

**State of the University
University Meeting
August 25, 2011**

Greetings everyone! To our newcomers, welcome to Eastern! It is great to have everyone back on campus. I hope that all of you have had a restful summer.

Stephen Covey, author of such books as “The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People,” talks about two circles in our lives — the “circle of influence” and the “circle of concern.” The circle of concern includes all the things that we cannot impact that nonetheless affect our own lives. The circle of influence includes those things that we can have some bearing on.

Clearly today, there is much in this world to be concerned about. The global economy, the challenges facing our leaders in Washington, D.C., the turmoil in the world’s financial markets and unemployment. People are fighting for democracy. In so many countries people are dying to end oppressive regimes. There are many things these days to be alarmed about.

The circle of influence for those of us at Eastern is a much smaller circle, but it is this circle of influence that I want to focus on today. That is not to say we should not be attentive to the bigger issues facing our country and the world. But in the end, we can agree that it is important to do our part where we live and work. So I want to spend a few minutes today talking about what is happening here at Eastern, where each of us can and should have a direct influence.

At Eastern, not all is bad news. In fact, I have a number of positive things to report to you today. First of all, what do you think of our new entrance? Does it make you think of “Connecticut’s public liberal arts university?” Imagine how our guests, visitors and potential students will feel when they enter our grounds now. I think it is an entrance fitting our beautiful campus, and it was long overdue. A special thanks to Nancy Tinker and her staff who always deliver projects on time and within budget.

There are other good things to report. For the first time in 20 years, through your prudence and careful management, we have saved money and begun to set aside money for our reserves, something that the Board of Trustees had asked us to accomplish. Is that not wonderful! For the first time in 20 years, Eastern has modest reserves. This shows we are a mature and well run institution. Yes, there are many good reasons to feel good about what you do each day at Eastern. It has not been easy; these are difficult times for us, for everyone in public service in Connecticut — for our entire nation. But you have worked together as a community, and accomplished a great deal.

That is why I am so pleased to be able to share with you that, for the third year in a row, Eastern has received recognition by the Chronicle of Higher Education as a Great College to Work For.

The competition keeps getting stiffer, and we are actually improving our position for this great distinction. This year we were recognized in four areas: Shared Governance; Senior Leadership; Compensation; and Campus Facilities and Safety.

This recognition is a symbol of our greatest strength — you the employees! The values, goals, mission, and spirit of collegiality that we all share puts us in position to meet any challenge and as we all know, over the last three years we have.

This common sense of purpose was manifest in another way this past year, during our NEASC reaccreditation. We conducted an extensive self-study and Eastern was rewarded with a renewed accreditation and a road map for improvement opportunities. Let me read from the

letter I received from Mary Jo Maydew, chair of NEASC's Commission on Institutions of Higher Education on May 31st.

“We commend Eastern for an exceptionally thorough and candid self-study that documented the institution’s notable progress since the last comprehensive evaluation. We concur with the visiting team that strong presidential leadership has engendered a sense of community and transparency throughout the University, and that shared institutional commitment has contributed to a focused sense of mission, alignment of resources to meet that mission, and commitment to the strategic planning process. We note with favor that the institution’s revision of the liberal arts core has been both ambitious and forward-thinking. We particularly commend the institution’s focus on student success and its detailed attention to the retention and graduation rates of different segments of its student population. With its strong leadership, dedicated faculty and staff, and its well-managed infrastructure and facilities, Eastern is solidly positioned for future success.”

Well done, my friends! I want to thank Nicole Krassas and Richard Silkoff for their faculty leadership in the NEASC process. In addition to these inspirational words, Dr. Maydew outlined five areas of improvement that will help frame our next strategic planning process, which will begin next year. I will come back to the Strategic Plan in a few minutes. Those five areas include assessment of the liberal arts core; achieving greater balance in our faculty staffing; evaluating online offerings; coordinating multi-level planning; and governance (Board of Regents) and budgeting. We will speak to the issues in greater detail at the January 2012 University Meeting when Rhona Free will lead discussion of the NEASC report; for now I wanted to share the tone of the accreditation continuance letter with you and again, tell you how proud I am of the hard work all of you put into the self-study and reaccreditation process.

I was chair of NEASC when Harvard and Yale were accredited. I had a dream that the day Eastern was accredited we would receive the same response from NEASC as they did and guess what? We did. They asked us to submit a five-year report like Yale and Harvard and nothing else. I was so proud and excited when we received the news. Again, congratulations to everyone who assisted in getting us to this outstanding point of external validation.

Dr. Maydew spoke of our clarity of mission in her letter. We really do know who we are! On your table, in addition to details on our Great Colleges to Work For designation, you will also see a reprint of a piece that the Christian Science Monitor ran last month.

