

## INAUGURATION SPEECH

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Thank you Chairman Warfel, Chairwoman Shapira, Chancellor Greenstein, Trustees, Honorable Lloyd Smucker, Honorable Scott Martin, Her Excellency Martha Pobe, distinguished guests, campus community, family, friends and all who are joining us online, I am deeply grateful for your presence today. I am humbled to stand before you as the president of Millersville University. There are so many people here today and online who mean a lot to me so my gratitude has been moved to the end of my remarks.

Although July 1st last year was the beginning of a new chapter in our history, today marks the formal opening of a new era. This ceremony provides an opportunity for meaningful reflection starting with our proud past, highlighting our present circumstances, and visualizing the bright future that we are going to build together. For some of us, this occasion is an opportunity to wear our best outfits and regalia! Just look at the dazzling array of vibrant splendor in this audience. I have never seen such a wonderful crowd of people with the richest of colors. You look fabulous!

At this juncture, I will like to reflect briefly on my path to where we are now. My father passed away in an automobile accident when I was 7 years old, so my mother had to raise her four children by herself on the income of a seamstress. Therefore, it is not a stretch to say that my experience growing up in Ghana was not unlike that of a first-generation college student. I guess that is why I have a sincere affinity to our first-generation students.

Because of her life experiences, my mom vowed to educate all her children to their highest ability. She strived to accomplish that goal, but I doubt she ever imagined that her second born son would end up as the president of a university in the United States. So how did I get here? With the help of a lot of people but indulge me for a few minutes to share my story.

As the saying goes, “every dark cloud has a silver lining”. This saying resonates well with me and here is why. A month before graduating from the University of Cape Coast, in Ghana, the military government closed all campuses and sent us home to teach us a lesson for demonstrating against the regime. Most of us were hopeful that we would be called back to campus within a few months to complete our final exam and go our merry way to a happy life. Unfortunately, this closure lasted 9 months; the longest closure of universities at that time.

Now, imagine completing about 90% of the requirements to earn your degree and having to wait for almost a year in limbo because you couldn't take your final exam. That was the dark cloud. So where was the silver lining? It was during this time that I started thinking about pursuing a graduate education. Providentially, UCC reopened in

time for me to complete my degree in May and I left for the US in August. But wait, that was not all. Another silver lining from that closure was that my wife and I went from being just friends to lifelong partners when we started studying together for our senior year final exams after the hiatus. So, I can say without a doubt that I found 2 silver linings in a single dark cloud and for that I am grateful.

Fast forward eight years, my mother attended my doctoral commencement at the University of Georgia. The expression on her face that day is one that I see on the faces of parents of graduating first generation students during commencements.

After a couple of years as a postdoc, I landed my first faculty position at Towson (State) University, which is about 1.5 hours south of here. A few years later, I was put on the academic administrative track by serendipity when I was invited to participate in a faculty leadership program. My aspiration was to serve as an assistant department chair, but fate had other plans for me that has led me to today.

Along the way, I encountered a few people who saw something in me that I didn't. Dr. Linwood Rose was the first person who told me that I could be a president when he invited me to serve as his special assistant in 2003. My supervisor at Virginia Tech, Dr. Mark McNamee, is another mentor who provided me opportunities to gain invaluable experiences to lead a university. And Ted Zaleski, who has been a staunch supporter since my days at Towson. I will like to acknowledge them today. After a few years at my most recent institution, where I learned the ups and downs of being an academic administrator, I cannot see myself at a better institution than Millersville University.

Now that everybody knows more about me than you care to know, let me take you on a journey in time about our university.

