CSL Cornerstone of Campus Renewal Plan

It was once said of renowned architect Daniel Burnham that his greatest influence may not have been what he built, but what he imagined. He urged everyone to make no little plans, to think big. And that’s exactly what is happening at EKU as the University continues to move forward with a bold and visionary campus renewal plan that will transform the way members of the campus community learn, live and work together, and even change the way others perceive Eastern.

Plans continue to unfold for a variety of exciting projects, the cost for which will be covered by an innovative combination of public-private partnerships, private dollars, a recently approved student fee and University funds. The proposed Center for Student Life (CSL) at EKU, the signature element of the broad and ambitious campus revitalization plan, is aimed at transforming the student experience by revitalizing the core of the Richmond campus.

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Progress on the CSL can be tracked at ekubuilds.eku.edu. A $150-per-semester student fee, which will remain in place for the next 20 years, will go toward “student-centric” facilities that comprise a part of the CSL. The fee was approved, in turn this spring, by the Student Senate, Board of Regents and, lastly, the Council on Postsecondary Education. Students will play an active role in deciding the features of a recreation center and student union.

Initial design work and project cost estimates for the CSL are expected to be completed by October, and it is anticipated that the final agency bond amount will be submitted to the CPE and Finance Cabinet this December for inclusion in the 2016 budget request. The University will then seek General Assembly approval next year to begin the project.

Other components of the CSL, to be funded by a combination of public-private partnerships, private funds and the University, are expected to include:
- new residence halls
- a new dining-only facility
- a multi-level parking garage
- the Noel Reading Porch on the south side of Crabbe Library and an adjacent pedestrian plaza between the Library and the Weaver Building
- Carloftis Garden (at the former site of the Martin Hall tennis courts)
- a Lancaster Avenue pedestrian gateway at the site of the now-demolished Combs residence hall.

Changes on the Richmond campus are hardly limited to the CSL. Many other ongoing and planned projects are addressing facilities in need of renovation and enhancing the curb appeal of Eastern.

A few examples:
- Phase 2 of the New Science Building, scheduled for completion by late 2017.
- A 12,700-foot addition to the Ashland Building, to be completed by August.
- The construction of a research facility and “bunk house” at Lilley Cornett Woods, a University-owned old growth forest in Letcher County.
- Continuing upgrades for Hummel Planetarium. A re-dedication of the facility is slated for May 21 at 3:30 p.m.
- The construction of a multi-purpose facility, replacing the east side grandstands at Roy Kidd Stadium. Donald and Irene Dizney contributed the lead gift for the project, which is also funded in part by an agency bond issued by the Commonwealth.
- The replacement of the McBrayer Arena floor, along with new, much stronger LED lighting above the floor.
Bullhorn Creative Assists with Brand Strategy

For many reasons, 2014-15 will go down as a watershed year for EKU.

One is the selection of Bullhorn Creative, a Lexington-based branding and creative services firm, as a partner in the development of a new brand strategy for the University.

A new brand platform and subsequent integrated strategic marketing plan will serve as the foundation for the University’s effort to define and advance the University brand.

“While they understand our target audience,” President Benson said, “we will push them to broaden our base and expand our reach and reputation. Great things are ahead for Eastern.”

Already, Bullhorn has held several focus group meetings with students, faculty, staff and other constituent groups.

“One of the reasons I started Bullhorn was to change the way people think about Kentucky,” said Brad Flowers, a partner in the firm. “Working with EKU is a great opportunity to do this in a very practical way. The work we will do together will not only benefit our organizations, but will continue to raise the bar for everyone in the state.

“Higher education is rapidly changing.” Flowers continued. “We believe that EKU is uniquely positioned to benefit from this changing environment. We couldn’t be more excited to retell the story of Eastern to a new group of staff, students and faculty.”

New Day for Colonel Athletics

It’s a new day for Colonel Athletics.

Shortly after Steve Lochmueller was introduced as the University’s new Director of Athletics, he was deep into a search for a new head men’s basketball coach after Jeff Neubauer announced he was taking the job at Fordham University in New York City.

The new coach is Dan McHale, former assistant at the University of Louisville and the University of Minnesota, and he comes with high recommendations from some of America’s best coaches. Furthermore, when ESPN analyst Jeff Goodman was handing out grades for all the coaching hires nationally this spring, his highest grades were two A-minuses. And one was for Coach McHale.

Most recently, in an effort to raise much-needed private support for the EKU athletics program, Austin Newton, former player and assistant coach, has stepped into a new role focused on the Athletics Annual Fund and the Colonel Club.

The new role for Newton coincides with what President Benson said upon Lochmueller’s arrival: “I believe we have in Steve Lochmueller a leader who can imbue our athletics operation with a business mindset focused on resource and revenue generation.”

