

TO: The Eastern Kentucky University Faculty Senate
FROM: Senator Michael T. Benson
DATE: 1 March 2015
RE: March Senate Report

I think we could all agree that, in some ways, it was a February to forget: from the gun threat early in the month that occupied much of our thoughts and energies to an epic snowstorm that brought the campus and much of the area to a standstill the following week.

Still, in spite of considerable adversity, it was a good month for Eastern. The campus community came together in impressive ways in the wake of the gun threat and again when, just a few days later, Mother Nature left all of us shoveling our way back to normalcy.

It was also another month marked by progress on many fronts and remarkable achievements by our faculty, staff and students. Below are just a few.

Bullhorn Creative Assisting in Development of Brand Strategy

Our mantra for some time now has been “Make No Little Plans.” And, now, we have a valuable partner to help us realize our grand vision.

In early February, Bullhorn Creative, of Lexington, was selected to provide expert guidance in the development of a new brand strategy for the University. Their work reflects a level of boldness we need to advance Eastern at this important time in our history.

Given their ties to this part of the state and that some of their key employees have come out of ECU, they understand us and our target audiences well. They will help us broaden our base and expand our reach and reputation.

Last week, Bullhorn representatives met with an implementation team on campus to begin the work, and you’ll be hearing much more about this initiative in the weeks and months to come. Great things lie ahead for this partnership and for the University.

Diversity Initiative Aims to Help Us All See We’re Part of Same Fabric

A new diversity and inclusion initiative at ECU is aimed at helping each and every one of us understand that we’re all part of the same fabric.

The initiative, headed by Interim Chief Diversity Officer Dr. Sherwood Thompson and a 30-member team from a cross-section of campus, will develop a plan that positively impacts the entire University.

As Dr. Thompson has said, the objective is to send a signal that our primary goal is to sustain Eastern as a welcoming and inclusive community. It’s also part of an effort to centralize diversity initiatives on our campus.

I hope you can attend one of the campus-wide Diversity Summits planned for later this semester. I eagerly anticipate having the Committee’s draft of recommendations by July 1 of this year.

On a related note, congratulations to Dr. Thompson, who is the general editor of a recently-published Encyclopedia of Diversity and Social Justice, a unique, 900-page, two-volume set that covers a broad range of important diversity and social justice themes.

Finalists Announced for Athletics Director

This is a critical juncture for ECU Athletics, and I encourage you to participate in the process to name the individual who will help guide us to even higher levels of excellence – our next Director of Athletics.

Four outstanding finalists are coming to campus March 8-19, and open forums will give the campus community and public a chance to meet each of these individuals and hear what they have to say.

The finalists are Jude A. Killy, senior associate athletics director for external operations at Miami University (Ohio); Stephen Lochmueller, owner and president of Direct Attention Inc.; Derrick Ramsey, director of athletics at Coppin State University; and Christopher Walker, associate athletics director for development at Washington State University.

Each finalist will spend two days on ECU's Richmond campus for a series of meetings and forums.

To see the schedule of open forums and more information on each of the finalists, visit ecu.edu/AD.

Admissions Staff Accepts Challenge, Turns South Laurel Senior into Candy Man™

What makes ECU special?

Ask Chris Butcher when he arrives on campus this fall from South Laurel High School.

It all started as what he considered a good-natured joke.

But when Butcher, a senior at South Laurel High School, tweeted, “@EKUAdmissions better step up their game because (a rival school) sent me some candy,” he soon found out just how seriously Eastern Kentucky University was taking his interest.

Butcher's initial tweet was quickly met by a response from ECU Admissions: “What's your favorite? We will see what we can do.”

Just three days later, with permission from the school's guidance counselor and Butcher's teacher at that time, Fe'Lisa Wilson and Beth Brashears from the ECU Admissions staff, along with a current ECU student and the Colonel mascot, made the 50-mile trek to London and appeared at his South Laurel classroom door with a surprise treat. A basket was filled with not only his favorite candy but also an ECU banner, some ECU shirts, and other University paraphernalia.

Butcher was not alone in feeling special. For the 86 other South Laurel students who had also applied to the University, Wilson and Brashears brought each a bag full of Starbursts with a note that said, “We are bursting with happiness that you're a #FutureColonel.”

The surprise visit and gift basket certainly made a vivid impression on Butcher, and made me proud of our University and of our hard-working Admissions staff.

Eastern, Western Partner to Enhance Worker Safety

The bitter sports rivalry between Eastern and Western pre-dates my arrival here, though I still hear many alumni talk about it and pine for the days when the Colonels will take on the Hilltoppers again.

But it's a new day, a time when institutions, even historic rivals, must pool their resources to better serve the Commonwealth.

In this spirit, I was delighted to see our institutions come together recently to enhance worker safety throughout the western half of the Commonwealth.

Here at Eastern, we house one of only 27 OSHA Training Institute Education Centers in the U.S. Now that Center has partnered with the Division of Extended Learning and Outreach at Western to deliver OSHA safety courses in Bowling Green and Owensboro. This will make safety instruction more seamless, more convenient and less costly for industries in western Kentucky.

