



Eastern Connecticut State University President Elsa Nunez, second from left, with the 12th class of Eastern Fellows: Cody Guarnieri, a 2009 grad, Larry Smith, a 1977 graduate, and Justin Piro, who graduated in 2005. Courtesy of ECSU

Trio is inducted into Eastern Fellows

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CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

WILLIMANTIC — Three more alumni were inducted into the Eastern Fellows Program at Eastern Connecticut State University this fall.

The 12th class of the fellows program was inducted Oct. 23 during a luncheon, and its members were also part of a panel discussion and classroom visits during their return to ECSU.

The three inductees were Cody Guarnieri of the Class of 2009, Justin Piro of the Class of 2005 and Laurens “Larry” Smith of the Class of 1977.

Guarnieri is now a law firm partner at Brown, Paindiris and Scott, a departure from his original career plan when he started as a freshman at ECSU.

He originally majored in education, but, after job shadowing a high school teacher, he realized it wasn’t his call-

Special Neighbor

ing, and that studies in political history and logic, along with analytical discussions with Father Larry LaPointe at the campus ministry program, were more interesting to him.

“That was the end of my teaching career,” Guarnieri said.

After ECSU, he went on to the University of Connecticut’s law school and said his undergraduate education prepared him well for that.

“I did not feel any disadvantage compared to my peers,” he said.

Piro helps develop pharmaceutical therapies for neurological disorders and brain injuries as the principal research scientist at AbbVie’s

Foundational Neuroscience Center.

At ECSU, he was a biochemistry major and had a work-study job in the biology department, which led

him to summer research work at Wesleyan University and a doctorate from Dartmouth Medical School.

Piro said the skills he learned as part of his liberal arts education helped him in his scientific work, and the

academics overall were of high quality.

“We can develop technical knowledge, but if you can’t think critically or communicate effectively, that knowledge is useless,” he said. “We got to know all of the biology

professors on a one-to-one basis. This is one of the benefits of a school like Eastern.”

Smith is the interim vice president of the Utah State University system and a former research professor at Idaho State University.

Smith said ECSU’s undergraduate requirement of a literature course was not something he was excited about initially, but he developed an appreciation for the skills he learned through liberal arts courses, which helped him write grant proposals and research papers through his graduate studies at the University of Kansas’ physiology program and during his career.

“Scientists are great storytellers,” he said. “Stories give science meaning and make it come alive.”

The newest honorees join 32 other alumni who have been inducted into the program since 2008.