Often times, in order to move forward, we need to dig into our past, so let's talk about Millersville University's history. Lancaster County was the 4<sup>th</sup> county established in Pennsylvania. During the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, it experienced an astronomical rate of growth; for example, the population went from about 40,000 in 1800 to 99,000 by 1850. In 1854, a local banker, Christian Herr and a school teacher, Lewis Hobbs, decided to establish a private school to address the needs of rapid population growth. They constructed a 3-storey building with two classrooms and an auditorium about 150 yards away from this spot at the corner of West Frederick and George Streets. During the final stages of the project in 1855, the Superintendent of Lancaster County schools, J. P. Wickersham, and the superintendent of public instruction, Thomas Burrowes, needed a place to hold a 3-month summer institute to train teachers for the growing population. Mr. Herr and Mr. Hobbs offered the new building to the superintendents to promote their new school.

On Tuesday, April 17, 1855, 147 teachers enrolled as the first class of students at Lancaster County Normal Institute. They paid \$34 for tuition, room and board for the 3-month program. The institute was so successful that the superintendents convinced Mr.

Herr and Mr. Hobbs to establish a permanent teacher training institute instead of a private academy.

On November 15, 1855, the Lancaster County Normal School opened its doors to about 100 students. The original founders demonstrated two of our current core values i.e. exploring the possibility of training professional teachers. In 1859, the state recognized the school as the First Pennsylvania State Normal School, but it was privately owned until 1917 when the state took ownership and we became an institution with a public mission, which is our third value. A year later in 1860, a model school was established on campus to provide hands-on experiences to the students. The school started with 90 elementary-level students from Lancaster County but it closed a few years later. Three months ago, we brought back a modern model school in the form of a Head Start program that is currently located in Bard Hall.

Now let's talk about our present situation.

One of the most common questions that I am often asked is: What is your vision for Millersville University? I believe the best vision for our university is the one that we will develop together. But let me put this in context by framing it around the three Ps:

- Our people;
- Our programs;
- Our place

## **PEOPLE**

Our students range from traditional age to adult learners; and resident students to commuters. Our mission statement requires us to work with each student based on his or her individual potential. So, how are we doing so far? I think we are doing well but we will strive to do better. An increasing number of faculty engage students in hands-on experiences and encourage them to participate in internships. Last Tuesday's "Made-in-Millersville" event is an example of such efforts. This annual event has grown from about 60 participants since its inception six years ago to 470 participants this year. Our effort to provide such opportunities to all students is the impetus behind our current campaign for students, where 50% of the funds will go to faculty-student interactions.

Now let's talk about our alumni. Engaging our alumni, supporters and friends is no more an option but a necessity. We have a greater need for such relationships because our commitment to liberal arts education requires additional resources that the state cannot provide. With about 65,000 living alums, we are well positioned to benefit from engaging them. However, we have some work to do. But I am optimistic because based on positive comments made by our alums during my listening tours and the outcome of our recent One Day Give Event, I believe we are on track. Furthermore, our alumnae have expressed their readiness to serve as mentors for our students. That is what top-notch liberal arts universities do and there is nothing wrong with using their playbook. Now let me talk about our programs.

## **PROGRAMS**

I believe liberal arts education is the strongest bedrock upon which the best professional preparation can be built. It prepares students for whatever profession they choose because it expands their intellectual capabilities, increases their agility and broadens their horizons. Hence, we will deepen our commitment to the synergy between the liberal arts and career preparation.

We engage in efforts to facilitate transfer student admissions and help our graduating students transition to the next stage of their lives. A couple of examples: first, we recently signed a memorandum of understanding with Thaddeus Stevens College of Technology to allow their graduates to take online courses that will enable them to earn a bachelor's degree within two years after their associate degree while working. Second, the recent MOU signed with the Via College of Osteopathic Medicine will provide a seamless transition of our qualified students to medical school.

## **PLACE**

Recently a university president said: "As higher education leaders, we need to do what we can to bend the cost curve. Higher education is one of the few industries where competition tends to drive costs up. It's time to stop this arms race, and to consider the benefits of greater cooperation. These can include shared infrastructure and exchanges to eliminate redundancies in our curricula". This sounds like something Chancellor Greenstein would say. But actually, this is a comment made by the president of Harvard University during his inauguration. So, if the university with the largest endowment in the world is thinking about sharing, shouldn't we be doing the same?