I share it with you for two reasons. First of all, it articulates our emerging vision for the liberal arts, one that marries the traditional values of scholarship, inquiry, and dialog found in a liberal education with the practical applications of knowledge that we can offer our students today. Secondly, the fact our brand of education was interesting enough to be given a full page in an international publication is one more indicator that we are doing things right at Eastern.

You may also have seen an article earlier this summer in USA TODAY's newspaper, one that ranked Eastern number one in the commitment and rigor of our students as they continue to go out into our community to provide community service and participate in service learning activities. We were one and Stanford was two – I was extremely delighted to see that. The truth is that Universities were not ranked, but I like to say that we were number one.

The Center for Community Service has been a successful initiative fully implemented from the Strategic Plan. The faculty members who are engaged in creating service learning opportunities, and our students, continue to demonstrate that today's generation is determined to make a difference in the lives of others. I have confidence in this generation of young people.

Two weeks ago, we heard from yet another national publication. The Princeton Review has again rated Eastern as one of the Northeast's Best Colleges. I think it is worth noting that we have been receiving some of these accolades on a recurring basis. It would be easy to become complacent about such awards. The truth is, they are highly competitive and we are consistently receiving them. That is a sign of our stability and the quality of our educational enterprise. That is nothing to be complacent about!

Finally, in terms of national recognitions and accomplishments, we have just been admitted as members of the prestigious New Leadership Alliance for Student Learning and Accountability. This national advocacy group is committed to gathering, reporting on and using evidence to improve student learning in American undergraduate education, and we are pleased to be a part of this important initiative. We, of course, want to know how effective we are in educating our students. This important organization work will help us to better understand our strengths and our weaknesses.

Not everything we do gets national press attention, but I have a number of academic achievements and initiatives that you should also know about. As our tagline says, "A Liberal Education. Practically Applied." is the educational promise we provide our students. Our Liberal Arts Work committee continues to refine our experiential learning offerings and we are seeing a number of new employers working with our academic departments and the Office of Career Services to provide more internship and cooperative education opportunities.

One of our concerns has been the challenges faced by students in travelling to off-campus internships — lack of transportation, gas prices, time expended, and other considerations make it a big hurdle for some students. We have come up with a revolutionary idea. This fall, we are opening an onsite internship center in Winthrop Hall where CIGNA and other companies will hire our students to perform information technology services. These interns will work right here on campus and are being paid well. This is a unique program that has not been tried elsewhere; we are creating a new paradigm. It is outsourcing to us — to a University — not to an out-of-state location. Let's see how we do and in what ways we can expand this idea. It has a great deal of potential.

On another front, faculty AND students are being recognized for their research. Mathematics Professor Anthony Aidoo's paper, "Effect of channel geometry on the electrostatic potential in **acetylcholine** channels," published in *Mathematical Biosciences* in 2003, has been selected as one of the "top ten articles of all time published in the same domain." It is an amazing accomplishment! Also, in October, ten of our students will participate in COPLAC's undergraduate research conference at Keene State, which supports our goal of providing our undergraduates research opportunities at Eastern.

One of the things we are trying to stress is making high impact practices available to all our students, including those from low-income families. Our Foundation recently funded a \$30,000 scholarship fund to help such students participate in global field experiences. This past year, 31 percent of all global field experience students were Pell eligible, which exceeds our overall percentage of 23 percent. So we are making headway in giving students with significant financial need more opportunities. I remember having a long conversation with Professor Richard Jones-Bamman during the Strategic Planning Process in which we debated what it meant to be an elite institution. He looked at me and said softly, "President Núñez, we can be elite without being elitist," and so here we are today ensuring that all students regardless of economic background are participating in all that Eastern has to offer.

Our commitment to access is found in other initiatives as well. For instance, our Dual Enrollment program (The Hartford Program) enters its fourth year and has expanded to include students from Manchester High School. And we have a small cohort of seven students from the New Haven Promise program — This is a special program where students from New Haven received scholarships based on attendance and performance in high school to come to Eastern.

So where are we with our Strategic Plan? We continue to make progress on our Strategic Plan. For instance, the strategy to better coordinate events on campus is being implemented and will make scheduling and hosting events more efficient, and we hope, more successful. We were in five different offices, often causing confusion for everyone. That will now be fixed. In the area of global citizenship, we are seeing an increase in global field course participation, with a focus on supporting more low-income students to participate, and we now have several Dean's Cup events identified as fulfilling portions of the global citizenship requirement. We have implemented this initiative successfully.

Also, just as I mentioned that we are trying to find ways to help more students from low-income families engage in global field courses, we are also working to do the same in the area of internships. It appears to be paying off. The percentage of students who are Pell eligible participating in internships is 26 percent, which is higher than our overall average.

