

TO: The Eastern Kentucky University Faculty Senate
FROM: Senator Michael T. Benson
DATE: November 3, 2016
RE: November Campus Report

Several of us from ECU spent the better part of Wednesday at a Performance Based Funding work group meeting in Frankfort. There are still many uncertainties relative to the final product and how it will impact every public institution in Kentucky. One thing is certain, however, and that is that this new funding model is happening and a new normal is upon us.

Our discussion on Wednesday with CPE staff, state legislators, members of the Governor's staff, and other university presidents focused on the various metrics still being considered, how degrees at various institutions will be weighted, "equalization" funding, and the possibility of new state dollars for higher education. Relative to this latter point and in response to a question I posed to our elected officials, given the current state of our budget and the encumbrances on existing resources and our pension obligations, we should not be hopeful that any new dollars will flow to public higher education anytime soon. Our task is to position ECU in the best possible way to avail ourselves of existing funds while continuing to make headway on our retention and graduation rates and producing more degrees in those areas being emphasized by the proposed model.

Our next meeting is November 15th, followed by another gathering on November 28th at which time we are to finalize our work and submit a report to the Governor's Office and General Assembly by December 1st. Draft language is already being worked on for inclusion into a proposed bill. We will continue to keep you apprised of any new details.

As we continue to deal with policy issues affecting our campus, we must never lose sight on what our daily work means to people and their experience at ECU and beyond.

On the fourth Saturday of every October, ECU joins a nationwide celebration of "Make A Difference Day." Our students and others fan out across the campus and community to perform a variety of community service projects.

But we are all privileged to be part of a learning community where every day of the year is Make A Difference Day. Because that is truly what we do when we touch the lives of our students in life-changing ways and reach out to serve our surrounding communities.

Just in the past few weeks, we've seen several examples of that. Perhaps you read the recent article in the *Lexington Herald-Leader* about Colonel football player Justin Adekoya. The story can be found here:

<http://www.kentucky.com/sports/nfl/article107330012.html>

It recounts how Justin grew up hungry and hustling on the violent streets of Chicago only to encounter overt racism when his multiracial family moved to a small town in northern Georgia. His experiences often left him disillusioned and angry but, with the help of some thoughtful mentors in his life, he began to see that the only way to a better life was a college education. Now, driven by a different kind of hunger, he's one of our countless success stories, a social work major who eagerly envisions a life spent helping young people growing up like he did.

Any talk about life-changing experiences at Eastern must include our Honors program, which again fielded the largest delegation of presenting students at the recent National Collegiate Honors Council. Any time I meet alumni of the program, they share how their lives were profoundly changed, how their eyes were opened to other cultures, and how they grew in confidence and came to expect more of themselves than even they ever thought possible. To all those faculty who teach and mentor our Honors students, keep up the good work. You are making a difference in the lives of these students.

The best gift of all we can give our students is when we link higher education to community service and model for them the value and importance of giving back.

On one recent weekend, groups of EKV and Centre College students, assisted by a few community volunteers, joined forces to continue the restoration work at the historic Shelby City African American Cemetery near Danville. For the past three years, Cindy Peck, our Central Region director, has spearheaded this effort, bringing students and community volunteers together to uncover an unappreciated and largely forgotten slice of Kentucky history. In 2014, the project received one of our \$10,000 Regional Stewardship Grants.

Many of the graves represent the slaves of local landowners. Many served our country in World War I or II. Recently, volunteers replaced the broken military headstone of Jordan Wallace, who had served as a soldier alongside fellow African Americans in the Civil War. Several of his descendants are thrilled to have the opportunity to attend a special dedication ceremony at the site in May 2017. What an inspiring example of making a difference, not just in the wider community, but in the lives of the student volunteers themselves.

Our University Diversity Office is also working hard to make a difference as well. In addition to its new scholarship program, which has a strong mentoring component, the Office is sponsoring a variety of programs aimed at building bridges of understanding. It is no accident that Eastern recently became the only university in Kentucky to receive the Minority Access Diversity Institution Award each of the past six years. We can all be proud of that honor.

Across campus, our adult education programs in Madison, Clay and Garrard counties were recently ranked among Kentucky's best. These programs, headed by Paula Jones, are enriching the lives of hundreds of area residents and their families and giving them hope for a brighter future.

Thank you for your continued service to EKV.