## **FUTURE**

Now, let's talk about the future that we will build together. To do so, let's go on a journey through three stations that will lead to the future we envision:

- Provide quality education at an affordable price
- Prepare our students for the digital age
- Develop an inclusive community

The first station is a commitment to enhance the quality of a Millersville University education while increasing access and affordability to qualified students. Generally speaking, one can assume that simultaneously increasing access and affordability will require resources that are beyond our reach. However, if what we've done in the past 9 months is an early indication, I will not bet against the Marauders. For example, last month our Trustees approved a proposal to decrease the total fees for our students effective next academic year. How did we buck the trend in the escalating cost of higher education? It was through a collective and creative effort of dining and residential services to enhance efficiencies and provide more flexibility to our students. We also

encouraged our faculty to consider using open source material for their classes; we have already saved students over \$200,000 in the cost of textbooks this academic year. For those students who haven't experienced this cost savings, just wait because it will be your turn soon as more faculty adopt open source materials in their courses. We will continue to pursue such efforts to make college affordable and accessible to our students. Meanwhile, our plans to develop alternative revenue streams in the form of philanthropy and corporate partnerships will continue. Ultimately our goal is to provide more financial aid through scholarships for our students.

The second station is about preparing our students to be successful in this digital age. During most of the 20th Century, a sound education was based on 3 skills: Reading, Writing and Arithmetic. Towards the end of last century, the focus shifted to the 4 Cs: Communication, Collaboration, Creativity and Critical thinking. Due to the rapid pace of technological advancement, several occupations are at risk for transition or elimination through automation and artificial intelligence. Such risks are highest in highly developed economies like ours<sup>1</sup>. Some futurists claim the era of artificial intelligence is almost over because we are now entering the early stages of intelligent automation. In a global study three years ago, McKinsey & Company reported that for most jobs, more than a third of the skills necessary in 2016 would no longer be required for the same job by 2020 – we are talking about next year.<sup>3</sup> Last year, the Business Higher Education Forum and Burning Glass Technologies described three groups of new foundational skills that are needed for the digital economy. These skills are the Human Skills, Digital Building Block Skills and Business Enabler Skills. These skills have replaced the 4 C's.

These three-skill groups are already needed in several professions, regardless of their relationship to the digital economy. So how will we equip our graduates with these skills? First, we must embed or strengthen these skills in all disciplines across the curriculum. Secondly, we must integrate these skills in other campus services such as advising and admissions. Ultimately, our goal is to incorporate these skills in both instructional and extra-curricular activities.

The future problems that humankind will face will require knowledge and skills from multiple disciplines and perspectives. As Steve Johnson highlighted in his recent book entitled "Far sighted", groups that are diverse are able to generate better solutions to problems than homogenous groups. That brings us to the third station, which is developing an inclusive and vibrant community.

Last month at the American Council on Education meeting in Philadelphia, I attended a session led by Robin D'Angelo, author of the book entitled "White fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk about Racism". One of the take home lessons of her presentation was that universities need to equip our non-minority students with skills that will enable them to interact positively with minority students. Often, we assume that our majority students already have these skills, but that is far from the truth. So, we need to work harder to move the needle to create an inclusive community.

As a graduate student who migrated to this country with nothing but a desire to better myself, I believe that international experience is necessary for a holistic education. Because not all students can afford to travel abroad, having international students here enables them to interact with people from other countries and cultures. In addition, just think about these two factoids: First, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, over a third of the Nobel Prizes awarded to Americans in chemistry, medicine, and physics have gone to individuals who were foreign-born. Second about 40 percent of Fortune 500 companies were founded by immigrants or their children. Being able to interact positively with people from other cultures is no more an option but a requirement for being a productive American citizen. As we send our graduates into the real world, how can we justify not giving them an opportunity to be globally educated?

