

CONVOCATION REMARKS: ELSA NUÑEZ
September 1, 2006

Good Afternoon! I hope to be at many convocation ceremonies at Eastern, but this is my first, so your first day on campus is also a very special day for me. I have just arrived as the University's sixth president, and I am very happy to be here. This university community has a clear sense of who we are — the public, liberal arts university of Connecticut — and everyone works hard every day to give our students the best education we can provide. Notice I said "we," because I must tell you, in only a few short weeks, I have come to feel at home. I want to thank the faculty, staff, administration, and students who have given me such a warm welcome to the Eastern Family.

I want to talk with you for a few minutes today about the campus experience you can expect at Eastern. I want to talk about our faculty and the style of education featured at this University. And I want to talk about the Class of 2010 as well.

What can you expect from campus life at Eastern? You can see for yourself what a **beautiful modern, campus** we have — and it grows before our eyes. I think you will find that the life available to you on our campus is full of excitement, culture, and friendship. We have students from all over Connecticut, from across America, and from more than 30 foreign countries — this rich diversity can help you truly become a citizen of the world. We have more than 60 student clubs, an exciting athletic program, and have brought everyone from Kanye West to Bill Russell to campus to enrich your Eastern experience. This year will be no exception. Mark your calendars for October 24 — distinguished actor James Earl Jones will be here. And on November 17, Bill Nye the Science Guy is coming.

Your academic life will be immeasurably enriched by getting out of your dorm room and the classroom whenever possible. Join a student club. Sign up for intramurals. Get involved in student government. Attend the many cultural events on campus. As you take advantage of the time you are here, you will come to realize what we mean when we say the liberal arts transforms lives.

Not all of what you learn, however, will be here on campus. *Mark Twain once said, "I have never let my schooling get in the way of my education."* I think he was saying that we need to balance theoretical concepts with practical application. At Eastern, we do that in a variety of ways. Two-thirds of our students get real-life experience in an internship sometime during their studies. And whether it's the tropical biology course in the Caribbean, going on 40 years, or the Theatre program's bi-annual trips to London, England, Study Abroad is another way students gain invaluable field experience. There are many others.

Let me tell you a little bit about the professors who will be guiding you through your education at Eastern. **Our faculty teach.** That may sound funny until you realize that in many larger research universities, much of the teaching is done by graduate teaching

assistants. Students may never actually meet the professor whose name appears in the catalog. At Eastern, faculty will give you the personal attention you deserve. Many of our alumni still maintain close relationships with the professors who helped them years before. I want to mention a few members of our faculty. Professor Rhona Free was selected in 2004 by the Carnegie Foundation as one of only four professors of the year and the only one from universities like Eastern. Professor Richard Jones-Bamman just returned from Sweden where he was teaching and conducting research as a Fulbright Scholar. You will come to learn how special a Fulbright Scholarship award is. That's why we are so pleased that English Professor Lisa Fraustino also received a Fulbright this year. She is still in Thailand instructing teachers there how to use children's books to teach English. And here on campus, Biology Professor Elizabeth Cowles just received a grant from Pfizer for her invaluable research. These are exceptional people, but they are not exceptions. We have talented faculty in every department. Our faculty does conduct research, and does publish its scholarship. But their focus is on you, as it should be.

You have heard a great deal, I hope, about Eastern's liberal arts education. What kind of education are you, as a student at a liberal arts college, going to receive? The term "liberal arts" originated in the Middle Ages, comes from the Latin and refers to education that liberates and frees us. In the Middle Ages, most people had little of the freedoms we take for granted today. But the real freedom that the term refers to is the freedom and ability to think for ourselves. *A. Whitney Griswold described a college education as "a capacity explore, to question, to perceive relationships between fields of know experiences....not a . . . body of memorized knowledge salted away in a card file."* This is what we hope for you at Eastern, that our liberal arts education can help you form your own opinions, grounded by information that you have discovered. When you graduate from Eastern:

- You will have a clear sense of your own core values and will base your actions on those values and principles. I encourage you to stand true to your values in a world with many temptations and always an easier, less principled way of doing things.
- You will be able to investigate and explore an issue, develop your own opinion, and be confident in defending it, while being willing to change your mind.
- You will be knowledgeable of the world, with an understanding of history, sciences, the arts, and other areas of scholarship.
- You will understand and respect other cultures.
- You will appreciate how the lives of past generations impact your life today.
- You will exhibit leadership in your family and in all of your personal life.
- You will be active at work and in your community, understanding that an engaged citizenry is the foundation of a free, democratic society. Part of that sense of social responsibility is giving back to the community, helping others less fortunate than yourself. At Eastern, our resident students perform more than 20,000 hours of community service each year, assisting more than 40 nonprofit organizations and social agencies in the Windham area. And don't think you cannot make a difference. If not you, who will? *As Henrietta Mears once remarked, "Your influence is positive or negative, never neutral."*

It's an exciting campus, an inspiring faculty, and a challenging educational experience that we offer you. I believe you are up to the task. As you can see from the scholarships Dr. Tordenti just awarded, **we have some special students in the class of 2010**. Kesley Watson and Sharday Alston have impressive credentials as students, community volunteers, athletes, and even as musicians. But they aren't alone. Each of you has a special gift that we can help you uncover and polish until it is **bright and gleaming**. Each of you has the potential to be transformed by Eastern's liberal arts education. You are special in many ways. For one thing, less than 30 percent of all American adults have a bachelor's degree. You aren't there yet, but today marks what I hope will be a successful college career here at Eastern. And clearly you will stand out when you walk across the stage four years from now. You are special in another way. The percentage of liberal arts enrollments at U.S. colleges and universities is only three percent! It is a special form of education that you have chosen.

And finally, you are special to **me**. As the Class of 2010, you are the first group of students who I will be with for the entire four years of your journey. We are "newbies" together! I hope to see you on campus often over these next few years as we grow and learn together at our new University. Please share your aspirations, your needs, and your thoughts with me and with other administrators, staff members, and, of course, your professors.

Close your eyes with me for a moment. I am envisioning a day in May 2010 when I plan to be part of commencement exercises. I want you to commit to being there with me for your graduation ceremony, decked out in your mortar board and gown. It will be a great day, another day of beginnings like today.

In a moment we are going to conduct what has become a new tradition over the past several years at Eastern. We call it the "Make a Wish" or "Entering" tradition. We do it for every entering class; once at convocation and again at graduation. It's a circle, a small circle in your life, which you start today and close at graduation. Think about how you can close the circle by studying hard, working with your professors, and fellow students, and discovering how talented you really are.

Again, I welcome you to Eastern. We are delighted you are here. Plan to see me often. I would like to introduce you now to Chelsea Jasek, who will explain our Entering Tradition to you.