Of course, we are also working hard to increase the number of internships available to all students and I already mentioned the CIGNA project happening at Winthrop this fall. We are also working with other employers to provide more placements. I remember talking to Rhona Free and Imna Arroyo during the Strategic Planning process about "Centers of Excellence, a concept the previous administration had developed." They both discouraged me from pursuing this idea, but instead inspired me to rethink the role of developing academic excellence and this Exemplary Program idea took hold in the Strategic Plan.

The Exemplary Program initiative in the Strategic Plan continues to gain momentum: a standard reporting template has been developed, several departments have volunteered to conduct program self-assessments this year, and for the first time two departments will be selected to receive additional resources in 2012-13 in support of their efforts to gain regional and national distinction that is to be exemplary. We are leading new ground in the area of assessment where our faculty are leading the process. In the May University meeting, I will give you a full report of all 18 initiatives in the Strategic Plan and lay out for you where we are on each. Next year, we will begin the second Strategic Plan in my Presidency.

It will not, however, start from scratch as we did years ago. We will build on what we have already done by letting go strategies that did not work, continuing those that need more time and securing long-term funding for everything that was implemented successfully. This will be the basis for the next planning process. I will be calling on many of you to help "figure it out" as I did five years ago. I hope you will come forward – it will be a different process, but I will count on this community to be involved.

These are just a few of the good news stories we can use to motivate each other in the coming months. We will need all of that inspiration and good will as we face some of the challenges we are currently confronting. Let me share some of those with you and how we are responding to them.

BUDGET

Several years ago, I said that our financial challenges constituted a five-year problem. We are now in year four of the five year phase, and perhaps we are starting to see light at the end of the tunnel.

This past week, the majority of the membership of the 15 unions representing public employees in this state ratified the concessions agreement between Governor Malloy's administration and the State Employees Bargaining Agreement Coalition. If you live anywhere near the state of Connecticut, you know that the outcome of this process was in doubt all the way until the end. For the past 3-4 months, newspapers, radio stations, TV stations, blogs, and other news media have been full of stories about the state budget and the potential for disaster if the unions had not agreed to the concessions.

Since the agreement impacts all of us, I thought I would provide a quick summary. You may have this all committed to memory by now, but it is worth a quick review.

1. There is a two-year pay freeze, followed by 3 percent increases in Fiscal Years 2014, 2015, and 2016. Adjustments for any increases in these first few payrolls of Fiscal Year 2012 will be made on the front end of Fiscal Year 2014.
2. There is a four-year commitment by the state to no layoffs.
3. The Governor's staff clarified that Sustinet is not a health care option.
4. A voluntary Health Enhancement Plan identifies five chronic conditions and is aimed at assisting people with those conditions.
5. A new mail-order program for maintenance medications has been put into place.
6. New employees must meet a 15-year service requirement to be eligible for retiree health benefits.
7. Overall, the concession agreement protects state employee health coverage through 2022.
8. Employees not now contributing to the Retiree Health Care Trust will begin making contributions on July 1, 2013, starting at ½ of 1 percent and moving up to 3% annually.
9. There is also new language regarding longevity, overtime, and pensions.

Certainly here at Eastern, the concession agreement makes a critical difference in how we are going to be able to operate during the next two years. In pure dollar terms, it amounts to an estimated \$6 million. That is the amount I would have had to find to give to the Governor if the concessions had been rejected a second time. It would have been a very lean, unhappy, miserable time for us at Eastern. Now, I have the dollars that the Governor is seeking to alleviate the state's budget.

However, it is not to say that we are totally out of the woods as it is. I think the difference between what our immediate future is likely to be and what it would have been if the concessions had not been approved is night and day.

I want to thank everyone here who was willing to make the sacrifices necessary to keep our workforce together and to ensure that the progress we have made the past few years continues.

So where do we stand on the financial and organizational fronts? Ralph Waldo Emerson said that "man is great, not in his goals but in his transitions." Economic downturns provide surprisingly rich moments for presidents and their faculty and staff members to review long-term goals and we have been doing exactly that from the last four years.

Fiscal Year 2010-11

In terms of our budget, I want to first recap what we did in the fiscal year that just ended. For one thing, we were able to save sufficient operating and personnel funds to set aside \$2.1 million to accommodate the 27th payroll this next June. Through your judicious management of our resources, we were also able to respond to the Board of Trustees mandate and set aside \$1 million for reserves. We also benefited from approximately \$700,000 in lower energy costs, thanks to your conservation efforts. Thank you again for your hard work and sacrifices. We

cannot manage our limited resources without the active participation of everyone in this room. Again, thank you very much for your support. We ended up with a balanced budget that met all the demands before us.

Fiscal Year 2011-12

Now let me talk about fiscal year 2011-12. The original 2012 budget called for \$41.7 million in state funds and a total revenue budget of \$115.9 million, including a modest 2.5 percent increase in tuition and fees. We were then asked to help balance the state budget, and our state funding was reduced by \$2.1 million.

