

## Defining Value at Muhlenberg

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So, here we are. Public trust in higher education is flagging, the trend toward being outcome-focused has morphed into calls for colleges to be more vocationally oriented and the politicizing of the cost of education has resulted in a tectonic shift in which people across the spectrum are questioning the value of a college education.

But how did we get here? Well, there's enough blame to go around, and colleges shoulder much of it.

Admittedly, there was a certain arrogance in assuming that higher education was above the political fray. The prevailing public perception of the 1990s and early 2000s was that a premium college cost equated to a more prestigious degree. The result was a kind of arms race among institutions that saw increases in tuition and residential costs with commensurate increases in financial aid that essentially allowed colleges to raise the sticker price (and the prestige a high price implies) at higher rates while mitigating the actual cost impact through aid. This has caused a problematic cascading effect that is still taking shape.

When the market crash of 2008 occurred, it was unlike any financial crisis the majority of the American public had ever experienced. We had become a country built on credit without much regard for savings. But that changed in the wake of The Great Recession. People became more conscious of how tenuous the financial system could be, and they changed their outlook on how they spend their money, looking for value. They also changed the way they viewed premium pricing. That opened the door for higher education to become an easy target for politicians looking for talking points that resonated.

What have we seen since? An assault on the liberal arts—humanities in particular; funding cutbacks to state higher-education systems; families from all economic strata bargaining for financial aid packages; and free-tuition programs among two-year and four-year state institutions beginning to gain traction. Each of these has had an impact on Muhlenberg College.

There's a lot to unpack here, but there's one thing I feel quite passionate about, and that's the value of a Muhlenberg education. In our current economic and political environment, the discourse almost always narrows focus at the expense of nuance and understanding and value has fallen prey to this kind of thinking. To many, value is strictly about sticker price and financial aid. That certainly plays a role in any college's value proposition, but it is just that: a role. The

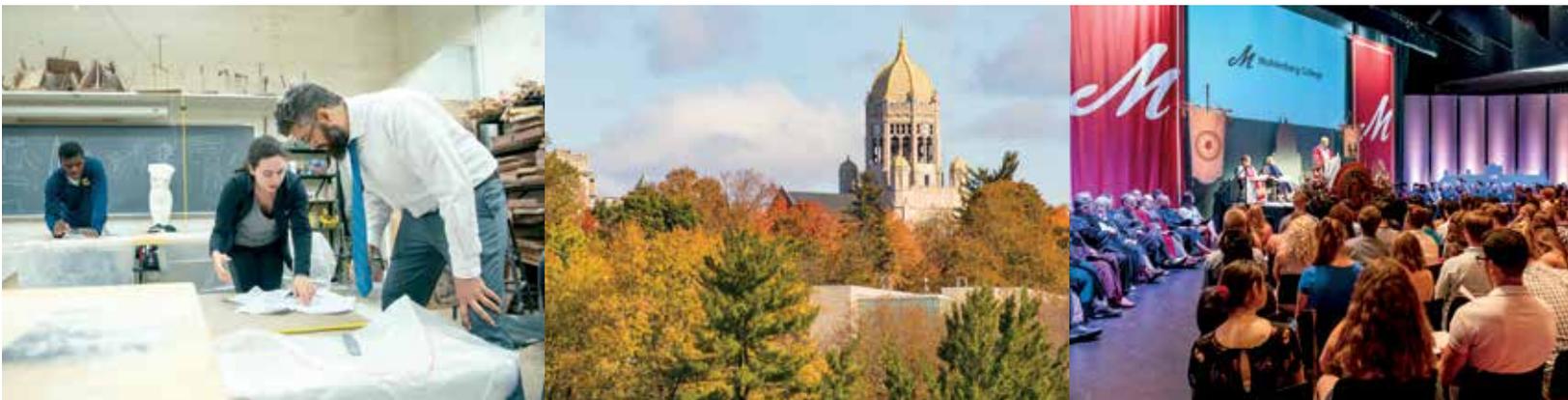
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real value for students is found in the living and learning experiences offered at the College and the doors opened for graduates to pursue careers and continued educational opportunities. On these measures, we deliver outstanding value for our students.

