

TO: The Eastern Kentucky University Faculty Senate  
FROM: Senator Michael T. Benson  
DATE: March 31, 2016  
RE: April Campus Report

As I am writing this report, events in Frankfort have taken an interesting turn. Below is the note to campus faculty and staff which was circulated on Thursday morning, March 31, 2016.

Dear Campus:

If you have been paying attention to the goings on in Frankfort, this morning's events have certainly created a unique and somewhat unprecedented scenario.

House and Senate leadership met briefly just now and agreed to disagree on their budget priorities, meaning lawmakers will ***not*** pass a two-year Executive Branch budget in the 2016 regular legislative session. With this impasse, legislators will convene on Friday as planned to pass and clean up any remaining bills still pending.

This stalemate leaves two choices for Republican Governor Matt Bevin: (1) call lawmakers into a special session to restart negotiations and pass a budget before the end of the fiscal year on June 30; or (2) not call a special legislative session and attempt to operate state government without a budget, funding only necessary government entities and emergency agencies only. In this latter scenario, universities could use non-general fund dollars to operate, if they have them. If they do not, summer sessions, and other activities could be dramatically impacted.

After tomorrow's legislative session for Day 59 of the 60-day session, legislators are expected to reconvene on April 12 for a final "veto override" day in which they can consider any gubernatorial vetoes or possibly pass any remaining legislation that is still pending.

We will continue to monitor all developments and keep campus apprised of any new news. All we can do at this point is to focus on our respective responsibilities, do our work, and continue to serve our ECU community and students – 89% of whom are from the Commonwealth of Kentucky. Thanks for your continued commitment to Eastern Kentucky University.

Yours sincerely,

Mike Benson

### **Campus Updates**

While the recent news out of Frankfort may be disconcerting for us, March was also a month for many positive headlines for ECU.

It actually started on Saturday night, Feb. 27, when former Student Regent David "Doc" Fifer, now a member of our faculty, and four of his emergency medical care students came upon an accident on

an interstate highway near Charleston, West Virginia, as they were returning home from a conference. Seeing that immediate help was critical, they volunteered their services, equipped with only their own knowledge. Thanks in part to their quick action, the driver is expected to make a full recovery. As one student put it, “The only equipment we had was just us and what we have been taught. Our training definitely paid off.”

That rescue episode underscores a message we’ve shared repeatedly in recent weeks with our elected officials and others: EKU’s status as the Commonwealth’s “First Responder University.” Of course, that’s just one of many critical community needs that our graduates are meeting all across Kentucky. It’s a fact that we will continue to emphasize.

We are also making note of the fact that EKU, with a higher percentage of in-state students than any of our peers, is simply “Kentucky’s University.” Many of our students come from small towns and rural areas but, wherever they call home, they continue to demonstrate that they can compete on a national stage with anyone from anywhere.

### **EKU Mock Trial**

One current example is very appropriate: our national tournament-bound mock trial team. The EKU team, which has finished first in three events this season, is one only 48 teams to qualify for national championships and the only squad from a regional comprehensive institution. Take note, too, that six of the seven members of this team are from Kentucky, none from a town bigger than Georgetown. Several are also members of our Honors Program. Because these students come from various academic disciplines, we can all share in the pride for their achievements.

### **Recognition for Online and other Academic Programs**

Our online academic programs have garnered much praise recently, and for good reason. A recent award-winner is walking testimony to that quality. Phillip Wenturine, a student in our outstanding MFA in Creative Writing Program, never has and may never set foot on our campus, although he did enjoy two summer residencies with faculty and classmates in Portugal. Yet, when he was recently awarded a Fulbright English Teaching Assistantship, he gave credit to the program and its faculty for opening vistas of possibility that he never dreamed were within reach. Now this native of rural southwest Georgia is headed back to Portugal as a Fulbright Scholar and “cultural ambassador” for the U.S. – and, I might add, EKU.

Another of our widely renowned academic programs is American Sign Language and Interpreter Education. So much so that when the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., was needing its first-ever interpreting intern, it turned to none other than EKU. It’s a perfect fit for Mekaella Vailu’u, a senior with a double major in American Sign Language Interpreting and Deaf Studies and a minor on Political Science. She plans to use the experience as a springboard to law school and a career as an international deaf rights activist. I suspect we haven’t heard the last from her.

Two pieces of good news this past month involved our Department of Computer Science, specifically two of its degree concentrations: Interactive Media and Computer Forensics and Security.

The highly regarded Princeton Review recently ranked our relatively new Game Design Program as No. 50 in the world after conducting a survey of 150 institutions offering game design coursework and/or degrees in the U.S., Canada and some other countries. Bear in mind that our Gaming Institute was established in 2014, while many of the other programs on the list have been around for 10-20 years. A reminder: as the result of the prestige our program already enjoys, ECU will host on April 30 the first-ever game design conference in Kentucky.

