

TO: Eastern Kentucky University Faculty Senate
FROM: Senator Michael Benson
RE: October Faculty Senate Report
DATE: October 5, 2015

Though we were unsuccessful in our bid to land a presidential or vice presidential debate for 2016, there's no debating the fact that the first full month of our 2015-16 academic year was full of progress and achievements of which we can all be proud.

As you know, we welcomed our largest-ever freshman class, part of what will be or very close to a record overall enrollment with approximately 17,000 students. It's also our best-prepared freshman class, with higher average ACT scores and high school GPAs than previous classes.

A few years back, the University introduced programs aimed at reducing the need among incoming freshmen for developmental classes. Not surprisingly, the number of students entering with developmental needs is down from 31 percent two years ago to 21 percent this year.

Another encouraging trend is the number of freshmen enrolling in STEM disciplines. In addition to the outstanding faculty in these fields, this can also be attributed to our New Science Building, only half of which has even been built. Most impressively 33 freshmen are majoring in physics, up from just seven a year ago, and the number of freshman chemistry majors increased from 85 to 121. Once the second phase is completed by late 2017, I am confident EKU will be even more of a magnet for those seeking to go into STEM fields.

One of the beneficiaries of our revamped merit scholarship model, and additional funds to attract more of the best and brightest students, is our Honors Program, where the incoming class is also among the best ever. As Interim Director Dr. David Coleman described, "We are truly beginning to witness the growing perception of EKU as one of the top choices for motivated and high-achieving students from across the Commonwealth and beyond."

College of Education Peer Mentoring Program

Retention is another driver of our overall enrollment numbers. In our College of Education, every freshman has an upperclassman peer mentor. By all indications, the program is achieving the desired results, with freshman-to-sophomore retention rates on the rise.

Bluegrass Academic Leadership Academy

I am pleased to note that seven of our faculty members recently completed the second annual Bluegrass Academic Leadership Academy. Ryan Baggett, Lisa Day, Kellie Ellis, Eric Fuchs, Gill Hunter, Evelyn Parrish and Jennifer Wies are among 48 Fellows from 12 colleges and universities throughout central Kentucky.

The Academy is sponsored by the Bluegrass Higher Education Consortium, of which I am honored to serve as co-chair along with John Roush, President of Centre College.

Incidentally, three of those seven were also members of our inaugural President's Leadership in Action Academy: Drs. Baggett, Ellis and Wies.

I am confident that our investment in building our leadership capacity will continue to pay big dividends down the road – at the University, in our communities, in their respective academic disciplines and throughout our profession.

Student Project Aimed at Enhancing Economic Expansion in Madison County

Many of our students make significant contributions to the Richmond community and communities throughout the region through various projects.

One recent example comes from our Global Supply Chain Management program in the School of Business, where two seniors worked with faculty to design a Madison County Supply Chain Assessment Survey aimed at assisting local manufacturers and facilitating economic expansion in the county.

Even better, the survey has a universal applicability that, with minimal modifications, makes it pertinent to other counties. In fact, the program has already heard from economic development leaders in Frankfort asking about just that possibility.

Senior Participates in Cystic Fibrosis Research Program to Help Nephew

It's always uplifting when our students use their education to help others who have suffered some misfortune.

Consider senior Molly Bates, a biology and pre-medical sciences major from Pikeville and one of our GURUs, who was one of only two students nationwide selected by the Elizabeth Nash Foundation for Cystic Fibrosis Research to participate in a prestigious research program this past summer in Oakland, California.

The object of Molly's passion is her four-year-old nephew, Liam, who has cystic fibrosis. In fact, it was Liam's diagnosis that led Molly to pursue a career as a physician and gave her the desire to combat the disease more directly, to tackle the cause of CF and join others at the forefront of CF research.

New Wheel Helps Senior Pursue Passion for Pottery

Another heartwarming story comes from our Department of Art and Design, where a new pottery wheel is helping a wheelchair-bound senior pursue her passion.

When it became apparent that Rebecca Perritt would not be able to throw her pottery on any of the wheels in the ceramics lab, Foundation Professor Joe Molinaro intervened. He approached a leading pottery wheel manufacturer to design a special wheel – even if it cost the department as much as \$3,000 – just for Perritt's use. (It turns out the company donated the wheel so ECU could serve as a test site before it's introduced to the general market.)

Rebecca, who plans to pursue a master's degree and her own career as a college professor, was overjoyed to use the wheel for the first time Sept. 9.

As Professor Molinaro said, the efforts on Rebecca's behalf "demonstrate our commitment to our students, regardless of their personal restrictions, in this case being handicapped. We are dedicated to our students' success, even if it requires us to find new and creative ways to meet their individual needs. For us in the art department, like all areas on campus I am sure, we think it should always be 'students first' and that we should do all we can to help them succeed, regardless of the obstacles presented."

And Finally. . .

We might have missed out on a presidential or vice presidential debate for next year but, in less than three weeks, the ECU Center for the Arts will host a gubernatorial debate. That debate is scheduled for the evening of Sunday, Oct. 25 and will be telecast to a statewide audience.

And, yes, we will persist in our efforts to land a presidential or vice presidential debate. Hopefully, 2020 will be our year.

The past few days have also been very memorable for campus as we officially dedicated space within the basement of the Crabbe Library in honor of the late Charles Bracelen Flood. I have attend many dedicatory services during my career, but the program put together by Dean Betina Gardner and her staff was probably the best one I have ever enjoyed. And my opinion on this is not unique – many others have come to me over the past 48 days and said the same thing.

While the ECU Football Colonels came up a tad short in overtime on Saturday night against UK in Commonwealth Stadium, many have told me how impressed they were with the caliber of our student-athletes and the quality of our coaching staff. To the University of Kentucky's credit, a special moment honoring the memory of ECU student-athlete, Joey Kraemer, was held before kickoff. As you know, Joey was tragically killed in car accident on September 27th. Two buses of his teammates traveled to Kettering, Ohio, on Sunday afternoon to attend the memorial service for Joey. Nothing is more tragic or sobering than when we lose members of our ECU Family.

Thank you for your continued service to our campus and community.