catalyst for personal transformation and a vehicle for socio-economic upward mobility. We equip our students with the knowledge and tools needed to make a difference and encourage them to build a more just and equitable world.

Together, we will write another chapter in the 'Ville story. I am excited about exploring new opportunities and reaching new heights with all of you this year.

In closing, let's listen to a message of thanks from our students who have traveled long distances to join the 'Ville.

***Video #3 insert***

Friends, I hope to see you at the Garden Supper this evening and on campus at one of our many events this semester.

Best wishes for a productive academic year.

Thank you for joining us today!