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## 2020-21

# Report of the President

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*Kathleen E. Harring*

Over the course of the past 18 months, much has been written about the future of higher education. Some have predicted that the massive shift to online/remote learning that took place during the pandemic would mark the end of residential education. Others have speculated that the use of digital learning technologies would forever change the classroom experience. At the time, all this speculation didn't sound so hyperbolic. Some of the leading voices in higher education even gave these notions credence.

We, too, have spent a lot of time discussing the future of the Muhlenberg experience. In fact, we began those discussions well before COVID-19. Digital pedagogy has been a part of teaching and learning at the College since 2013, and its use as a means for strengthening the student experience has been one of many components we have explored as we look at changing student demographics and the skills needed to succeed in the global economy.

Throughout our discussions, we have adopted a viewpoint closely aligned with our institutional values and culture. That is to say, we believe that an in-person experience with faculty mentors in an active, collaborative environment gives students more than just an education. It gives them a community.

Sometimes the negativity and hyperbole in the media can make you question your choices, but it only took one minute and 10 seconds on the afternoon of Saturday, October 9, to confirm my viewpoint that we are on the right path.

The pandemic sent the Class of 2020 home on March 14, 2020. COVID-19 deprived these students of their last college semester and the opportunity to share their academic accomplishments with their families during an in-person graduation ceremony. Though we held two virtual ceremonies to honor members of the Class of 2020, we had promised that they would have the chance to return to campus and walk across the stage in recognition of their accomplishments. We were able to hold the Class of 2020 Celebration Weekend in October. Throughout the weekend, a multitude of 2020 alumni expressed how happy they were to be "home" on campus and to see their Muhlenberg family.

A graduate recognition ceremony took place in Memorial Hall on that Saturday afternoon. The floor was filled with graduates and the bleachers with family and friends. After all of the students had their names read and walked the stage, Provost Laura Furge said, "President Harring, we have now recognized all of the Class of 2020 graduates present today." The audience burst into a standing ovation that lasted one minute and 10 seconds. It was an unbridled outpouring of joy and support for these students. It also spoke directly to the importance and deep meaning of the residential Muhlenberg experience.

As we plan for the future of Muhlenberg, we have been focused on understanding how we can continue to evolve, as we always have, to make sure this experience meets our students where they are. This means we need to first understand the changing demographics of college-age students. The number of qualified students graduating from high school is on the decline across much of the



PHOTOS BY MATT LESTER

U.S., particularly in the Northeast, where most of our students call home. But within this decline there are two positive changes that we are paying particular attention to: the growth in the number of first-generation students and in the diversity of prospective students. The Class of 2025 that we welcomed to campus this fall includes nearly 17 percent first-generation students and 23 percent students of color—the most diverse class the College has ever seen.

Reflective of the demographic changes is the increase in the number of students eligible for Pell grants. Some of our most talented students are able to attend Muhlenberg because they qualify for this federal support. Recently, a new category around social mobility has been added to the *U.S. News* educational rankings methodology measuring how colleges and universities provide opportunities for students from diverse backgrounds. The current *U.S. News* ranking for Muhlenberg shows our overall six-year graduation rate at 82 percent while the graduation rate for our Pell students is 99 percent. Pell students at Muhlenberg perform at a high level in their academic accomplishments and as campus leaders.

What do these changes mean for the College?

In the best tradition of the liberal arts, Muhlenberg has a history of adapting to the changing world around us. Whether that be the start of our continuing education program more than 100 years ago, adding a business major in the 1930s or beginning the Emerging Leaders Program in 2011, we always strive to embody the principles of the liberal arts to critically examine information and create solutions for the complex problems facing the College.

Since Muhlenberg's first faculty cohort completed training in digital learning during the spring of 2015, our goal has been to incorporate digital tools as a way to enhance the educational experience. While we continued to train new faculty each year, the pandemic sped the process to include all faculty. It also presented the opportunity to explore new methods and outlets for student engagement, scholarship and artistic performance that can be integrated into face-to-face learning experiences across the disciplines. Now faculty across the curriculum have expanded their expertise in digital pedagogy and scholarship, advancing our strategic goal to strengthen students' digital literacy skills. We must continue developing innovative educational experiences and draw upon that same creativity to strengthen the residential student experience.

Muhlenberg's outstanding foundation in digital pedagogy also served us well as we launched our first two graduate programs—the master's of organizational leadership and the master's of applied analytics. These programs, which are built on the College's academic strengths, lay groundwork for Muhlenberg's future on two levels. More and more professionals, including many of our alumni, are seeking educational opportunities to advance their careers in emerging areas. These programs,

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which are unique in the Lehigh Valley, respond to that need. This fall, we also rolled out a new 4+1 program in applied analytics, which allows students to obtain both their bachelor's and master's degrees in five years. Programs like this enhance our academic reputation and the perceived value of a Muhlenberg education.

I am also proud of the work our faculty is doing to revise the curriculum by integrating diverse perspectives across the disciplines. A number of departments have updated their curriculums, giving our students more opportunities for in-depth exploration of new and varied topics. This has always been essential to the liberal arts experience, but often curricular choices are inherited based on well-established, and sometimes narrow, canons. As we move forward, we must expand our thinking about the curriculum to broaden the student experience.

