

# He's a state university president and an African king. How Millersville's new leader is bridging those worlds

by [Susan Snyder](#), Updated: 33 minutes ago



BRADLEY C BOWER / FOR THE INQUIRER

One day last October, in a town in central Ghana, a land dispute dating back three generations was about to turn violent.

That same day, on another continent thousands of miles away, at a usually quiet state university campus in central Pennsylvania, another crisis was looming: Someone had drawn a swastika in the men's room at the library.

Dealing with both problems was the responsibility of [Daniel Wubah](#). That's what happens when you're a university president — and a Ghana born king.

As a tribal king, a royal title he inherited in 2017 when his uncle passed, Wubah rules a district of about 140,000 people, while managing a 7,780-student university campus. It

means daily phone calls to Ghana where he confers with a council of elders and at least a once-a-year visit.

“Every now and then I step back and I ask myself how I’m handling the two,” Wubah, 58, said this week in his office at [Millersville University](#) in Lancaster County. “I look at it as a work in progress. The challenges that I face daily are so unpredictable in most cases. ... I don’t sleep that much.”

Wubah is bridging two worlds. Soon he hopes to help others bridge those worlds, too.

Last week, he and State Rep. Jordan Harris, a Millersville graduate from Philadelphia and member of the university’s council of trustees, traveled to Ghana and [left with agreements](#) to smooth the way for faculty and student exchange programs between Millersville and the [University of Cape Coast](#), Wubah’s alma mater, and [The University of Education, Winneba](#).



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Millersville University President Daniel Wubah is creating exchange programs and partnerships with universities in Ghana, his home country.

Millersville isn't the only Pennsylvania state university with global partnerships, but Wubah and Harris hope to create the deepest connection, possibly even allowing interested students to take up to two years of their study in Ghana and welcoming Ghana students to Millersville for two years.

Wubah hopes to send some Millersville students to Ghana as soon as next summer for research. And students who can't go abroad will learn from Ghana students who come to Millersville, he said.

Such experiences are vital for a well-rounded education, Wubah said.

"When you think about the fact that most Fortune 500 companies make more profit outside the United States than they make domestically, you know the value of being globally educated," he said.

Funding and specifics of the exchange programs still need to be worked out. Still, the effort has been endorsed by leaders of Millersville's trustees' council.

"It really fits into our mission," said vice chair Richard L. Frerichs, a retired education professor. "At Millersville, we try to represent a world view."

## **Royal ties**

Wubah's father died in a car accident when Wubah was just 7 and his mother, a seamstress, had to raise him and his three siblings.

"I doubt she ever imagined that her second born son would end up as the president of a university in the United States," Wubah said at his inauguration last spring.

Wubah moved to the United States to attend the University of Akron for his master's in biology. A microbiologist, he got his doctorate in botany at the University of Georgia and then rose through the administrative ranks at Towson, James Madison, the University of Florida, Virginia Tech and Washington and Lee, where he was provost and senior adviser to the president.



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Two other kings from Ghana attended Daniel Wubah's inauguration ceremony last spring. By policy, they must walk under umbrellas, which students carried.

He was still at Washington and Lee when he ascended to the throne. Both his mother and father came from royal families. Being a king carries restrictions. He can't eat in public; at his inauguration, he and two other kings from Ghana who attended ate in a private room and then joined the others.

“It gives me a good opportunity to walk around and talk to people while they are eating,” he said.

Wubah also can't dance in public, nor can he let his bare feet touch the ground. When he is in Ghana, he is accompanied by a security detail and people aren't allowed to speak directly to him. They must go through a staff member. That restriction does not apply in the United States.

Wubah, who has two daughters — one a Philadelphia school teacher and the other a medical school student — started at Millersville last summer. The local newspaper, LNP, covered his appointment, which drew racist comments.

The newspaper followed with an editorial, saying that Wubah was well qualified and welcome and the comments were not representative of Lancaster.

“Lancaster County is better than the xenophobia and racism that were expressed in some of the comments . . .,” the paper wrote. “The proof of this can be found in the strong pushback those comments received from the majority of the commenters.”

Wubah and his wife, Judith, a biologist who got her doctorate at Thomas Jefferson University in Philadelphia, were grateful.



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Daniel Wubah, president of Millersville University, (sitting left), signs an exchange agreement with the Rev. Prof. Anthony Afful-Broni, vice chancellor of The University of Education, Winneba, (sitting right) in Ghana.

“That editorial convinced us, this is where we want to be,” he said.

On campus, news that their president was also a king surprised students.

“I was like, 'he’s a king? Why is he here?’” said Diavian Gunner, 20, a junior from Philadelphia.

But she’s glad he’s at Millersville.

“He’s so down to earth,” she said. “You just would never expect him to be a king because of how open and how warm you feel around him.”

Gunner is excited about a Ghana exchange program.

“Can I go today?” she asked.

## **The Trip**

Last February, Wubah got a text from Harris, the state representative: A delegation from Ghana’s parliament was visiting Harrisburg, and he was meeting with them. Wouldn’t it be great to create partnerships with Ghana universities and governments, he thought. “I would like to visit Ghana,” Harris told Wubah.

Harris, who grew up in South Philadelphia and attended Bartram High School, recalled how important his semester-long study abroad experience in London had been.

“It showed me that there was so much more in the world outside of the four corners of 17th and Dickinson,” he wrote in a Facebook post. “It also gave me courage that I could achieve and do anything. I vowed not to stop traveling and to continue seeing the world but to also provide this opportunity for others.”



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Millersville University president Daniel Wubah discusses new partnerships with universities in Ghana on July 30, 2019 in Millersville, Pa.

In Ghana last week, Wubah and Harris spent time at the universities, sat in on governmental meetings and visited Elmina Castle, which was used to hold slaves before they were sent to America. Harris touched the chains of former slaves and thought about his great, great, great grandmother, a slave named Belle.

“It was overwhelming and emotional,” he said.

He wants students to have the same experience, he said.

In his prior jobs, Wubah had taken students to do environmental research in Ghana and would stop at Elmina.

“To me, one of the most important cultural experiences was to go through that castle,” he said. “It gave them a different perspective and understanding of what the slave trade was all about.”

Wubah also liked that Cape Coast’s roots are in teacher preparation, the same as Millersville, which was founded in 1855.

Millersville’s focus on global education increased after Wubah’s arrival.



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State Rep. Jordan Harris, (first left) and Daniel Wubah, Millersville president, (second left) get a tour of Elmina Castle from a guide (right).

Last winter, Deborah Tamakloe, a Millersville education professor from Ghana, took students there. Five professors, including Tamakloe, are in Kenya this summer, working on partnerships.

“Students who studied abroad in the winter of 2018 in Ghana, have volunteered to be trip leaders for students next year,” Tamakloe said. “They want to go back. This is partly because Dr. Wubah is leading the way.”

### **A Dual Role**

From the time his uncle began grooming him to be king, he said there was a clear understanding that he and his wife would remain in the United States.

“I’ve been in this country 35 years, more time than I spent in Ghana,” he said.



Wubah said he uses his leadership experiences as king to inform his decisions as president and vice versa.

As king, he is responsible for his district's economic, cultural, educational and health needs. He also must resolve disputes, like the land fight that erupted last fall.

He was in Ghana at the time.

"I had to find a way to prevent any bloodshed," he said. "I ended up creating a buffer zone. I ... said this area doesn't belong to any family anymore."

That ended it, he said.

Meanwhile, Millersville's chief of staff notified him of the swastika in the library. With staff's help, he drafted a statement that emphasized such hatred would not be tolerated.

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"We were able to manage it," he said.

As only a college president and king could do.



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