

TO: The Eastern Kentucky University Faculty Senate

FROM: Senator Michael T. Benson

DATE: 1 February 2016

RE: February Campus Report

I apologize for not being able to be with you today, but my meeting with Governor Bevin was slated for Friday, January 22<sup>nd</sup> and then Snowmageddon 2016 happened. Everything in Frankfort was canceled. We are at the Capitol today making up our postponed meetings and continuing to plead our case with our elected representatives.

Along the lines of the weather, I would like to thank you for your patience and understanding, and for working with our students, during the recent snowstorm. Hopefully, it was not just the first of twin storms like we had last winter. I would also like to commend our ECU Facilities Team for their round-the-clock work in helping clear campus and making roads and sidewalks more navigable.

You will hear us ask for patience and understanding many times in the weeks to come but for other reasons, as we begin demolition of Martin Hall and a section of Brockton in order to build a couple of badly needed new residence halls. The razing and subsequent construction have necessitated a reconfiguration of our parking spaces and will, no doubt, create some temporary issues for many of us. The construction fencing will be erected around Martin Hall on February 6, 2016. The parking currently utilized in that lot will be unavailable. Hence, the creation of employee parking in the Lancaster Lot. Handicapped spots will be provided. Please see the map below which has been circulated widely in our efforts to keep everyone informed.



At its meeting last week, the Board of Regents authorized the University to proceed with finalizing a facilities lease with F2 Companies/Grand Campus Properties LLC, our first public-private partnership, for the construction of these two new halls. It was an historic day for EKU, and I know all the short-term inconveniences will be worth it in the long run, as we continue our efforts to attract more of the best-and-brightest students and explore innovative ways to do so.

It was also a long day, but I left Monday's Board meeting encouraged for many reasons.

Executive Vice President Dr. Laurie Carter reported that a new welcome center and student success center will open soon. She also detailed continued improvements in retention and graduation rates amid our records and near-records in overall enrollment and the academic quality of this year's freshman class.

Dr. David McFaddin, executive director of engagement and regional stewardship, told the Board that a large campus and local contingent will converge on Frankfort on Feb. 17 for our annual Colonels at the Capitol Day. He also noted that our regional campus enrollment is on the upswing and that demand is high for EKU's popular Dual Credit program.

Nick Perlick, our vice president for development and alumni relations, noted that giving for the first six months of this current fiscal year easily surpassed totals for the same period the previous fiscal year. The approximately \$3.2 million raised from July through December 2015 was the third-best six-month figure in University history, he said, and \$1.2 million ahead of last year's pace. You might recall that we are coming off our best fundraising year since 2001. Some more exciting news about additional gifts will be forthcoming.

Provost Dr. Janna Vice also shared some very good news related to the latest National Survey of Student Engagement, better known as NSSE. Eastern exceeds similar benchmark institutions and other comparison groups on measures of student engagement, especially in the areas of academic challenge and experiences with faculty.

According to the 2015 Survey, the University's freshmen and seniors alike rated EKU "significantly better" than all its benchmarks and the national average on all academic challenge indicators (higher-order learning, reflective and integrative learning, learning strategies and quantitative reasoning) as well as measures related to experiences with faculty (student-faculty interaction and effective teaching practices).

EKU also fared well in the campus environment category. First-year students and seniors rated Eastern ahead of its benchmarks and the national average in quality of interactions and supportive environment.

In almost every NSSE category, Eastern showed steady improvement over the past three years.

The survey also revealed that the percentage of EKU first-year students and seniors who rated their experience as "excellent" or "good" and who said they would "definitely" or "probably" choose to attend the institution again given the opportunity exceeded the average for benchmarks, southeast public institutions and the nation. In each case, 86-87 percent of the first-year students and seniors responded affirmatively.

These results are the result of concerted efforts on the part of many people and are due, in no small measure, to your diligence and your commitment to personal excellence and to the success of your students. Thank you so much and keep up the good work!