I already mentioned that the concessions package approved last week amounts to an estimated \$6 million (I am not sure of that amount – It is an estimate.) in savings we will not retain at Eastern over the next two years — an estimated \$2.3 million this year and \$3.2 million next year go to the Governor. This is a significant amount of money for an institution our size, especially given the operating fund cuts we have already faced the past three years. But we have the money to give the Governor and that is the good news!.

The only way we were able to get to this point was for public employees across Connecticut to continue to be willing to make personal sacrifices to maintain essential services to our citizens and keep our workforce together so that we can continue to serve our students. This is the second concession package that our state workers have approved in three years, and it is no small matter. But we are all sharing in that burden, and we know that without these sacrifices, our University and our entire state would have suffered greatly.

In addition to the concessions package, it is possible that the new Board of Regents may provide additional financial relief next spring in the form of a reasonable tuition/fee increase for fall 2012. If that happens, we will use these additional funds to help support our operations.

Mind you, we are not out of danger yet when it comes to our budget. We will be given an amount to cut shortly by the System Office. In light of the international economic situation, restraint, prudence, and caution are the order of the day. And we must continue to meet our enrollment and housing goals to maintain a balanced budget. This is the basis of our budget. This is extremely hard work which is done very well by Chris Dorsey and his staff in Admissions and Walter Diaz and his staff in Residential Life.

But I am very grateful for the relatively stable picture I am sharing with you, because again, it is only possible because of the work you have done. For one thing, our budget managers have continued to demonstrate fiscal restraint. Secondly, the Ad Hoc Budget Committee, which represents all of us, has done a great job keeping you informed about the budget while seeking opportunities to achieve institution-wide savings. Finally, I have to personally thank my senior staff, especially Dennis Hannon and Jim Howarth, for their leadership in managing our budget in these difficult, difficult financial times.

In addition to sharing information on the budget, I also want to speak for a few minutes about the new governance structure that the legislature has created for higher education in Connecticut.

BOARD OF REGENTS:

As we know, a new Board of Regents has been created to govern the four state universities, Charter Oak College, and the 12 community colleges. The Governor and legislative leaders have already made appointments to the 19-member board, and former University of Maine President Robert Kennedy has been named interim president of the Board of Regents. Higher Education Commissioner Michael Meotti has been named Executive Vice President of the Board of Regents. Two vice presidents, yet to be appointed, will provide oversight: one for the community colleges and one for state universities.

Mr. Meotti has made public assurances that our state university system and its component universities will maintain their identity and mission. The Board of Regents and its staff also appears to be ready to give us a fair amount of autonomy on our campuses in return for responsible fiscal management and accountability for student outcomes. We are going to have to wait for future details. I only have few at the moment. In the meantime, during this transition period, the CSUS Board of Trustees will be in place until the end of this year. The Governor has appointed good people to the Board of Regents and with the other student representatives and members appointed by the legislative leadership, it will be a group that is sure to make its mark on Connecticut higher education.

As the Regents begin to meet and formulate policy and discuss our future, I will be sharing more information with you.

I do believe we are not only going to survive during these next two years, we are going to continue to move forward and flourish as we have done during the last financially difficult four years. Here are some things I am hoping we will see during that time.

- I hope to see some relief from the three-year hiring freeze, allowing us to hire needed faculty lines, police officers and other staff positions that have been vacant for too long.
- I think we can continue to make progress in providing our students with more experiential learning opportunities as we see our Liberal Education, Practically Applied emphasis evolve and get stronger.
- I know sometime in this next year, we will see architectural renderings, the design program, and schematics for the new Fine Arts building. It is something our performing arts and visual arts faculty and students have been very patient about, and we continue to inch closer to bringing their dream to reality. It will be the bookend to our Science Building and help to further cement our position as a leader in liberal arts education.
- I believe we will continue to protect access and bringing together our goals of being a University of First Choice, but also a University for the people.

SUMMARY

I have shared largely positive news with you today for good reason — we are doing well as a campus community on many fronts. You have worked hard and you deserve the outcomes we are seeing. Even so, we should move forward with cautious optimism, given the fragile economic climate we are in.

Nonetheless, I believe we are on the right path and our students are proof of that. I speak frequently about the range of students at Eastern — the children of doctors, business executives and faculty sit in class next to first-generation students and inner-city students who have been given the unexpected opportunity to attend college. Some are promising students when they arrive, others discover their promise only once they get here. That is the wonder of American

Public Higher Education. The power to educate people regardless of background is what we hold and it the power we must share.

So let us attend to our circle of influence. We know that we can have a positive, life-changing influence on our students — they tell us that each day. If we stay focused on what we do well, respecting and supporting each other while we give our students an exemplary education, we will be successful. Thank you for contributing to this great University, welcome again back to campus.