Formal education is only half the equation in a residential college experience. Over the past 18 months, the College has responded to the changing needs of our students in some incredible ways. So many people play a role in the outstanding student life experience at Muhlenberg that I want to take a moment to recognize them. Staff from the health center, Counseling

Services, campus safety, housing & residence life, student activities, housekeeping, Dining Services and support services have given new meaning to the term "essential staff." I don't believe you will find an institution that performed better—maybe some performed as well, maybe—during the pandemic because of their hard work and dedication to our students and the community.

Another group that has had a tremendous impact on the student experience is the Student Government Association (SGA). The leadership of SGA last year became more active in engaging the student body and creating space for student voices and this year has gone to a whole new level. I encourage you to read the story about SGA President Zaire Carter '22 and his vision for SGA on page 40.

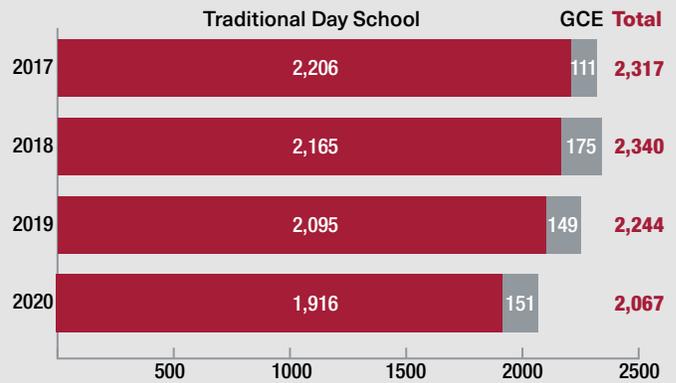
The student body at Muhlenberg is changing, a result of both the pandemic and the shifts in who chooses to attend college. Last year two different grant funds—an experiential learning grant and an emergency grant—were put in place to help students with financial needs related to their Muhlenberg education. These funds help students with costs related to things like travel to conferences, field trip costs or unexpected medical expenses. During the pandemic, these funds also helped many of our remote learning students with things like reliable internet connections and emergency computer needs.

Our return to campus was met with both joy at returning to community and trepidation. Many



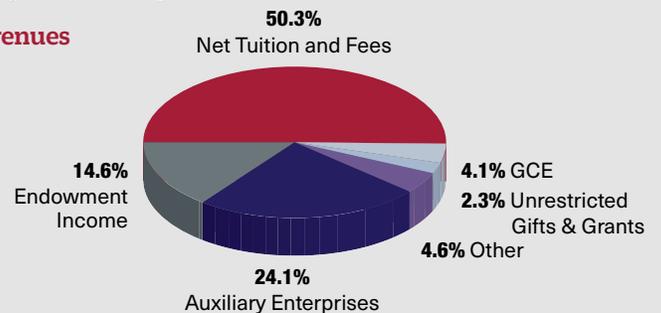
## 2020-21 BY THE NUMBERS

### Total Fall Enrollment

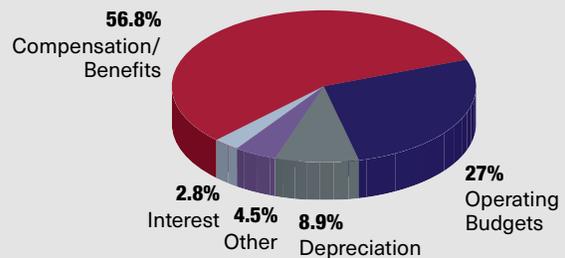


### Budget Summary

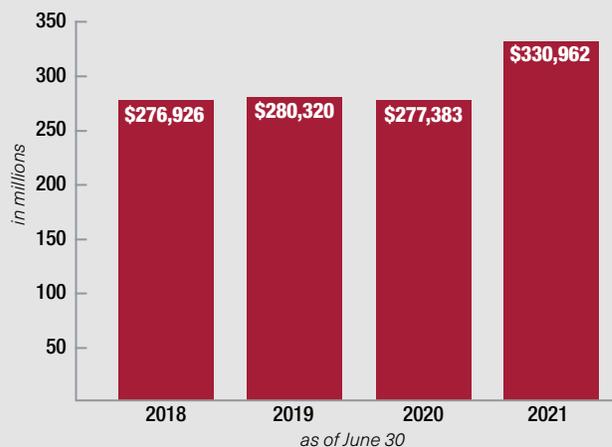
#### Revenues



#### Expenditures



### Endowment Summary



students had not been in a classroom since the spring of 2020 and were unsure of what to expect. Nationally, there has been more emphasis on mental health in the past year, with the media spotlighting the stories of high-profile athletes who openly discussed their personal struggles. The topic of mental health and well-being is beginning to shed some of the stigma that it has often had.

The Counseling Services staff have done an outstanding job in meeting the needs of our students. This is true whether they were a remote resource during the past year or since we have returned to campus. As an institution, we understand that not every student will seek help or an outlet for the stresses in their life, so this fall we took a day to cancel classes and offer students as well as faculty and staff a day of learning activities, reflection spaces and support resources aimed at providing the Muhlenberg community with opportunities to prioritize their mental health and emotional well-being. The day was an incredible success with many sharing their thanks that the College made the day possible.

COVID-19 has played a bit of a shell game with us all, taking what we knew and giving us something different. It's presented us challenges but also opportunities to evolve as an institution. And one minute and 10 seconds of joy on an incredible October Saturday reaffirmed both the value of Muhlenberg's residential, liberal arts experience and the ways in which we continue to strengthen our great College.