

TO: The Eastern Kentucky University Faculty Senate  
FROM: Senator Michael T. Benson  
DATE: March 1, 2018  
RE: March Report

February was a good month on the national stage for EKU students, faculty and academic programs.

Our mock trial team finished first in its regional tournament and is headed to the first level of national competition later this month in Memphis. Congratulations to Coaches Tom Parker, Lynnette Noblitt, Dean Sara Zeigler, and program alumni Kristeena Johnson and James Tee Pennington and these outstanding students for another job well done, and best wishes for the rest of the season.

I hope, too, you saw the recent front-page *Lexington Herald-Leader* story on senior Omar Salinas Chacon, a DACA recipient who last fall was chosen as the top honors student in the entire nation at the National Collegiate Honors Council conference. Omar continues to do us proud, and I know he has a bright future ahead of him. The EKU Board of Regents also passed a resolution on Monday recognizing Omar and his contributions and stating its collective support of him and all our DACA students.

Dr. Peter Kraska, a professor in our School of Justice Studies, now boasts an Academy Award on his trophy shelf. No, not *that* Academy Award. Dr. Kraska received the Academy of Criminal Justice Science's Police Section Award for his 25 years of scholarship in the field of police militarization. Kraska is an internationally prominent scholar in the areas of police and criminal justice militarization, criminal justice theory and mixed methods research.

Bernardo Scarambone, a professor of piano in our School of Music, recently picked up a similarly prestigious national honor – the Steinway Top Teacher Award for his “hard work and commitment to teaching and inspiring young people in their study of piano music.” Professor Scarambone has also helped attract several students from his native Brazil.

Among programs to earn national distinction this past month, our Risk Management and Insurance Program was ranked in the top 20 nationally, according to the February 2018 issue of *Best's Review* magazine. Also, SR Education Group ranked Eastern among the 2018 Top Military-Friendly Online Colleges.

In other big news from our College of Justice and Safety, Eastern and the Federal Bureau of Prisons recently announced an Inside-Out partnership, the first in the state, to provide criminal justice students a more hands-on learning experience while also providing inmates at the Federal Correctional Institution at Manchester a chance to learn in a college environment without leaving custody.

In another new teaching arrangement back here on the Richmond campus, we will launch our first Faculty-in-Residence program this fall in the new Martin Hall. As Lisa Mendenhall with our Housing and Residence Life staff said, this program will provide a perfect opportunity for students and faculty to connect in more informal and meaningful ways. The application deadline is Friday, March 9.

We've had countless ribbon cuttings on campus in recent years, and it never gets old. The latest, of course, was grand opening ceremonies for our new Case Dining Hall. At the ceremony last month, I recalled the words of Food Network personality Guy Fieri, who once said: "Cooking is all about people. Food is maybe the only universal thing that really has the power to bring everyone together." We're already seeing ample evidence of that truth at this wonderful facility.

One of my favorite events each academic year is when our students gather in O'Donnell Hall to spin an oversized wheel for study-abroad scholarships. This year, 17 of our students walked away with scholarships to a variety of locations worldwide. But the larger story here is that 17 lives will be forever changed by experiences that open their minds and hearts in an untold number of ways.

The tuition freeze announced last fall is already paying off. Enrollment indicators are all up a little compared to the same time a year ago. And it's not just prospective students and their families who are paying attention. At our recent Colonels at the Capitol event in Frankfort, the Kentucky Senate honored Eastern with Senate Resolution 118, which noted that we were the sole Kentucky public postsecondary institution to have announced a tuition freeze for the 2018-19 academic year.

I noted in my last report that attendance for the Kentucky All "A" Classic on our campus exceeded our expectations. Well, the final numbers are in, and the 2018 Classic recorded a total attendance of 38,201, the highest number for the annual event since 2008. The tournament returned to Eastern this year after six years at the Frankfort Convention Center. We can't even begin to put a price tag on the positive exposure our University receives from an event that draws so many prospective students and their families.

Some additional positive news announced at our recent Board of Regents meeting came from Dr. Eugene Palka, our vice president for student success, as he shared that our four-, five- and six-year graduation rates, already at record-high levels, continue to rise and are well above the national average. I can't brag about this impressive fact enough: our four-year graduation rate has roughly doubled in seven years.

Also from the enrollment management area, a pilot Pell Plus project, whereby Pell Grant-eligible students from targeted out-of-state areas such as the Cincinnati and South Florida metropolitan areas, will qualify for in-state tuition rates. This will ultimately result in greater diversity on our campus.

Also at that recent meeting, the board gave the go-ahead to a project whereby the University would develop, in partnership with a private developer and operator, a low- to moderate-income assisted living facility on the south side of campus as part of the first-ever Tax Increment Financing (TIF) district on campus. Best of all, this project will ultimately create up to 60 new jobs, including a clinical learning space for 20 ECU students from nursing, occupational therapy, nutrition, recreation and other academic disciplines. Further, the project will require no financial expenditures from the University.

Finally, some recent news out of Frankfort gives all of us a glimmer of hope in terms of the outlook for the state budget. The House version of the budget bills (HB200 HCS1) provides many improvements for ECU for FY19-20, namely the restoration of both mandate reductions for Model and the Community Operations Board and the restoration of the original 6.25% General Fund cut.

As I reported to the Senate in February, we advocated strongly last summer for Asset Preservation Funds and the CPE approved a system-wide fee last month – to be implemented at the discretion of

each institution – and the House budget bill provides \$43.2 million in agency bond authorization to address our capital improvement needs on campus immediately. Our obligation is to raise \$21.6 million of that amount to apply to these renovation and repair projects. Top of the priority list are the Moore Building, the Wallace Building, and additional floor build outs within Commonwealth so spaces within Combs Classroom can be repurposed for instructional space.

It goes without saying that our attention will now be turned to the Senate to ensure that as much of the House version of this budget can be maintained.

Thank you for your continued service and commitment to our students and community.