Muhlenberg is one of the few, top liberal arts institutions in the U.S. to offer professionally oriented majors like public health, media & communication, business administration, finance and accounting within a rigorous liberal arts context. And we lay legitimate claim to strong traditional majors like biology, chemistry, neuroscience, English and psychology, as well as the nation's top liberal-arts-college-based theatre and dance programs. Muhlenberg also offers



pre-professional study in medicine, law and theology. In fact, we have a strong history in pre-med preparation that has recently waned a bit in prominence, but to which we are redoubling our commitment through the creation of the new Shankweiler Scholars program. This program encourages students to prepare for careers in medicine by combining the natural sciences with courses in humanities and social sciences, in large part because medical schools have stressed they want students who can become doctors capable of treating the person, not just the patient. (To learn more about this program, see page 13.)

Regardless of what kind of major you pursue at Muhlenberg, you will find an academic approach that integrates learning from across the curriculum in a more thorough and thoughtful way than many other colleges provide. Of course, the real value is that this kind of experience prepares students both for graduate and professional school and for careers directly after graduation. Despite the general public's declining trust in higher education, business executives and hiring managers showed a great deal of confidence in the July 2018 survey report *Fulfilling the American Dream: Liberal Education and the Future of Work*, published by Hart Research.

In fact, respondents indicated that, contrary to what many think, one's major is far less important than a range of learning priorities that include critical thinking and reasoning, ethical judgment and decision-making and the ability to communicate effectively and to apply knowledge and skills in real-world settings. These findings excite me because they confirm and reinforce the very foundation of liberal arts learning. The skills acquired through these learning priorities not only prepare students to enter the workplace upon graduation, but enable graduates to grow and nurture careers including positions that will emerge years in the future.

For students who want the skills of a broad-based liberal arts education with opportunities to parlay that experience

into graduate study, Muhlenberg offers students a number of cooperative programs. Through partnerships with Columbia University, American University, Boston University, Pennsylvania State University and more, Muhlenberg students can obtain advanced or dual degrees in engineering, health professions and business, among others. These programs provide a more distinct path for students who have set their sights on particular careers.

A central focus for the College is to enable students to achieve powerful outcomes. Students arrive to orientation and First-Year-Seminar programs designed to help them transition to the demands of a Muhlenberg education. Students learn about the writing-intensive curriculum and rise to meet expectations in the classroom through programs and exercises designed to teach them how to succeed. Mentoring programs allow students to develop one-on-one relationships with faculty, staff, alumni and even parents to help them grow through their Muhlenberg experience.

These programs also begin a purposeful integration of student and academic life on campus. From faculty who care deeply about the lives of our students to intellectual programming in residence halls, the Muhlenberg experience is a holistic one.

Muhlenberg provides ample opportunity for students to apply their knowledge and skills in real-world settings as well. Service learning at the College continues to expand. Through the work of our Office of Community Engagement and faculty, we now partner with more than 35 local and regional organizations. These interactions allow students not just to put their learning into action but, often, to help catalyze their classroom learning in ways possible only through firsthand experiences. These partnerships invariably lead to change, whether that be personal, institutional or for the community as a whole.

Of course, opportunity and real-world experience are the heart of the Muhlenberg Network. From the chance to



get advice from working professionals about career options to finding internships that serve as a springboard to a first job, the Career Center brings students and alumni together. This creates a powerful dynamic that brings considerable knowledge, expertise and a Muhlenberg ethos to help one

They contribute to classroom and community discussions in ways that expand the discourse and help us to grow.

I'm not sure how you put a financial value on any of this, and maybe that is the challenge. When we can't see something in front of us, we tend to discount it. A residential liberal

arts education is transformational in ways that go beyond skills. There is a reason graduates often encourage their own children to pursue a similar experience—because they know first-hand the impact it has had on their lives.

But we do live in a “show me” world—many of you have asked me about the cost of a Muhlenberg education. Well, we pay attention to that as well. Much of the focus of college cost has centered on a comparison between

private and public institutions, primarily, due to the lower “sticker price” of public universities. But public university systems don't offer the grant aid and scholarships that private institutions like Muhlenberg do. State funding gives the appearance of a lower tuition cost, while the actual

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another to bear in creating professional opportunities.

