

TO: The Eastern Kentucky University Faculty Senate  
FROM: Senator Michael T. Benson  
DATE: September 9, 2015  
RE: September Campus Report

I apologize for not being with you for this month's Faculty Senate meeting, but I am in Indianapolis for the semi-annual meeting of the NCAA Honors Committee. I hope the semester is off to a great start for each of you as we are well into another exciting academic year at EKU.

Eleven days after our last Faculty Senate meeting and my last report, many of us marched into Roy Kidd Stadium under the arc of a double rainbow behind the commencement stage.

The eternal optimist I am, I believed then and I still believe today that it was a sign of great things to come for us at EKU.

Our collective Colonel spirit was very much in evidence last week when on successive days we came together to sign a beam that went atop phase two of the New Science Building, cut the ribbon on a women's health clinic, celebrated what makes us unique at Tradition Night, cheered a season-opening rout by our nationally-ranked football team and, lastly, proudly wore the maroon for College Colors Day.

It continued this week with all the activities surrounding our annual 9-11 remembrance. And I have no doubt we will come together in similar ways throughout this academic year.

### **“Make No Little Plans: A Vision for 2020”**

Our new Strategic Plan, “Make No Little Plans: A Vision for 2020,” is a perfect example of teamwork. Behind every successful institution is a strategic plan that is driven by the aspirations of its stakeholders and reflects their shared values; effectively appropriates its human, physical and financial resources; and undergirds its direction, its hopes and its dreams. That certainly describes our new Plan, which focuses us on six strategic goals: Academic Excellence, Commitment to Student Success, Institutional Distinction, Financial Strength, Campus Revitalization and Service to Communities and Region. To all of you who contributed in any way to this Plan, thank you for your contributions.

While I touched on a few of the following items of note at our Welcome Back Convocation, please allow me to highlight a few more.

### **Records Fall: Quantity and Quality**

As many of you know, this is our largest freshman class in the institution's history and if it doesn't go down as our record overall enrollment at just under 17,000, it will be awfully close. As of this morning, our enrollment stood at 16,958 which is a 3.20% increase from this time last year. This, too, has been a team effort, involving not only our Student Success staff but our entire faculty and staff.

However, it is not just a matter of quantity. This is also one of our best-prepared freshman classes, as the number of students entering with developmental needs is down from 31 percent just two years ago to 21 percent this year. This year's freshman class also brings a higher average ACT score and high school GPA than preceding classes. This stems in part from our recently revamped merit scholarship model and an increase in scholarship funding.

The word "quality" also applies to the experience we're providing our students, according to their feedback on the most recent National Survey for Student Engagement (NSSE). We exceeded our similar benchmark institutions on several measures related to student engagement.

EKU seniors ranked the University especially high on effective teaching practices, quality of interactions, and two areas related to level of academic challenge: higher-order learning and quantitative reasoning. In fact, Eastern scored ahead of its benchmarks, national norms and southeast public universities in all those categories except quantitative reasoning, where it eclipsed its benchmarks and national average. Seniors also ranked ECU ahead of its benchmarks in supportive environment.

First-year students also rated Eastern higher than its benchmark institutions in higher-order learning and collaborative learning and ahead of the national norm in learning strategies. In most other areas, ECU's scores, among both seniors and first-time students, were roughly identical to the University's benchmarks and comparison groups.

Furthermore, the survey also showed that the percentage of ECU first-year students and seniors who rated their experience as "excellent" or "good" and who said they would "definitely" or "probably" choose to attend the institution again given the opportunity exceeded the average for benchmarks, southeast public institutions and the nation. In each case, 87-89 percent of the first-year students and seniors responded affirmatively.

Recruitment is, of course, just one part of our enrollment management strategy. We're also working hard on the retention front. One terrific example of that is the Freshman Academy for Diverse Students, which enjoyed a highly successful first year. The fall-to-fall retention rate for the 51 first-year Academy participants was 82.4 percent, well above the average for other diverse students. Seventy-seven percent of those students are in good academic standing, and the average GPA of the group is 2.69, surpassing the average of other freshman diverse students. Now, those freshmen from a year ago have remained with the Academy to serve as mentors for the program's incoming freshmen, so I expect even greater success in the months to come.