### **In Other News ...**

- A new Scholar House, expected to open on the ECU campus in the summer of 2017, will offer a “transformative” experience for single parents pursuing a college education. This facility, to be built in the 800 area of Brockton, will provide a “one-stop shop” of services. In addition to the 36 two-bedroom apartments, residents will also enjoy an on-site, certified child development facility for up to 80 children; receive counseling; participate in life skills workshops; and be near all the services and amenities of the Richmond campus. Most services are free, while the cost of housing and childcare will be income-based. The \$9.5 million project is primarily funded by the Kentucky Housing Corporation and will be managed by Kentucky River Foothills. Eastern provided the land via a long-term lease. Single parents are given first priority to reside in the House. Residents must be at least 18, be eligible for a Housing Choice voucher, and be full-time students at any degree-granting or specialty institution of higher learning. Pending legislative approval, construction is expected to begin this summer.
- A proposal to involve all ECU students in public service captured the top prize in the University’s first Campus Challenge competition. “Race to the Next Greatest Generation: Making ECU a Force for Good,” developed by four of our construction management faculty members – Scott Arias, Bryan Dyer, Anthony Lamanna and Chengyi Zhang – includes two components: a public service exchange where providers such as Habitat for Humanity and Salvation Army post opportunities for assistance, and an academic requirement that each full-time undergraduate student contribute one hour a week throughout the school year in service. We would be the first public university in Kentucky, and one of just a few nationwide, to adopt such a requirement. The winning team received \$10,000 from the University to begin implementing its plan, which requires \$50,000 in start-up costs. The payoff would be approximately 300,000 volunteer hours contributed each year by Eastern students. The Campus Challenge stemmed from a President’s Suggestion Box in 2013 that encouraged faculty and staff to offer ideas for improvements. Last year, it was decided to model the competition after the Bloomberg Philanthropies’ Mayors Challenge. Thirty-three entries were submitted and then narrowed to five. Our Board of Regents Chair Craig Turner donated \$5,000 to each of what we termed “four second-place winners.” Thanks to all who participated and contributed.
- A newly established doctoral fellowship, the result of a partnership between ECU and the Madison County School District, will allow one Madison County Schools administrator or teacher a year to pursue, with all tuition and fees paid by the

University, an Ed.D. degree in educational leadership and policy studies on the Richmond campus. We selected Madison County Schools Superintendent Elmer Thomas to be the program's first Fellow. Then, each subsequent year, the school system will select one administrator or teacher to participate. Many ECU grads are teachers and administrators in local schools, said this fellowship establishes an even stronger link between the University and the Madison County School District and will help develop the next generation of leaders.

- Undergraduates at ECU and at colleges and universities throughout Kentucky now have another venue to showcase their scholarly and creative work. The multidisciplinary, peer-reviewed Kentucky Journal of Undergraduate Scholarship, housed here at Eastern and the first of its kind in the state, will be published online twice annually and include entries from life sciences, engineering, social sciences, humanities, creative writing and the performance arts. The Journal will be housed at the ECU Libraries Encompass portal, and its online format will enable the Journal to cut costs, accept more submissions and include audiovisual elements. Submissions are invited from undergraduate students at all public, private and community colleges and universities across Kentucky. Students can develop their manuscripts based on their own independent research, faculty-mentored research or existing coursework. They can also revise major scholarly works for submission, including mentored scholarly projects, or papers from capstone courses, independent studies with faculty and thesis projects. Submissions are coming in for the inaugural issue, expected to debut by June 2016. Dr. Jonathan Gore, our director of undergraduate research, is serving as editor-in-chief.
- A \$3.5 million expansion of our Ashland Inc. Fire and Safety Laboratory is now complete; I was honored to speak at a ribbon-cutting last month. Prior to the expansion, conditions for students were quite cramped. Now, two new labs, one for special hazards and one instructional lab, will allow current lab space to be used more efficiently and permit greater flexibility, as we better prepare fire science students for the job market by exposing them to the proper methodology for conducting fire research and newer technology. The expansion doubles the size of the Ashland facility, which opened in 1995. Since then, the number of students in the program has quadrupled. The expansion will also provide a better location to perform additional undergraduate and graduate research, reinforce student learning outcomes by allowing more demonstrations to be conducted within the building and better enable the fire science programs to meet the high standards required by external accrediting bodies.
- ECU Online graduate nursing degree programs are No. 18 in the nation on U.S. News and World Report's 2016 list of best online degree programs. Eastern advanced

significantly in the annual rankings, up from No. 63 one year ago, and was the highest rated Kentucky school to make the list. U.S. News rankings are based on five categories: student engagement, faculty credentials and training, peer reputation, student services and technology, and admissions selectivity. This is the second national accolade EKU's Department of Baccalaureate and Graduate Nursing has received in a month. The online RN to BSN program was ranked No. 11 in the nation by Affordable Colleges, which rates institutions for quality and value.