When I was formally introduced to our campus as the incoming president a year ago, the comments section of our local newspaper, LNP, included questions about why I was selected? Fortunately, those comments were in the minority. The following day, the newspaper's Editorial Opinion affirmed my desire to be part of this community. Let me share a paragraph with you:

“We have only this to say to Wubah: In Lancaster County, you'll find that most residents welcome people of different backgrounds. Our county is home, after all, to a city known as “America's refugee capital.” Signs outside of homes in the city, the suburbs and rural communities welcome neighbors in Spanish, Arabic and English. We see diversity as our strength; we see it making the culture here richer. So welcome to Millersville. We wish you and the university well.” THAT IS ALL JUDITH AND I NEEDED. THANK YOU LNP.

Now I have an announcement. As part of our efforts to foster and strengthen an inclusive community beyond our campus, Millersville University will unveil a DIGITAL QUILT today to collect the thoughts of anyone who is committed to a just and equitable society by negating all forms of bigotry and hatred. The project is the brainchild of our staff led by Ms. Rita Miller. This website, known as NEGATING HATE, will go live at 3:23 p.m. today and I invite you to claim your piece of this quilt.

Our future reputation depends on how we achieve these three aspirations:

- Provide quality education at an affordable price
- Prepare our students for the digital age
- Develop an inclusive community

The only way we will develop a great reputation is to focus on educating students who will go out and make the world a better place. According to Abraham Lincoln “Character is like a tree and reputation is like its shadow. The shadow is what we think of it; the tree is the real thing.” As we build our reputation to be a top-notch university, our values must serve as our north star to help us develop a deep-rooted tree with a solid trunk that is covered with blossoming branches. Ultimately our goal is to serve the public good.

One of the most important responsibilities of a university president is to translate philosophical questions into administrative processes. Upholding this solemn duty, I have sought the collective wisdom of a cross-section of our community in the past nine months through the Listening Tours. We will measure our success by our absolute standard of providing excellent education at an affordable cost. This commitment to excellence in whatever we do should never be interpreted as an embrace of elitism. Our goal is EXCELLENCE WITHOUT ELITISM.

Before I conclude, I want to express my sincerest gratitude to everyone here today. I am thrilled by the presence of my mentors, former students, and friends. To the delegation from Ghana, it gives me great joy that you are here. Thanks for crossing the Atlantic Ocean to join us on this memorable day.

To our faculty—thank you. I am ready to work with all of you to educate our students and help them realize their dreams. You inspire our students and mold them into citizens who will go out to make the world a better place.

Thank you to our staff. Your dedication creates the vibrant beauty of our campus and the caring support for our students. You make Millersville University beautiful from the inside out.

Thank you to our students. We are here because of you. The future of our society depends on your passion and commitment. Whenever I chat with our students, I come away feeling optimistic because I believe we are in good hands. Now some suggestions to you, our students: When others call you unrealistic, prove them wrong. When others talk about bigotry and hatred, counter it with compassion and love. When others call you idealistic, thank them. Even amid the great difficulties and divisions we face, keep your zest and optimism because you are our future.

To my three predecessors, thank you for your skillful stewardship of the university and the foundation you laid for me.

To our alumni—thank you. You're nearly 65,000 strong, and you are the best. You motivate our students and together with our faculty and staff, we will prepare them to follow your footsteps.

My thanks go to the Millersville and Lancaster communities. You are our top collaborators in our mission to build a community that is a model of prosperity. To our Trustees—thank you for being strong supporters. You demonstrate the Marauder spirit every day. You exemplify our commitment to civil and respectful discourse, collective decision-making, and shared vision.

The presence of my relatives, sitting close by, provides great comfort. My sister, my uncle and his wife, my daughters, Vera and Araba, my grandkids, Kwesi and Eku. And

finally my amazing wife, Dr. Judith, Wubah, a wise confidante and reliable partner, who at times I think knows me more than I know myself.

With immense gratitude and humility, I thank all of you for celebrating this occasion with me. Thank you.