### **Best Fund-Raising Year Since 2001**

And speaking of good work ... Increasingly, the success of our University and your respective academic programs will depend on private support, so I am proud to note that our Development staff recently concluded the best fund-raising year at ECU since 2001. The total of \$4.1 million reflects

donations to all areas of the University: academic colleges and departments, facilities, athletics, The Eastern Fund, endowed scholarship funds, and more. This is not nearly where we need to be or want to be, however. A school our size with a living alumni base of over 125,000 should be raising, annually, between \$10 and \$12 million. So while we celebrate this past year's accomplishment, we also have a ways to go and now have the infrastructure and personnel to help us reach these markers. I can promise you increased private fund raising successes in the future.

One of the larger gifts last year came from Ron and Sherrie Lou Noel, whose name graces our Studio for Academic Creativity. Thanks to their continued generosity, the Noel Reading Porch on the south side of the library now overlooks a newly landscaped pedestrian mall. I am confident this will become a favored location for gatherings and events.

As we move forward with components of the Center for Student Life and other improvements on campus, private support, sometimes in the form of public-private partnerships, will take on even more importance.

The largest gift this past year came from Donald and Irene Dizney, whose lead gift in 2014 enabled the University to proceed with replacing the former east-side grandstands at Roy Kidd Stadium with a \$15 million multi-purpose facility. Plans are being finalized for this new addition to RKS and the structure will begin coming out of the ground in the coming months.

Over the past few months, we have taken major steps to raise the level of private support and create new revenue streams for Athletics as part of an effort to make our Athletics Program more self-sustaining. I am very happy to report that in just the past two months, the Colonel Club has raised OVER \$250,000. That is double what we raised ALL of last year. So we are well on our way to setting a brand-new record for booster club support.

### **Another Kentucky Runway Cleared for Landing**

Last month, several of us from ECU were on hand at the Ashland Regional Airport for another milestone involving our nationally-unique aviation program, as our network of 2+2 community and technical college partners continues to grow. It already includes Hazard, Middlesboro, Ashland and Owensboro, and our aim is to fly the ECU flag at every regional airport in the Commonwealth. We are well on our way to achieving that goal.



## **Model Lab Makes List of Nation's Top High Schools ... Again**

For the second consecutive year, Model Laboratory High School ranks among the top 2 percent of the nation's public high schools, according to Newsweek magazine. Model is one of only three Kentucky schools to rank in the top 500 among the nation's approximately 25,000 public high schools. We continue to work toward securing funding for a new Model Lab School, in addition to a new facility for the College of Education, as our number one capital project for the upcoming Legislative session.

The announcement relative to Model's ranking noted that more than 16 percent of Model students are participating in dual enrollment, for which they receive both high school and college credit for taking ECU classes. We can be very proud of that program's role in the success of Model and its students.

## **Regents Authorize Self-Management of Capital Construction Projects**

The University will now self-manage its capital construction projects.

In its special-called meeting last week, our Board of Regents approved a resolution authorizing the University to take the leading role in administration of all capital projects valued at more than \$600,000. Previously, that role had been assumed by the Commonwealth's Department for Facilities and Support Services, an administrative group within the Finance and Administration Cabinet. The University already had authority to manage projects up to \$600,000. The action taken by the Board now awaits approval by a legislative committee.

As I said to the Board, this move allows us to be masters of our destiny, helping us to streamline procurement, decision making, approvals, accounting functions and most general administration functions, providing for faster and more efficient project delivery.

The central figure in this transition is Paul Gannoe, our newly-named director of capital construction and project administration at ECU, who had served the past 11 years as executive director for the Commonwealth's Office of Facility Development and Efficiency and, most recently, as deputy commissioner for the Department for Facilities and Support Services.

House Bill 622, enacted by the 1982 General Assembly and codified in the Kentucky Revised Statutes, authorized the governing boards of the state's universities to elect to perform locally one or more of certain financial management functions previously performed by other parts of state government, including capital construction, and to delegate authority for implementation to an institution's president.

Most of our sister institutions in Kentucky are already self-managing their capital construction.

## **Chautauqua Lecture Series Asks “What If?”**

It’s a question we ask often, as we should, at ECU: “What if?”

So it’s only appropriate that’s the theme for our Chautauqua series this academic year.

Once again, we have a stellar lineup of distinguished scholars, best-selling authors, social activists and prominent educators. They include best-selling author/historian Douglas Brinkley, who is coming here next April.

Many thanks to Chautauqua Director Dr. Erik Liddell for organizing this year’s series. I encourage you to attend as many of the events as your schedule allows.