All of these connections and off-campus interactions provide a critical dimension to the residential liberal arts experience: perspective. An essential component of a Muhlenberg education is opening up one's personal views to a wide array of diverse perspectives. From racial and religious differences to socio-economic and geographic differences, the kind of transformative education Muhlenberg provides is fully realized only when we engage with others who are different from ourselves. Like critical thinking and communicating with others, engaging with difference is a learned skill, one that will stay with you and shape you throughout a lifetime that will be characterized by increasing diversity.

Muhlenberg students find diversity of culture and experience beyond the classroom as well, with nearly 60 percent of students studying abroad at some point during their College career. And while the chance to study abroad becomes essential to the students who participate, the College community also realizes a benefit. Students who study abroad come back to campus with a different outlook.



## 2017-18 BY THE NUMBERS

cost to students is similar to a private education.

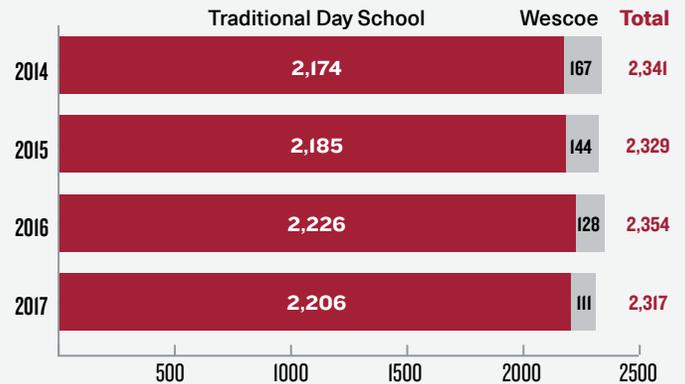
According to the federal government's Scorecard website, collegescorecard.ed.gov, Muhlenberg offers a student cost—meaning the actual cost after student aid is applied—that is comparable to that of both the state university system and our local state-affiliated university. Likewise, the amount of student debt upon graduation is also comparable to public institutions while being well below the state average. The big difference, of course, comes when you look at the earnings after graduation, where Muhlenberg not only outperforms the state and state-affiliated schools, but many of the top private colleges within our region.

Access is very important for us. More than 87 percent of Muhlenberg students receive some form of financial aid, from grant aid and merit scholarships to federal aid and work-study opportunities. The first-year financial-aid package has averaged \$35,310 over the past four years, with merit aid—awarded to students for outstanding academic achievement regardless of need—averaging \$14,257 over the same time.

These are challenging times. We have an amazing, hard-working community that is committed to a strategic plan that lays out a path to build an experience that not only meets the demands of today's students but also allows us to distinguish ourselves from other colleges. But we need more. We need you. We need our alumni who have witnessed firsthand the life-changing, lasting nature of attending Muhlenberg, who can speak emphatically to the value of the Muhlenberg experience. We need you to spread the story of Muhlenberg College as offering a distinctively transformative, holistic education. 

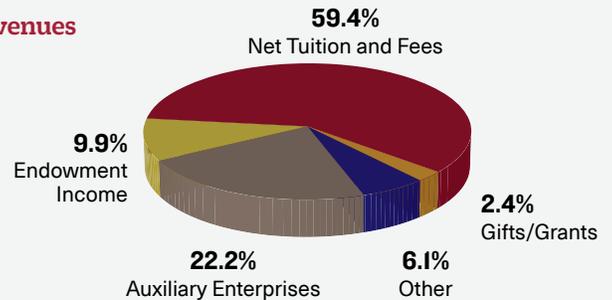


### Total Fall Enrollment

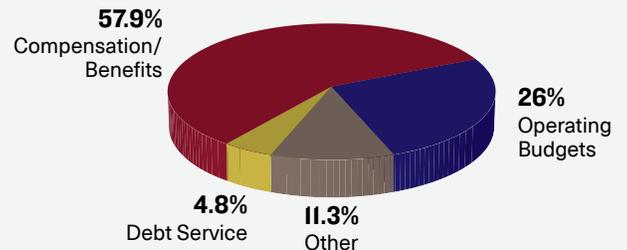


### Budget Summary

#### Revenues



#### Expenditures



### Endowment Summary

