

TO: The Eastern Kentucky University Faculty Senate

FROM: Senator Michael T. Benson

DATE: November 2, 2018

RE: October Campus Report

If you ever wonder if what we do here at Eastern makes a difference, consider Stephen Jones. You may have seen the recent story about our junior psychology major who has endured all kinds of adversity to pursue his dream of a college degree and a rewarding career.

His parents separated when he was 9. Twice in his childhood, an older brother was tried for murder, found innocent both times. When he was in the seventh grade, Stephen's body was grazed by a drive-by shooter. A year later, he lost a close friend to gun violence. Then, as a high school football standout, he sustained a series of knee injuries immediately prior to his sophomore season.

Stephen was more fortunate than some – he had a mother in his life who constantly preached the value of education. So now this Rodney Gross and McNair Scholar with a 3.2 GPA is planning to pursue master's and doctoral degrees in clinical psychology, with an eye toward working perhaps with the Federal Bureau of Prisons. His immediate goal? Help his mother retire in 10-12 years.

Just another reason why we should all be excited to come to work each and every day.

Consider, too, the case of Jennifer Perkins, a junior journalism and history major from London, Kentucky, whose work with our Eastern Progress so impressed the judges that she was recently named Communication **Professional** of the Year by the Kentucky Communications Association. When our students are earning Professional of the Year awards for their work as students, we can take heart in two truths: we are blessed with some outstanding students, and we're doing right by them.

During his nearly 30 years with us, Dr. Frank O'Connor certainly made an impression on his economics students, on his profession and on our Commonwealth. So it was great to see Dr. O'Connor receive the 2018 Distinguished Economist Award recently from the Kentucky Economic Association. It was a richly deserved honor for an outstanding educator and practitioner.

Elsewhere on campus, our mock trial program has picked up where it left off last year, achieving a second-place finish in its first tournament of the year in early October. And team captain Ryan Wiggins, who is also our SGA president and student regent, pulled off the

impressive feat of winning both Outstanding Witness and Outstanding Attorney awards on opposite sides of the case.

The academic quality of our student body, and the exemplary work of our faculty and staff, is also reflected in the steady improvement in our four-year graduation rate, which this fall stands at 32.7 percent, an all-time record high for the institution and more than double where we were just eight years ago. Our six-year graduation rate is also at a record high of nearly 51 percent, up 34 percent over eight years ago. Not coincidentally, this has been accompanied by a steady rise in the average GPA and ACT Composite scores of our incoming freshman classes. Our expanded merit scholarship program has been a critical factor in these improvements.

In other news, the services and positive environment we offer military veterans continue to bring us national attention. In the latest “Best for Vets” rankings from *Military Times* magazine, Eastern is 12th nationally, up from 14th a year ago. We are the highest ranking school in Kentucky or any adjacent state.

I was delighted last month to sign a charter that will serve as the organizational backbone of the University’s ombud office. The charter details the responsibilities and limitations of the ombud, provides a framework for how the work of conflict resolution gets done and advises faculty and staff on what they can expect when they call on the ombud. As Ombud Joan Beck has said, by addressing and resolving any conflicts that arise as early as possible, we have the opportunity to improve job performance and morale, and deepen job satisfaction.

Lastly, please allow me a moment of personal privilege to plug a book project which has eaten up any spare time that my co-author, Hal Boyd, and I had for the past two years. *College for the Commonwealth: A Case for Higher Education in American Democracy* is now out from University Press of Kentucky, and we hope that this work will help facilitate discussions about the important role that our institutions of higher education play in the furtherance of the democratic values, principles and practices that we all cherish as Americans. Joseph Beth Booksellers was kind enough to host me Thursday night for a discussion and book signing and the attached flyer, from the University of Kentucky, details the upcoming Kentucky Book Festival.

Thank you for your continued service to ECU and our students.