## **Center for the Arts Kicks off Season, Prepares to Host Gubernatorial Debate**

The ECU Center for the Arts kicked off its season this past weekend with a performance by Vince Gill and a special screening of “The Princess Bride” with one of its stars on hand. Visit [ekucenter.com](http://ekucenter.com) to see the full list of programs for this coming year. The Center’s theme this season is “You’ll Love What You See” and I have no doubt that this is true.

In addition to all the entertainment, the Center will for the second time host a Kentucky gubernatorial debate on Oct. 25. Ticket information will be announced later this month. The Center hosted a gubernatorial debate in 2011 and a Sixth District Congressional debate in 2014.

By the time that gubernatorial debate rolls around, we should know whether we are selected to host a U.S. presidential or vice presidential debate. The announcement from the Commission on Presidential Debates is expected in October.

## **Campus Challenge Finalists**

As I mentioned in a campus-wide e-mail a few weeks ago, we received some outstanding ideas from ECU faculty and staff as part of the Campus Challenge initiative. The five submissions selected as finalists run the gamut and reflect the great diversity of talents in our campus community.

Congratulations to these finalists:

- Randy Wilson – “Establishing Sustainability Practices into the Campus Waste Management and Recycling Program”
- Stephanie McSpirit, Ed Fredrickson, Michelle Gerken, Rick Griebenow, Cheryl Martin, Mark A. Martin, Radhika Makecha, Robert Mitchell, Anne Rodiek, John Settimi, Kathryn L. Splinter-Watkins and Sarah Tsiang – “Kick Start Campaign and Master Plan: Horses, Humans and Health Equine Complex”
- Anthony Lamanna, Scott Arias, Bryan Dyer and Chengyi (Charlie) Zhang – “Race to Next Greatest Generation”

- Steve Greenwell – “Return of Retired Faculty”
- Grace Baldwin and Bernardo Scarambone – “The Campus Beautiful”

These finalists will present their proposals at our first-ever “Colonel Tank” in October. Judges will hear the five presentations and award a \$10,000 cash prize, provided by the EKU Foundation, to the successful candidate or team.

### **Faculty and Student Achievements**

EKU faculty continue to distinguish themselves on the state and national stage. In the last few months, honorees include:

- Art and Design Professor Isaac Powell, whose work was on display at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. The exhibit, in the Hall of Nations, featured artwork from 16 artists in an Emerging Young Artists Program sponsored by the VSA, an international organization that recognizes outstanding artists with disabilities through a competitive annual juried arts exhibition.
- Dr. Melinda Wilder, director of our Division of Natural Areas, who received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Kentucky Association for Environmental Education.
- Dr. Qian Xiao, assistant professor of management, who received the 11<sup>th</sup> annual Jack L. Dyer Excellence in Teaching Award.
- Dr. Jacquelyn Jensen, program coordinator for Family and Consumer Sciences education, presented the Kentucky Association for Career and Technical Education Post-Secondary Teacher of the Year Award.
- Dr. Ron Jones, retired biology professor, for whom the University’s renowned herbarium is now named.

Of course, our faculty play no small role in our students’ achievements. A notable example this summer was EKU junior Kate Tran, who was one of only 15 students chosen nationwide to participate in the highly selective Washington State University Nuclear Forensics Undergraduate Summer School.

### **Personnel Announcements**

We welcomed to campus this fall several new faces in key positions ... and some “old” faces in new roles.

First and foremost, Dr. Vic Kappeler is the new dean of our College of Justice & Safety, succeeding Dr. Allen Ault, who retired earlier this year after 12 years of exemplary service. Dr. Kappeler is an internationally renowned scholar whose textbooks are used by universities worldwide and whose expertise is sought often by the government and media, as well as a visionary leader who can take our Program of Distinction to even greater heights.

Some other key personnel include:

- Dr. Tanlee Wasson, assistant vice president for institutional effectiveness and institutional research

- Paul Gannoe, director of capital construction and project administration
- Kristi Runyon Middleton, chief external affairs officer
- Joslyn Glover, director of institutional equity
- Dr. Timothy Forde, director of African/African-American Studies Program
- Patrick McKee, sustainability manager
- Ken Johnson, interim chief human resources officer (as a national search continues to hire a chief human resources officer)

And speaking of personnel, our institution is only as good as the faculty and staff who make the campus run every single day on behalf of our students and the community. Our ECU employees deserve to be compensated fairly for the work they do and the service they render.

To that end, we will be announcing plans shortly relative to a cost of living increase for all personnel as well as future plans for our IPEP, phase 3. Our plan is to make this increase effective November 1, 2015. More details will be forthcoming in the next few days.

Thanks for your continued commitment to ECU and our students.