

Local colleges strengthen our county's workforce

- DANIEL WUBAH | Special to LNP
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Daniel Wubah, president of Millersville University.

Monday will mark my one-year anniversary as president of Millersville University. It's been a great first year.

My wife, Judith, and I are grateful for the warm welcome that we received from the Lancaster community. I've had the pleasure of meeting alumni, business leaders and elected officials. It has been an honor to serve on the boards of the Lancaster Chamber and the Lancaster County Community Foundation. And I've enjoyed meeting and collaborating with presidents of other higher education institutions in our county.

Last week, I joined my fellow presidents — including John “Ski” Sygielski, president of HACC; Barbara Altmann, president of Franklin & Marshall College; and William Griscom, president of Thaddeus Stevens College of Technology — at the “Wake Up to the Issues with the College Presidents” panel organized by the Lancaster Chamber.

The incredible economic impact that higher education has on Lancaster County was the focus of my presentation. A large percentage of our graduates stay in Lancaster County and Pennsylvania. For example, 97% of Thaddeus Stevens graduates stay in Pennsylvania; 80% of Millersville alums and 70% of Elizabethtown College alums are residents of the commonwealth.

Not long ago, the Brookings Institution reported that college graduates, over the course of their lifetime, earn significantly more (\$2.3 million for a bachelor's and \$1.7 million for an associate's) than those with a high school diploma (who earn \$973,000). Those college graduates pump that money back into our local economy.

To ensure the vibrancy of our community, we need college-educated residents; they are more important than ever to our state and local economies and thriving businesses. They are not only our workforce of today and tomorrow, they are also the taxpayers, homeowners, innovators, creators and our civic and industry leaders.

As higher education leaders, we still have work to do. The workforce needs of the local business community are changing as our county continues to grow. In order to attract new businesses and retain existing businesses, we need to supply a workforce that is ready for the 21st century. As I mentioned in my inaugural speech, we at Millersville will endeavor to incorporate the three skills (human, digital building block and business enabler skills) in our curriculum to ensure that our graduates meet the workforce needs of present and future industries. Our students must have the soft skills of social, creative and critical intelligence (human skills), and the ability to collect, handle and analyze data (digital building block skills). Our students must also be able to deploy synthesis and integration skills (business enabler skills) including project management, business process, communicating data and digital design.

Our institutions must continue to develop new academic programs that contribute directly to workforce needs and respond to industry demand. For instance, HACC has introduced new degrees in the cutting-edge industries of radiology informatics and mechatronics. The Lancaster County Career & Technology Center offers degrees in veterinary technology and dental hygiene — two growing areas for jobs in the county. At Millersville, we collaborated with leaders of emerging businesses on curriculum innovation to meet their needs and we have launched new degree programs in music industry, entertainment technology and information technology.

It is imperative for our higher education institutions to collaborate with businesses and the local community to strengthen and explore partnerships that will allow our students to participate in high-impact practices, such as internships and undergraduate research.

Today I would like to propose two challenges.

To our business community: You have been wonderful partners, shepherding our students into the working world. You are at the front line of the future of industry and technology, and I implore you to share your challenges with us so that our students will build the future with you. You can provide settings where our students can put their education to work through internships, co-ops, apprenticeships and jobs.

To our local community: I challenge you to serve as mentors for our students. Many of you have been in the workforce, or are still in the workforce and you have knowledge to impart. Become a mentor. Our students want and need your life lessons and wisdom. As we launch our new mentorship initiative this fall semester, our goal is to provide a mentor for every student.

Preparing students for the workforce and for a life of continuous learning are important priorities for our university and community at large, and I know my colleagues across higher education would agree. I'm thankful for the hundreds of Lancaster County and central Pennsylvania businesses, and their leaders, for connecting with our Millersville University students each year.

I am eager to see what the next year brings for higher education and for our county.

Daniel A. Wubah, Ph.D., is the 15th president of Millersville University.