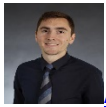


# Uncertainty over pandemic contributes to drop in first-year student deposits at Millersville, F&M



[ALEX GELI | Staff Writer](#)



Students walk on the Millersville University campus Wednesday, March 11, 2020  
BLAINE SHAHAN | Staff Photographer

The number of first-year students who have paid deposits at Millersville University and its public sister schools dipped slightly this year, and the coronavirus pandemic may be why.

For some Lancaster County colleges, though, the pandemic doesn't seem to have had much of an impact, if at all.

Data from the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education shows projected first-year enrollment at the 14-university system is down 1.7%, from 17,583 to 17,277. At Millersville, it's down 4.2%, from 1,356 to 1,299.

"The challenge for us is the numbers don't provide causation and correlation, but it is also within the realm of reason to look at what possible impact the pandemic has had," state system spokesman Dave Pidgeon said, adding that a decline in high school graduates is likely another reason for the drop.

Reports say colleges nationwide could see major enrollment declines due to a struggling economy, uncertainty around campuses reopening and potentially fewer students traveling from overseas.

Millersville University spokeswoman Janet Kacskos said the university isn't immune to those challenges.

"It's no different at Millersville," she said in an email. "Students and their families have been impacted financially by the pandemic, so that's a concern. And, what campus will look like come fall, is another concern of students."

Millersville announced earlier this month that campus would reopen under a hybrid model with some courses online and others in-person. It later stated at least half of its courses would be online.

Franklin & Marshall College, the county's largest private college with about 2,300 students, has also seen a dip in projected first-year enrollment. It's down nearly 4%, from 655 students to 631. F&M spokesman Peter Durantine said the college received a "near record of applications" this year. Deposits seem to be lagging this year, he said, but they're outpacing 2018.

"The pandemic has had an impact on students' enrollment decisions and we have seen that particularly among our admitted international students," Durantine said.

Federal data shows about one-fifth of F&M students are from overseas.

At two of the largest Lancaster County private colleges, however, projected-first-year enrollment is up from last year.

Nearly 10% more first-year students paid deposits to Elizabethtown College, and 2.3% more paid deposits to Lancaster Bible College.

Both colleges credited their hard-working admissions teams. But Elizabethtown, in particular, said its swift transition to virtual open houses and enrollment events contributed to the boost.

"We shared engaging virtual sessions through the journey of prospective students bringing our campus to their own homes," Elizabethtown College spokeswoman Keri Straub said in an email.

Other colleges held similar virtual events, but, at E-town, the "combination of a highly motivated admissions team, strong faculty engagement along with our technology accommodations" proved successful, Straub said.

The data seems to be a reversal from last year, when lagging enrollment and a budget deficit caused Elizabethtown to announce it was furloughing seven faculty and instructional staff members and phasing out majors in theater and philosophy.