Besides the personnel moves, numerous facelifts are recently completed, under way or planned for EKU athletics facilities.

Diversity Committee’s Plan Will Impact Entire Campus

The pieces of a new diversity and inclusion initiative at EKU might be many, but the whole is a campus where everyone understands “we’re all part of the same fabric.”

As the University’s interim chief diversity officer, Dr. Sherwood Thompson is heading up an Institutional Diversity and Inclusion Planning Committee, a 30-member team composed of faculty, staff and students from a cross-section of campus, whose goal is to develop a plan that will “positively impact the entire University.”

The Committee held two recent Diversity Summits to provide opportunities for input from all segments of the campus community, and nine focus group discussions have encompassed faculty, students and staff. Seven teams within the Committee are developing the University’s 2015-2020 Diversity Plan.

Thompson said it’s critical that diversity be defined as broadly as possible, encompassing ethnicity, gender, ageism, ableism, and sexual orientation, among other identities.

“Our goal is to develop a sustainable diversity plan that will foster greater awareness and enhance harmony on campus,” Thompson said. “We want to send a signal that our primary goal is to sustain Eastern as a welcoming and inclusive community.”

The Committee’s work is also part of an effort to centralize diversity initiatives on campus, “so that we are all singing in the same choir,” Thompson said.
National Honors Abound

EKU continues to earn national recognition for excellence in academics and student services. In the past academic year alone:

- The University was named by Forbes among America’s Best Colleges for the seventh consecutive year. Forbes recognizes 650 undergraduate institutions among approximately 6,500 accredited postsecondary institutions nationwide, ranking essentially places Eastern among the top 10 percent of colleges and universities nationwide.
- EKU ranked for the fifth consecutive year in the top tier of Regional Universities in the South, according to the 2015 edition of Best Colleges, published by U.S. News & World Report.
- Eastern was named a Military-Friendly School by Victory Media for the sixth consecutive year, ranking in the top 15 percent of colleges, universities and trade schools nationwide that are doing the most to help America’s military service members, veterans and dependents earn a college degree.
- EKU was recognized for the fifth consecutive year by Washington Monthly for its contributions to the public good. Eastern was honored along with 670 other public and private master’s universities nationwide.
- University Business magazine lists the EKU GURUs among “models of excellence” for enhancing student success. The 30-25 student GURUs serve more than 2,000 students daily, answering any and all questions about the University and campus life.
- Numerous EKU Online programs have earned national recognition for excellence.
- Model Laboratory School was ranked among the top 1 percent of the nation’s public high schools, according to Newsweek.

Second PLAA Class Selected

After a successful inaugural year, the second-year cohort for the EKU President’s Leadership in Action Academy (PLAA) was recently announced.

The 2015-16 participants are: Karrie Adkins, Michelyn Wilson Bhandari, Russell Carpenter, Steve Greenwell, Mark Howard, Gill Hunter, Mark Maier, Brent Parmer, Marissa Parmer, Kelly Smith, Sandra Stevens, John Taylor, Amanda Clemens Tudor, Kelly Walker and Matthew Winslow.

“I am confident that we have identified a class which represents a diverse cross-section of individuals from an array of units, experiences and perspectives,” President Benson said. “Even more, I am proud of the fact that we have established a cohort that is diverse and inclusive.”

Sadly, Kim Merritt, who passed away in April, had been selected for the new class. “Kim will continue to be officially recognized as one of the only 15 individuals selected for this class and was extremely worthy of this selection based on her unlimited potential, exemplary service and infectious personality.”

For the second year, Benson noted, the program received “a tremendous amount of interest from applicants, and it is my hope this will continue. While every single member of our talented faculty and staff is deserving, logistical challenges compel us to make these decisions and keep each class at a more manageable number.

“If unsuccessful in your application this far,” Benson added, “please apply again next year for what we hope plan to continue as a lasting initiative.”
Mock Trial Finish Highlights Student Achievements

The 2014-15 academic year was highlighted by numerous examples of national recognition for our students. Once again, our students have shown that, with the help of dedicated faculty and staff mentors, they can compete successfully on the national stage, whether it’s a mock trial tournament or for prestigious awards and scholarships.

For example, out of more than 600 collegiate mock trial teams nationwide that began the season, EKU’s squad finished 11th.

Competing in the American Mock Trial Association National Championship Tournament (NCT), the EKU team finished 6-6 against what Coach Tom Parker called “an extremely tough set of opponents.” Eastern began by taking one of three ballots against the University of Arizona, which finished seventh; then swept all three ballots against Ivy League opponent Brown University in the second round. EKU then took two of three ballots from the University of Delaware, the 10th-place team, before losing three close ballots to the second-place finishers, the University of California at Berkeley, in the fourth round.

EKU has now finished in the top 15 nationally three times in the last six years.