Elsewhere in the same department, the Computer Forensics and Security concentration recently became one of the first two undergraduate digital forensics programs in the U.S. to earn national accreditation. This is a newly emerging field of study in which students learn how to examine digital devices such as computers, notebooks, mobile electronic devices and network devices to collect digital evidence that can be used in criminal and civil court trials. Add the graduates from this rapidly growing field to that number from our campus who are applying their knowledge and skills to keep our communities safe.

### **EKU Foundation Professor**

The highest honor the University bestows for excellence in teaching, research and service is our Foundation Professorship, and I was delighted to announce last month that our Foundation Professor for 2016-18 is Dr. Shirley O'Brien. Dr. O'Brien, a professor in our Department of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy, is most deserving of this prestigious honor.

### **Public Private Partnerships**

The past month was also memorable as we marched ahead with a public-private partnership that will enable us to build two new residence halls and our first parking garage, as well as make other improvements. Gov. Bevin has challenged us to be creative in financing new projects, and that is exactly what we are doing here. These new facilities will change the face of our University forever, and we remain undeterred in our ambitious revitalization plans for the campus.

### **Upcoming Events**

I also want to call your attention to several events throughout April – events that, each in its own way, remind us what is special about ECU:

- Over the last 36 seasons, ECU cross country and track and field coach Rick Erdmann has transformed those programs into national powerhouses, while having a positive impact on countless young men and women. On Tuesday, April 5, the University will honor those contributions with a special recognition ceremony at 5:30 p.m. on the concourse level of Alumni Coliseum.
- Since our founding, Eastern has been committed to the success of our students, in our classrooms and in life itself. And that's why we are excited about the opening of a new Student Success Center in the basement of Crabbe Library. You'll hear much more about

this facility and its services in the weeks to come, but I did want to note that grand opening ceremonies are planned for Thursday, April 7, at 11 a.m.

- Also on Thursday, April 7, Eastern will be privileged to welcome to campus one of America's foremost presidential and cultural historians when Douglas Brinkley delivers a Chautauqua lecture at 7:30 p.m. in O'Donnell Hall of the Whitlock Building. Brinkley, a prolific writer and frequent guest on national news programs, has been described as "the best of the new generation of American historians."
- Students, faculty and staff will come together the week of April 11-15 for our annual Scholarship Week. I hear that we have a record number of undergraduate poster submissions for the University Poster Showcase. And that's just one part of an exciting week as we celebrate a campus culture of scholarship, research and creative endeavors.
- An event on Wednesday, April 13, will serve to remind us that this learning community truly is one big family, but never too big to reflect on the contributions of each and every one of its members. That's why we pause at about this time every year for a University-wide memorial ceremony, where we honor the lives and memories of current and retired faculty and staff as well as current students who passed away in the past year. Sadly, that number is especially large this year. The ceremony will begin at 4 p.m. in Walnut Hall of the Keen Johnson Building.
- Also on Wednesday, April 13, a graduate returning to campus for a speaking engagement is a perfect example of why we never, ever give up on our students. By his own admission, Jeff Newton was, at least initially, a terrible student here in the 1990s. But the faculty in what is now our Department of Communication saw through his shortcomings to respect Jeff's enormous talent, focus his wild ambition and unleash his boundless potential. The result today is a member of our Hall of Distinguished Alumni and award-winning war reporter and broadcast journalist who has earned widespread acclaim for his work with "60 Minutes" and now HBO's "Vice." His talk, titled "Oh, How I Miss T-Bombs: Ramblings on Global Conflicts from ECU's Worst Student and Best War Reporter," will begin at 6:30 p.m. in the Grand Reading Room of Crabbe Library.
- The true measure of our University community is how we care for the less fortunate in our midst. And that is never more evident than at the annual Empty Bowls event, which this year will be Friday, April 15, at First Baptist Church on the Eastern By-Pass. Lunch will be served from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. and dinner from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m., with all proceeds going to feed the hungry in Madison County. Bowls have been donated by ECU art students and local professional potters. In 1997, Richmond became the very first city in central Kentucky to organize an "Empty Bowls" project when one of our own, Foundation Professor of Art and Design Joe Molinaro, began asking local churches for assistance. The request was met with immediate enthusiasm and support, and the multi-denominational fundraiser has grown every year since.

- As was mentioned in my previous Faculty Senate report, the University will host an Idea Festival April 21-22 at our Center for the Arts. The event, planned and facilitated by the Bluegrass Higher Education Consortium, will be headlined by two prominent keynote speakers: Jad Abumrad of NPR's Radio Lab and author Rich DeMillo, noted for his work on the transformation in higher education.

I wish all of you well as we push forward toward the end of the academic year. It has been one with its share of highlights – as well as some challenges – but we trace our roots as an academic institution to 1874 and we will continue to demonstrate our resiliency and fortitude. Thank you for your continued service and commitment.