

TO: The Eastern Kentucky University Faculty Senate
FROM: Senator Michael T. Benson
DATE: February 1, 2017
RE: February Campus Report

The headline in the *Richmond Register* after our Board of Regents met on Monday, Jan. 30, summed up well our attitude entering 2017: "United and Confident, ECU Ready to Move Past Tough 2016."

In my report to the Board, as well as many others, we did not mince words.

We are, indeed, coming off a difficult year and face unprecedented challenges with the soon-to-be-implemented performance-based funding. However, as I told the Board and those in attendance on Monday, if you are worried about the future of ECU, you do not need to be. The reason for my optimism, even in the face of such uncertainty, is our top-notch faculty and staff that is pulling together to ensure that we will succeed in this new environment.

I cannot emphasize enough that our goal is not mere survival. We seek to build upon advances made in recent years, not just preserving the high quality of the academic experience for our students but taking bold steps to solidify Eastern as the school of choice for the next generation of Kentuckians and, increasingly, those beyond our borders. We recently had our first enrollment summit which included a broad cross section of regents and campus representatives. The initial conversation went very well and we intend to have additional sessions in the future as we refine our scholarship model and get even more aggressive in targeting specific student populations, both in and out of state, for our academic programs and degree offerings.

Allow me to cite a few more reasons we can enter 2017 with great confidence:

As Dr. Lisa Bosley, co-director of the QEP Implementation Team along with Dr. Jill Parrott, said recently, a new QEP focused on Reading with Purpose "represents ECU's commitment to institutional improvement and provides a long-term focus for faculty and staff professional development and student learning." Just as our closely-related current QEP has elevated the Eastern Experience for our students in recent years, I have no doubt our new QEP will do the same.

Our success in fund-raising will continue to change students' lives and impact academic quality. For example, a recent anonymous gift of \$1.25 million will fund scholarships in math and science, encouraging students to pursue their dreams for an education and career in STEM fields. Another recent pledge will be what Executive Vice President Dr. Laurie Carter termed "a game-changer" for diverse students at Eastern. ECU graduate Troy Ellis, now an executive vice president with Domino's, and his wife, Michelle, pledged \$50,000 to a newly established ECU

Diversity Non-Endowed Fund. It's the largest gift Eastern has ever received for diversity and minority initiatives, and I hope only the beginning.

Continued improvements in student success metrics, as Dr. Carter reported to the Board last week, bode well for us as we enter the performance-based funding. Likewise, the second phase of our New Science Building, two new residence halls and a new dining center, all of which come on line later this year, as well as the planned new recreation center and improved student union will make our campus more attractive to prospective students. All told, we currently have approximately 1 million square feet in construction or design. These new facilities will also factor into the calculus used to determine our campus' square footage and will have a significant impact on our "allocable resources" base in the formula.

Remarkable growth in our online programs, with enrollment more than doubling in the past four years, is matched by continued national recognition for excellence. Our online nursing programs were recently ranked among the nation's top 40 by *U.S. News & World Report*.

Programs such as the Faculty Leadership Institute continue to develop the leadership capacity on our campus. Twenty-six faculty members from a cross-section of campus recently completed the first year of the Institute.

Last, but far from least, with the SACSCOC on-site visit looming later this month, the initial response is quite encouraging. Provost Dr. Janna Vice noted at Monday's Board meeting that we met 74 of the 96 standards, and that the remaining could likely be met with additional information. She also pointed out that Eastern was in full compliance on adequacy of full-time faculty and faculty qualifications, a rare feat for most institutions.

In closing, a shout-out to a few faculty and staff members who have been in the news recently:

First and foremost, Dr. Vice is one of two recipients of the 2017 Ohio Valley Conference Thurston Banks Award for Distinguished Academic Service. The award recognizes outstanding contributions to OVC student-athletes' academic success, learning and development, and commitment to an institution's athletics program, and Provost Vice is richly deserving of this high honor.

Dr. Thomas Erikson, dean of our College of Business & Technology, worked with leaders of Murakami Manufacturing in Campbellsville and Taylor County Schools to forge an alliance that will provide scholarships and internships to graduates of the school system who attend and graduate from our applied engineering management program. The intent is to develop manufacturing talent for that portion of the state. As Dean Erikson said, "We need to leverage, to the benefit of their home communities, these strong family ties and develop the right kind of talent with bachelor's degrees to work in companies throughout Kentucky."

Dr. Stephen Richter and Dr. David Brown are the co-principal investigators for a National Science Foundation Research Experiences for Undergraduates grant in support of undergraduate student internships to study disturbance ecology in central Appalachia. The next three summers, outstanding students from throughout the nation will converge on our Lilley Cornett Woods Research and Learning Center and Maywoods Environmental and Educational Laboratory. The program will also include teachers as part of a parallel Research Experiences for Teachers Project.

Best wishes for a productive and successful spring semester. Thank you for your continued service.