

TO: The Eastern Kentucky University Faculty Senate  
FROM: Senator Michael T. Benson  
DATE: December 4, 2015  
RE: December Campus Report

My apologies for not being with you to report in person, but we are hosting the Leadership Kentucky group on campus today and, as a member of this year's class, I am required to be in attendance for our last session. Graduation for our class is on Wednesday in Lexington and I want to collect that diploma! This has been a most rewarding and enlightening experience as I have traveled from Paducah to Pikeville, and multiple points in between, in learning about the rich history and bright future of our Commonwealth.

I hope the semester ends well for each of you and that you are able to enjoy some time away from campus and with your friends, family, and loved ones.

As you all know, November was a month marked by tragedy – first, the loss of one of our freshmen in an accident on the Eastern By-Pass on the morning of Nov. 3 and then, just a few days later, the death of Richmond Police Officer and ECU alumnus Daniel Ellis.

But tragedy sometimes has a way of bringing out the best in people, and that could certainly be said of our campus and community that week. I will not soon forget the show of support and solidarity in the days surrounding Officer Ellis' death. It made me proud to be a Kentuckian, a Madison Countian and an ECU Colonel. I Daniel's wife, Katie, a two-time ECU graduate, and other family members were very appreciative of our role in what was a memorable and richly deserving tribute to a fine police officer and even greater gentleman.

This was not the first time this campus and community have shown gritty resilience in the face of adversity. Two days before the funeral for Officer Ellis, another event made me proud to be a Colonel. It was the premiere of "The Essential Eastern" a documentary film produced and directed by our own Chad Cogdill that told the story about a dream that refused to die: the vision of a vibrant "School of Opportunity" here in Richmond, Kentucky. If you missed the premiere, be watching for the documentary on KET sometime in the Spring.

Though the term "School of Opportunity" has evolved in its meaning over the years, it is important to remember that a significant number of our students are still the first in their families to pursue a college degree. This fall, more than 800 new freshmen entering our University were first-generation students. Now, our new Trailblazer Scholarship will help future first-generation students achieve their educational dreams.

We know that on-campus housing is also a major consideration for students as they make their college choice so we were pleased to announce just before Thanksgiving break that a letter of intent was awarded for the development of new student housing, the University's first public-private partnership. The winning proposal includes more than 1,100 beds on the site of Martin Hall and the current Brockton Block on Kit Carson Drive. We anticipate that both new halls, totaling \$75 million in

new construction, will be completed in time for occupancy in Fall 2017. These improvements will change the face of our University and help us recruit, retain and graduate our students. It is not hyperbole to say that these projects will forever transform our campus and its reputation.

It is critical at ECU that we continue to reach out to underrepresented populations. Hundreds of students from ECU and other college and university campuses received a GLIMPSE into their potential recently at a three-day event on our campus.

GLIMPSE stands for Gathering, Listening, Igniting, Mending, Persevering, Surviving and Empowering, and the conference helped the participants expand their horizons and develop leadership skills that they can employ on their respective campuses to help others.

ECU also continues to receive national recognition for all we do to embrace military veterans and their dependents. For the fifth time in six years, we rank third or higher nationally among four-year schools in the Military Times "Best for Vets" survey. We finished third in the U.S. this year.

Another area of growth – our online programs – is taking a step forward with the Spring 2016 launch of an online Master of Arts in Teaching program. Students can select a degree concentration leading to teacher certification in Elementary, Middle Grades and Secondary Education, as well as Interdisciplinary Early Childhood Education.

One of our nationally prominent programs, Mock Trial, reached a high-water mark recently when one of our teams fashioned a perfect 8-0 mark and captured first place in the Great Lakes Invitational. The names of two of the schools we passed on the way to the title are somewhat familiar: The University of Notre Dame and Northwestern University. Kudos to all those who work with these students to help them achieve this level of success.

Two recent additions to our staff will go a long way toward helping us better meet the educational and community development needs of our service region.

Dr. Tom Martin, previously the Senior Fellow for Research and Economic Policy at the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education, is the new Executive Director for the Center for Economic Development, Entrepreneurship and Technology (CEDET). Dr. Martin is a two-time ECU graduate and the president of our International Alumni Association.

Also, Dr. Ryan Wilson, a Clay County native and three-time ECU graduate, was recently named our Director of Regional Programming. Most recently, Dr. Wilson had served as Program Director of Student Success for our College of Education, leading the College's undergraduate advising, retention, recruitment and marketing efforts. I am also happy to note that Dr. Wilson also was a member of our first cohort in the President's Leadership in Action Academy.

Then, last week, we welcomed Hal Boyd to the Colonel family. As the new special assistant in my office, Mr. Boyd brings a keen intellect and sterling academic credentials and, most importantly, an unwavering belief in the transformative power of education and the value of shared governance. I first met him when I spoke late last year at Yale University, where Mr. Boyd was student president of

the J. Reuben Clark Law Society at Yale Law School. We went on to co-author an article for a National Education Journal that examines the lofty ideals and democratic impact of higher education. Mr. Boyd, who is set to earn his juris doctorate degree from Yale next spring, plans to pursue a career in higher education administration. I have no doubt he has a promising future ahead of him.

While this has proven to be a particularly challenging semester, I am encouraged by the manner in which we have collectively responded and thank you for your continued service to Eastern Kentucky University and our students.

Best wishes for a most productive, healthy, and happy 2016.