

To: EKU Faculty Senate

From: Senator Michael T. Benson

RE: April Faculty Senate Report

Date: April 1, 2019

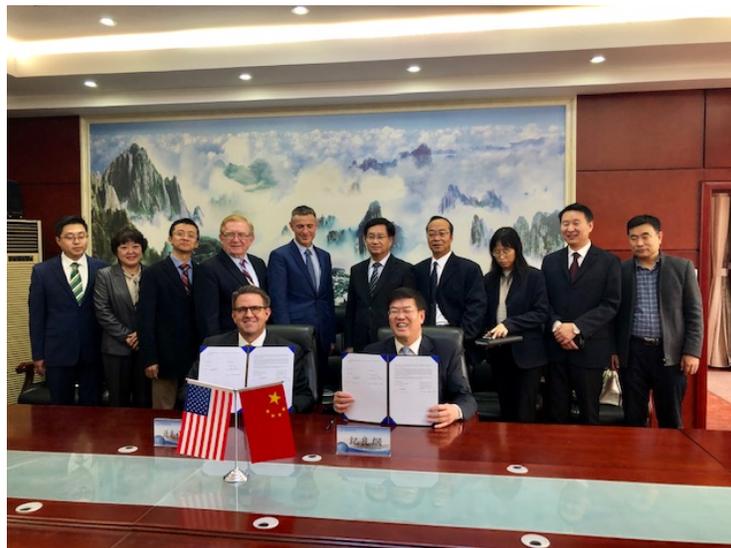
I hope everyone had a great spring break. As we head down the road to wrapping up another semester, I appreciate the hard work undertaken by the Senate and all our colleagues at the University that help make a rewarding “Eastern Experience” for our students.

China Trip

Just last week, I returned from a trip to China with Dean Tom Erekson. The EKU delegation also included Dr. Weiling Zhuang from the Department of Management, Marketing and International Business and Dr. Tom Butler from the Department of English and Theatre.

While in China, our delegation participated in MOU signing ceremonies at six Chinese universities, primarily in the Hebei Province region. Together with the presidents of these Chinese universities, I signed MOU’s on behalf of EKU to foster cooperation and to work on developing detailed student and faculty exchange agreements in the coming months.

Dr. Butler participated as part of the delegation to assess the possibility of EKU faculty teaching English courses in China, immediately before the Chinese students transfer to EKU, to improve their English skills and help assure that their language skills will allow them to succeed at EKU. There are all sorts of blue-sky possibilities for the institution as the State of Kentucky is ramping up its efforts to strengthen ties with China on economic, educational, and cultural fronts.





ARC Grant for Aviation Technicians

Once again, EKU recognized a problem and has addressed it. The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) through its POWER (Partnerships for Opportunity and Workforce and Economic Revitalization) Initiative has announced an investment of \$1,463,927 in Eastern Kentucky University's "Kentucky's Appalachia Aviation Maintenance Technician Training" project. As you have possibly heard, there is a significant shortfall of pilots in our country. As this crisis becomes more acute, it naturally follows that there is also a shortage of technicians to mechanically enhance and repair planes. For those that prefer to keep their feet on the ground, there will soon be options for them to work in the aviation industry.

Our Office of Regional Stewardship spearheads the acquisition of the grant. The 18-month program, slated to begin training students in January 2020, will be partially taught in traditional classrooms on the partnering college campuses: Hazard Community & Technical College; Big Sandy Community and Technical College; EKU Manchester; EKU Corbin; and EKU Richmond. Upper-level training classes will take place at partnering regional airports: Wendell H. Ford Regional Airport, Hazard; Big Sandy Regional Airport; London-Corbin Airport; and Central Kentucky Regional Airport, Richmond.

House Bill 358

As you know, pension reform has been EKU's top legislative priority as the Commonwealth's pension crisis continues to threaten our ability to provide opportunity to future generations of Kentuckians. Late Thursday afternoon, HB 358 was reviewed in committee, then voted on and passed by both the Senate and the House. It is now on its way to the Governor's desk to sign into law. I cannot say enough about the hard work of our EKU team in helping shepherd this

legislation through to its passage, and would specifically like to recognize Dr. David McFaddin and Mr. Ethan Witt for their efforts. I've seen firsthand how effective our lobbying efforts are in Frankfort thanks to these dedicated and capable employees and we are all the beneficiaries of their collective years of experience.

Major components of HB 358 will allow us relief from sharp increases in contribution percentages to the KERS pension system. Specifics of the bill include the following:

- New hires to ECU after January 2019 will participate in a University-sponsored optional retirement plan (ORP)
- KERS employees hired after 2014 (Tier III) will be moved into the ORP
- Employees hired before 2014 will have the option to remain in the KERS system or opt into ORP plan

Additional details regarding this legislation and its impact on our employees are being shared with campus and resources and information will be made available to everyone to ensure the best possible decisions can be made by each individual.

Students Abroad

One of my favorite events each academic year is when our students gather in O'Donnell Hall to spin an oversized wheel for study-abroad scholarships. From the British Isles, to Germany and Spain, 16 of our students walked away with scholarships to a variety of locations worldwide. But the big story here is that 16 lives will be forever changed by experiences that open their minds and hearts in an untold number of ways. You can read more about it here:

<https://stories.eku.edu/events/spin-wheel-travel-globe>

Veterans Affairs

Barbara Kent, recently-named Director of Military and Veteran Affairs at Eastern Kentucky University, has experienced the university as a "school of opportunity" firsthand. A military veteran, Kent came to ECU in 2010 as a temporary, part-time administrative assistant without a college degree. Now, in addition to earning a director position, she is preparing to graduate in May with a master's degree – the first in her family to do so.

Additionally, Eastern Kentucky University's online degree programs rank among the best for military members and veterans. ECU Online earned a "gold" rating and was named fifth on Military Friendly Schools' Top Ten list of online and vocational schools. ECU was also awarded a "bronze" ranking overall for its outstanding commitment to military students, the highest distinction awarded to any Kentucky university.

Online programs continue to rank nationally

For the eighth consecutive year, *U.S. News & World Report* has ranked ECU Online degree programs among the best in the nation. Eastern Kentucky University ranked in the top 30 for Best Online Graduate Nursing Programs. The university also ranked in the top 100 for Best Online Bachelor's Degree Programs and Best Online Graduate Education Programs.

Scholars Week

The annual Scholars Week will take place April 8-12, 2019, and will feature the scholarly and creative work of faculty and students from across campus. Held annually each April, Scholars Week celebrates, showcases, and promotes the rich culture of faculty, student, and faculty-student scholarship, research, and creative endeavors. All members of the ECU community are welcome to participate in Scholars Week activities.

Thanks for your continued service to ECU and our students. Best of luck as we push forward toward the end of the academic year.