This year’s NCT squad was composed entirely of Kentucky residents, and included several members of University’s Honors Program.

Just three more of many notable student achievements the past academic year:

- A former member of our Honors Program was one of only four Honors students nationally to be named a 2014 Portz Scholar, a distinction awarded each year to the best Honors student research projects in the nation. Sam Shearer, an accounting major from Winchester, was honored for his Fall 2013 Honors Thesis at EKU entitled “Truman Smith’s Reports on Nazi Militarism: A Study of Domestic Political Priorities and U.S. Foreign Policy Making in Franklin Roosevelt’s First and Second Terms.” Each honors program or honors college across the country is allowed to nominate only one honors thesis or research project from their campus each year, so Shearer’s paper was in competition against the very best among Honors students nationally.

- Competing mostly against doctoral students from better-known schools, a master’s degree-seeking student at EKU earned a prestigious psychology research award. Second-year Clinical Psychology student Chelsea Sleep, of Louisville, was awarded the 2014 Student Research Fellowship Award from Section IX of the Society of Clinical Psychology for her proposal. Competing proposals came from Michigan State University, Villanova University, Pennsylvania State University, Kent State University, Wayne State University and the University of Milan. Only one other student had not yet completed a master’s degree.

- EKU boasted two Gilman International Scholarship recipients this spring, Tori Caldwell, junior public health major and McNair Scholar, will travel to Tanzania this summer to study maternal and child health. Eric King, an anthropology major, will travel to Bolivia to study regional archaeology and culture.

Social Media Presence Explodes

EKU’s presence in social media, aided by a workgroup representing a cross-section of the campus, has escalated over the past several months.

For example, the University’s Twitter channel (@EKUStories) reported 7,243 followers in May, up 43 percent from November. On Instagram, 4,455 are following easternkentuckyu, a 34 percent increase from November. Facebook followers increased 4.3 percent, to 37,255, over the same period.

The highest levels of social engagement, not surprisingly, came in February, when the campus was dealing with the first of two epic snowstorms as well as a gun violence threat. The account of President Benson shoveling a student’s driveway went viral and brought the President and University international attention. Almost 105,000 people engaged on Facebook in February, well above the average of approximately 60,000.

A goal for later this year is the development of a Social Media Reference Guide to further assist offices, departments and programs. Also, a web site is under development that will collect all EKU social media accounts in one central location to help users with their specific needs.
Presidential Debate Site Visit
Team Here June 11

EKU is among 16 applicants across the nation, and the only site in Kentucky, vying to host a U.S. presidential or vice presidential debate in 2016.

The Center for the Arts would serve as the debate hall. Eastern had also applied to host a debate in 2012, but the Center had not yet opened at the time of application.

A team from the Commission on Presidential Debates will visit the Richmond campus June 11 to look over the Center and adjacent facilities that would serve auxiliary purposes, as well as discuss with University and community officials logistics dealing with security, transportation and telecommunications.

It is expected that a Presidential Debate would attract approximately 5,000 guests (including approximately 3,000 media personnel) to the community and area, some staying for as long as a week.

In 2012, the non-partisan Commission on Presidential Debates sponsored three presidential debates and one vice presidential debate. Centre College, which hosted vice presidential debates in 2000 and 2012, did not apply this year.

According to the Commission, other applicants to host a 2016 debate are: Belmont University, Nashville; the City of Birmingham, Ala.; City of McAllen, Texas; Dominican University of California in San Rafael, Calif.; Georgia College & State University, Milledgeville, Ga.; Hofstra University, Hempstead, N.Y.; Houston Community College, Houston; Jacksonville University, Jacksonville, Fla.; Longwood University, Farmville, Va.; State University of New York Rockland Community College, Suffern, N.Y.; Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas; University of Nevada, Las Vegas and the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority, Las Vegas, Nev.; Washington University in St. Louis; West Virginia University and West Virginia State University, Charleston, W.Va., and Wright State University, Dayton, Ohio.

The selection of the 2016 host sites will be announced this fall.

Scholarship Model Revamped

EKU is welcoming increasing numbers of the best and brightest students, thanks to a revamped model for merit-based scholarships that gives equal weight to ACT and SAT scores and high school GPA.

The University committed an additional $1.7 million to its scholarship budget for the Fall 2015 class, and that translates to 100-150 additional merit scholarships.

“We are investing more in our students,” said Dr. Brett Morris, executive director for enrollment management. “We want to reward academic excellence and help good, hard-working students come to EKU.”

Last year, Eastern added to the Rodney Gross Scholarship Fund to provide more opportunities for minority students as well.

Students and families are already taking notice - not only of the additional scholarship opportunities but also of new residence halls and academic facilities, such as a state-of-the-art science building, and other campus improvements.

“We’re seeing a lot more excitement about EKU,” Morris said.