EKU will provide all the instructors, curricula and material assignments, as well as process registration, fees and prerequisite verifications. Western will assess needs in the region, promote the courses and provide space and on-site coordination.

Regents Designate Mary Roark as Eastern's Second President

It was a proud day for the University last month when our Board of Regents officially designated Mary Roark as our second president.

As many of you know, Mrs. Roark served 1909-10 – at a time when women couldn't even vote in state or federal elections. She followed her husband, our first president, Ruric Nevel Roark, when he became ill and passed away a few months later. Although her title at the time was "acting president," she was quickly embraced by students, faculty, staff and the public as a legitimate leader in her own right. In addition to her many contributions to our fledgling campus, she was also a leader in the women's suffrage movement and on other social issues.

We hope to hang her portrait at a Founders Day ceremony later this month in the Keen Johnson Building, an event that some of her family members plan to attend.

I am proud now to serve as Eastern's 13th President, but I'm even prouder to serve a University that has seen fit to honor a true pioneer and trailblazer in this fashion.

Mary's official portrait will be unveiled this month as we have invited members of the Roark family to join us in Keen Johnson for the ceremony and a luncheon.

EKU Online Programs Ranked Most Affordable in U.S.

EKU's online degree programs are ranked among the most affordable in the nation. Best Masters Programs published a list of the 50 Most Affordable Online Master's Degree Programs, and EKU Online programs ranked No. 36 overall.

Programs were evaluated based on accreditation, courses offered and cost.

Our online programs have received numerous accolades for quality and affordability. In January 2015, U.S. News placed them among the Top 50 best online bachelor's degree programs, the Top 50 best online graduate degree programs in Education and the Top 100 best online graduate degree programs in Nursing.

Bertee and Retta Faye Adkins Scholarship Established

Some of you, no doubt, remember Dr. Bertee Adkins, who taught business courses here from 1973 until he retired in 1998.

Remembering how he struggled financially when he enrolled at Pikeville College in 1949 and how Eastern further changed his life when he transferred here later, the Floyd County native wanted to do something to help future generations of ECU students achieve their own educational dreams. So he recently established the Dr. Bertee (Bert T.) and Retta Faye (Jett) Adkins Endowed Scholarship for deserving students in our College of Business and Technology.

Public Health Major One of 108 Gilman Scholars Nationwide

Our students continue to compete successfully on the national stage.

One recent and prominent example is Tori Caldwell, a junior public health major and McNair Scholar from Louisville, one of only 108 recipients in the U.S. of the prestigious Gilman International Scholarship.

Caldwell will use the scholarship to travel this summer to Tanzania, where she will study maternal and child health, as well as the frameworks of global health and developing countries.

ECU's Office of National and International Scholarships and Fellowships at ECU assists students with the deliberation and application process. The coordinator is Dr. Minh Nguyen.

Student-Athlete Wins National Honor in Risk Management and Insurance

Many of our student-athletes are outstanding performers in the classroom. Taylor Speaks, Somerset, a member of our football team and a junior risk management and insurance major, is one of only 30 students nationwide selected for the Anita Benedetti Student Involvement Program.

Speaks, a long snapper for the Colonels and a 4.0 student, will attend the Risk Management Society's four-day annual conference this April in New Orleans. The highly competitive national award covers the cost of Speaks' registration, travel, lodging and meals. Also, Speaks will be paired with a mentor from the RIMS Student Advisory Council.

This marks the third consecutive year that an ECU student has been chosen for the program. No other student from a Kentucky college or university was selected this year.

Three Students Participate in Nationwide Train Jam

Three students in our video game development program, the only such program in Kentucky, are enjoying a unique trans-continental experience: a 52-hour Train Jam on which they and 27 students from across the U.S., Netherlands and Australia are developing games while on an Amtrak trip from Chicago to California.

The event, which culminates with the students demonstrating their games at the Game Developers Conference in San Francisco March 2-6, allows our trio to go through the same steps of design and development, but with a team of professional and amateur developers they have never met.

Besides providing an enrichment activity for the students, their participation in the Train Jam and Conference raises the national profile of the ECU program.

Participating students are Mark Cahalan, Austin Areaux and Daniel Marifjeren.

ECU to Host International “Living with Animals” Conference March 19-21

Presenters and attendees from at least 11 countries will converge on our campus March 19-21 for the second biennial “Living with Animals Conference.”

The event is sponsored by our Animal Studies program, the only such undergraduate program in the world. The sessions, much like the ECU academic program, are quite multidisciplinary in content, blending psychology, gender studies, literature, the arts, law, agriculture, ethics and many more diverse disciplines.

Naturally, in the Horse Country of the Bluegrass, several sessions are devoted to the horse. Other sessions focus on a wide range of animals – dogs, cats, elephants, whales and apes and more.

One of the more interesting sessions is an exhibit devoted to the art of Chantek. No, that’s not some long-forgotten artist from medieval times but an orangutan raised in a human setting at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, where he learned gestural signs based on American Sign Language and began to finger paint at about two years of age. At first, he exhibited patterns and techniques similar to young children. In later years, his paintings came to resemble Asian calligraphy. He also completed a variety of simple craft projects.

Thanks for your continued service to ECU and our community.