

TO: Eastern Kentucky University Faculty Senate
FROM: Senator Michael Benson
RE: November Faculty Senate Report
DATE: November 2, 2015

Even with a little rain, Homecoming 2015 was a smashing success, as we re-engaged our alumni and friends in the life of the University.

Two events in particular that week serve to remind all of us of our proud legacy here at Eastern of putting the needs of our students and their success first.

The first was a scholarship donor event on Oct. 22 that allowed some of our scholarship recipients to meet and thank the ones who have helped them pursue their educational dreams. I asked for a show of hands from all those in the room – filled mostly with donors – who themselves had received some sort of scholarship in the past. More than half of those in attendance raised their hands. And now they're paying it forward by helping current and future students.

Then, the 48th anniversary reunion of the EKU Gospel Ensemble reminded us again of not only the power of music to change lives for performer and listener alike, but the power of one life to make a difference. I'm speaking of the late Dr. William Berge, who was the first faculty adviser for the mostly African American ensemble and did so very much during the social upheaval of the 60s and 70s to foster racial harmony on our campus. At a difficult time in history, Dr. Berge walked the talk and remains a positive example for us to this day.

Now, some of those early Ensemble members, who brought the campus so much joy and built so many bridges of goodwill, are leading an effort to help future generations of Colonels by regularly supporting a scholarship fund that bears Dr. Berge's name, as well as an Ensemble foundation.

When we talk about the Circle of Opportunity at Eastern, these are two most fitting examples.

Homecoming Weekend ended with the gubernatorial debate at our Center for the Arts. Although we didn't land the "big one" as we had hoped, I think we showed once more we are an ideal venue for events such as this. I'm confident that first-time visitors to the center went away impressed and may return for a show, concert, or lecture.

EKU Documentary

Our Center for the Arts will host a history lesson of a different sort on Monday, November 9, with the premiere of a new documentary film chronicling our 141 years as a higher education community. “The Essential Eastern” was produced and directed by one of our own, Chad Cogdill of the Department of Communication faculty. The event will begin at 7:30 p.m., and admission is free. Most of you have lived more of this history than I have, but I think we’ll all come away with a renewed sense of what makes Eastern special.

Board of Regents Meeting: Enrollment, Online programs, and Student Success

At our most recent Board of Regents meeting, Executive Vice President and University Counsel Dr. Laurie Carter shared even more good news about some recent trends in enrollment management.

By now, you know that our overall enrollment this fall is the highest in University history, thanks in part to a record-breaking freshman class. I also mentioned in my last report that the preparedness level of this year’s freshman class is at an all-time high.

Dr. Carter also reported that, increasingly, ECU is the college of choice for high school seniors, especially throughout our service region. Seventy-six percent of all students in this fall’s freshman class listed Eastern as their **first** choice on their FAFSA forms.

Dr. Carter also noted that our students are graduating at a greater rate. Our four-, five- and six-year graduation rates are all up, and ahead of our targets.

These improvements are no accident or fluke. They are the result of a lot of hard work by all of you and by your faculty and staff colleagues all across campus, and I want to take this opportunity to commend you. We’ve got more work to do, of course, but we can all take great pride that we’re moving the needle in the right direction.

Part of our enrollment growth stems from the explosion in online degree programs. But, like our overall enrollment numbers, this is not just a matter of quantity. ECU ranks first among Kentucky colleges and universities offering online degrees, according to a recent announcement from Affordable Colleges Online. Criteria include tuition, academic programs, counseling services and job placement for graduates.

Another growth area is an increasing number of Latino students. Likewise, this is resulting in some quality students choosing Eastern. One of those high achievers, sophomore Omar Salinas-Chacon, was recently the only Kentucky college student selected to attend a reception at the White House in recognition of Hispanic Heritage Month.

Here’s a young man whose family fled the violence of El Salvador in 2001 and overcame tremendous odds to succeed in the U.S. He became interested in ECU through the annual Latino Leadership and College Experience Camp that we co-host with BCTC, and he raves about the role models here who’ve inspired him to give his best. Today, Omar has a 4.0 GPA with a double major in Spanish and political science and is a member of our Honors Program, Mock Trial Team and ECU GURUS.

Phi Kappa Phi

Many of our best and brightest students are members of Phi Kappa Phi, and I'm proud to note that our campus chapter is one of only 29 chapters nationwide to earn Chapter of Excellence honors, the highest commendation a chapter can receive from the organization. The award is given to chapters that excel in recognizing and promoting academic excellence and engaging the community of scholars in service to others. Dr. Rusty Carpenter serves as chapter president.

Coach Roy Kidd Statue

And speaking of recognizing excellence, a fund-raising drive is underway to finance a statue of College Football Hall of Fame Coach Roy Kidd. In addition to a life-size bronze statue, an adjacent wall will feature the names of all those who played for or coached alongside Coach Kidd. Even though Coach Kidd retired from coaching 13 years ago, the University will continue to benefit for years to come from his achievements here. He richly deserves this honor.

New Student Success Space in the Library

In conclusion, as I mentioned to another group a few days ago, one of the most stirring events I've attended on campus was the recent dedication of a newly renovated study space in Crabbe Library to the late author Charles Bracelen Flood.

Here was a native New Yorker and writer of worldwide acclaim who had conducted research in some of the world's leading libraries and always ranked ours among the very best. He did the vast majority of his research for his award-winning books, many about some of the greatest historical figures of the last two centuries, right here on our campus, and he never missed an opportunity to brag on our library and its helpful staff, wherever life's travels took him.

Maybe, as a regional university that has to fight for attention and respect, we sometimes wish we were this or that and consequently lose sight of what does make us special. But Mr. Flood did not, and I think we can take two lessons from his life and example:

First, we would all do well to remember the old adage to simply bloom where we're planted.

Another is to take note of the fact, as Mr. Flood did, that we do offer some world-class programs and resources here at ECU.

Add to that an outstanding faculty and staff oriented to extraordinary service and it's not at all hard to see why more and more of the best and brightest students are choosing Eastern.

Likewise, it is not at all hard to see why so many alumni and friends are lining up to help those students achieve their dreams here on our campus.

Thank you for your continued service to Eastern Kentucky University.