

TO: The Eastern Kentucky University Faculty Senate
FROM: Senator Michael T. Benson
DATE: September 6, 2016
RE: September Campus Report

As we enter this new academic year, we have many reasons to be optimistic, even in the face of some challenges and, at times, frustrations.

I want to share some of those with you today.

Never in the history of our University has the need for private support been so great, so I am proud to note that giving is at an all-time high at Eastern. We finished Fiscal Year 2016 with \$8.9 million in gifts and commitments, a nearly 100 percent increase over the previous year, which was our best since 2001. I want to call your attention specifically to a few major gifts that will directly impact academic quality:

- A \$1 million pledge from alumni Ron and Sherrie Lou Noel, the same couple whose gifts made possible our wonderful Studio for Academic Creativity and Reading Porch. The Noels earmarked \$600,000 of their most recent gift to support our efforts to engage students in faculty research.
- A \$1 million pledge from Maribeth and Louis Berman to support a combination of academic and student-focused initiatives. As some of you know, Maribeth is an ECU graduate who formerly served the University in the HR office.
- An anonymous \$1 million bequest for undergraduate student scholarships.
- A \$500,000 gift from Paul and Deborah Chellgren to endow the Chellgren Success Series at our new Student Success Center, which I am pleased to note has gotten off to a great start.

This record level of private support speaks to the confidence our alumni and friends have in the direction of the University and, more specifically, the high quality of our academic programs and faculty. So you, too, deserve much of the credit.

Secondly, of course, is the continued progress on several construction fronts. Much of this will come online for or during the 2017-18 academic year, including Phase 2 of the New Science Building, two new residence halls, a new dining hall, the Scholar House for single parents, and even a pedestrian overpass across the Eastern By-Pass that will better connect our north and south campuses and enhance safety.

I know that the preponderance of construction projects this academic year has resulted in inconveniences for many but, as I have said previously, the time was right to move forward when we did. I appreciate your patience, your understanding and, most of all, your cooperation. As soon as next year, I think we will look back and say that 2016-17 was a transformative year in the life of our University. And I remain confident that the best is yet to come.

I also want to call your attention to two significant honors the University received this summer.

First, Eastern was one of only two institutions in Kentucky and 83 nationwide to receive the 2016 Higher Education Excellence in Diversity (HEED) Award from Insight into Diversity magazine. The award recognizes those institutions that employ best practices in the recruitment and retention of students, and show leadership support for diversity and inclusion. As the publisher noted, the magazine looks for institutions where diversity and inclusion are woven into the work being accomplished across campus. We can all be proud of this honor and of the leadership from our University Diversity Office, headed by Dr. Timothy Forde.

We can also be very proud that Eastern was once again named a “Great College to Work For” by the Chronicle of Higher Education. We were one of only two large four-year institutions in Kentucky to make the list and among only 68 four-year colleges and universities nationwide so honored. This award, too, is a tribute to dedicated faculty and staff members who possess a can-do spirit and commitment to personal and institutional excellence.

A new academic year brings another outstanding Chautauqua lecture series. The theme this year is “Order the Chaos,” and Chautauqua Director Dr. Erik Liddell has lined up some of the nation’s leading scholars and other notables to address the topic from about every possible angle. In the next few weeks alone, we will hear from award-winning journalist and author Maria Hinojosa with “A Latina Perspective on the Politics of 2016” and from Heath High School shooting survivor Missy Jenkins Smith, speaking on “Triumphing over Tragedy.” Other programs throughout the year promise to enrich our understanding and maybe even spur us to action.

Mark your calendar, too, for Homecoming and Reunion Weekend Oct. 20-23. This year, we are combining Homecoming with what was formerly Alumni Weekend every April. The theme this year is “Golden Opportunities,” in recognition of our 50th anniversary of achieving university status. Be watching for further details on what promises to be a memorable four days on our campus.

We pledge to forge ahead despite some of the challenges which have arisen and circumstances beyond our immediate control. Thank you for your continued service to our students and community.

I wish you a most successful and rewarding academic year.