Lastly, I circulated a note to all faculty and staff last week after Governor Bevin's budget address. In case you missed it, the text is below. We have much work to do and I encourage each of you to get involved in the process of making a case for the value of higher education generally and for EKU particularly.

As always, I am grateful for your continued service. Thank you.

Dear Campus Colleagues:

Undoubtedly you have all read or heard about Governor Bevin's budget presentation made last evening to the General Assembly. I was there with my fellow university presidents and all eight of us held a conference call this morning with the Governor and members of his staff. The bill on our State's pension crisis has come due, and the Governor stressed repeatedly last evening that he will not borrow to get Kentucky out of this hole. In short, he intends to direct \$1.1 billion to the pension system without raising taxes.

What the Governor presented will certainly pose challenges to us, both in the short and long term. Our acute and most pressing task is to carve 4.5% out of our current budget mid-year in this fiscal cycle. Moving forward, we must carve out 9% out of our budget over the next 30 months. This 9% is off our total baseline as currently appropriated; our annual state appropriation is approximately \$68 billion. By 2020 ALL of our state appropriation will be subject to performance funding metrics, and these standards will be developed over the next several months and applied over the next two biennia.

While the Governor chose to exempt several state agencies from the \$650 million in reductions, unfortunately higher education was not one of them. Governor Bevin outlined a whole host of agencies and initiatives to fund and all of them are commendable (e.g., increased pay for police officers and other public safety personnel, reduction in caseloads for social workers, additional resources for prosecutors, and no cuts to Medicaid, etc.). We applaud him for protecting the most vulnerable in our population.

Nevertheless, my fundamental reservation with this approach is that we are addressing the collateral symptoms and outcomes of systemic problems. Education, on the other hand, is an

investment that treats root causes. In the triage of treatment for our Commonwealth's ills, higher education is paramount, and I can promise you that our lobbying efforts in support of ECU will continue unabated and undeterred. But, as always, we cannot make this case alone – we need your help.

When one considers that public higher education will receive \$231 million less in 2018 than we did in 2008 (a 35% reduction), our ranking as the 11th-worst in per-student cuts in America is a brutal reality.

The Governor expressed support of increased latitude for higher education institutions with tuition and fees to help address some of the budgetary shortfalls we will soon face. Governor Bevin reiterated his own belief in our call today that access to education is a privilege, and not a right, and the cost to educate our citizens must fall to those who benefit from those who consume it – students. He used his own experience as an Asian Studies major at Washington and Lee University as an example. The challenge with increased tuition is that it, perforce, reduces the number of scholarship dollars we can provide to qualified students, thus choking off access to education. This is one of my gravest concerns.

While we might have fundamental differences on the societal benefits of liberal arts education for all those who might want it, just as Speaker Stumbo said last night, the budget and the state are Governor Bevin's to manage and lead; he is the chief executive. The Governor is willing to continue conversations with all of us, and our group of presidents is planning another conference call next week.

In the midst of the inevitable cuts we must make to our ongoing budget, there are projects funded through other sources that will soon launch. These will move inexorably forward. Among these are our Public-Private Partnerships for new residence halls and other campus infrastructure improvements. The Governor did not include ANY state-funded capital projects in his budget, nor were agency bond projects listed. He did tell us this morning, however, that we can make the argument for our respective priorities, and he and his staff will consider them on a case-by-case basis. Our agency bond request was \$93 million and this remains our top priority. Funding for state-supported capital projects includes appropriations for our Aviation Program and a new Model Lab School.

Our roots as an educational institution date back to 1874, and Eastern has faced dire funding and other crises in the past. Rest assured that we will survive this recent challenge and emerge more united in our fundamental commitment to providing the very best educational experience to anyone who may want to access it.

Thank you for all you do for Eastern. To paraphrase the poet Samuel Johnson, the spectre of the gallows has a unique way of focusing one's mind. This situation is a sort of financial gallows

for us and will require our best and most focused thinking and effort both individually and collectively.

All of us together, in concert with our administrative and academic team and our Board of Regents, pledge to do whatever it takes to help ECU navigate successfully the challenging times ahead. We will also keep you updated as the legislative session unfolds.

Yours sincerely,

Michael T. Benson

President