

TO: The Eastern Kentucky University Faculty Senate
FROM: Senator Michael T. Benson
DATE: December 2, 2016
RE: December Campus Report

In the face of the challenges we face both within our system of higher education in Kentucky and on our own campus, we are surrounded by success stories of our students, faculty, and staff which continue to inspire and motivate us. This past month is no exception.

You have undoubtedly heard about our nationally prominent mock trial program and how it has picked up where it left off last season, when it fielded the only team from a regional comprehensive university in the American Mock Trial Association national championships.

In the past month, EKU mock trial teams have finished first in the Illinois State Invitational, second in the Great Lakes Invitational and sixth in the Cornshucker Challenge. Along the way, our students outlasted competitors from Indiana University, Michigan State University and Northwestern University, among others. Thanks to Thomas Parker, Lynnette Noblitt, Brandon Williams, Kristeena Johnson and Dean Sara Zeigler for their continued leadership of this program.

Likewise, our academic programs continue to rank among the nation's finest. For instance, our aviation program learned recently it is one of five collegiate partners selected by Cessna Aircraft to participate in the company's 2017 Top Hawk program. As a result, we will receive a new custom-branded Cessna Skyhawk 171 aircraft early next year to support flight training, recruiting efforts and promotional activities over an eight-month period.

Our faculty, too, continue to be highly sought for their expertise. Dr. Sherry Powers, in her first year as dean of our College of Education, was recently among four new members appointed to serve on the Education Commission of the States, an interstate compact created to improve public education by facilitating the exchange of information, ideas and experiences among state policymakers and education leaders. Earlier this year, Dr. Powers was appointed to serve a four-year term on the Commonwealth's Education Professional Standards Board.

I would also like to call your attention to a new academic journal established here at EKU. The Chautauqua Journal will serve as an interdisciplinary literary companion to our annual lecture series, featuring essays, articles and creative works from internationally known scholars, writers and artists that explore the themes presented in the lectures. Congratulations to Dr. Erik Liddell and Dr. Minh Nguyen for their vision and for their work as editors-in-chief of this online publication, and to all the EKU contributors to this first issue. As Dr. Liddell has said, this new journal will stimulate intellectual curiosity and challenge our assumptions and attitudes, just as the popular lecture series has done so admirably for the past 17 years.

By the time this report is circulated, Governor Matt Bevin will have received the final report from the Performance Based Funding (PBF) Work Group which met for the fifth, and final time

(at least for now), last Monday. While there was a tremendous amount of compromise required on the part of every institution, I wanted to report to you that there was an issue about which I felt very strongly and over which I disagreed vehemently with the majority of my fellow presidents. It had to do with the institutional sectors which have been in place for decades in Kentucky: one sector for the research institutions (UK and U of L) and one for the comprehensive institutions (EKU, WKU, NKU, MoSU, and MSU). Kentucky State has been “held harmless” throughout this process in order to address some of the acute challenges it is facing.

These sectors have served us well as they have recognized the institutional distinctions and unique missions of each university while allowing us to focus on our service regions and programs of distinction. At one of our early meetings, representatives from UK argued that the sectors should be eliminated and ALL four-year institutions included in one category with the number of bachelor’s degrees being the gold standard by which each institution is rewarded in the performance-based model. We were then told that a weighting system would be devised in order to allow for the professional degrees offered by the R1’s and the inherent additional costs associated with these terminal and professional degrees. It was not until I asked for the exact detail as to what these weights were that the numbers were shared with the group on Monday morning.

While a tremendous amount of progress has been made in devising this model and developing one which can accommodate all “allocable” resources directed at state institutions, there are also some shortcomings in the current arrangement which have result in some serious misgivings on the part of many. As a result, I joined my presidential colleagues from Morehead State and Murray State in voting against an elimination of the sectors. The vote was 5 in favor and 3 against. Our objections were noted in the final report and will be relayed to the Governor. We will see what comes of the final recommendation from the CPE and what course of action the Governor and his staff chooses to take, but I do know that members of the General Assembly have already begun crafting bill language which will put PBF into effect very soon.

I have also expressed my view that PBF should not be viewed as a panacea for the challenges and shortcomings, perceived or otherwise, which public higher education is facing. While 36 states have adopted, in some shape or form, a type of Performance-based Funding in their respective budgets, there is not enough longitudinal data to argue for correlation to results given its relative newness in public policy in American public higher education. To rush headlong and place all of our state appropriation into the PBF pool – before we have an opportunity for a “look back” period to ascertain what unintended consequences have occurred and what remedies need to be sought – is both unnecessary and unwise. This is my own opinion and I will continue to express as forcefully as I can.

As always, we will keep you informed as this process continues to unfold and will continue to advocate for our interests in Frankfort and beyond.

I thank you for your continued service to ECU and wish you an enjoyable and restful holiday season.

Kind regards,

Mike Benson