

**State of the University
University Meeting
August 27, 2010**

Greetings everyone! Welcome back to campus. To our newcomers, welcome to Eastern! I hope you all have had a great summer.

Before I begin my remarks today, I wanted to share something special with you.

For the second year in a row, we have been named a “Great College to Work For” by the Chronicle of Higher Education. We also were singled out again as one of the top 10 institutions our size in the area of shared governance.

To me, this award signifies that we have a strong collaborative spirit on our campus — an enhanced capacity to do great work together. Over the past four years, we have used this capacity to develop and implement a new vision for Eastern’s future. Many of you have been involved in the strategic planning process and by working together we have demonstrated that we can strengthen Eastern!

I have used University Meetings such as this one, as well as other forums, to share the status as we implement the plan. Today, I would like to pause and reflect on how our Strategic Plan works as an integrated model, and review its potential for transforming the lives of our students.

I begin by asking the question, “What **is** at the core of the educational experience we are poised to offer in the next few years?” Is it fundamentally different than the education we offered five years ago? If you line us up with the other public colleges and universities, what makes this undergraduate experience special? To what extent are we beginning to strengthen the undergraduate experience for all students?

George Kuh, founder of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and a benefactor of the American Association of Colleges and Universities — the nation’s leading advocacy group for liberal education — says that the focus of a liberal education today should be “deep learning” composed of “high impact” experiences. The “deep learning” he describes sounds a great deal like our own core abilities — communication skills, ethics and social responsibility, citizenship skills, cultural perspectives, and the ability to synthesize, analyze and reflect upon data, ideas and information. The notion of learning something in the classroom and moving on is basically flawed. You learn something in the classroom and you begin to reinforce that learning in out of the classroom experience; whether they are internships, community service, service learning, leading a club, participating in undergraduate research, they all reinforce what students learn through their academic experiences in the classroom.

The types of “high impact” experiences Dr. Kuh references are the very experiences we have embedded in our new engaged learning model — internships, undergraduate research, service learning, cultural experiences on and off campus, and more. As I looked at Dr. Kuh’s writings, I saw three key characteristics of this preferred model for a liberal education:

1. **The student experience is “whole,”** comprehensive. Community service, internships, student employment — even intramurals — are all necessary for the complete development of a student’s intellectual, physical, and emotional being.
2. **The student experience is integrated.** In an engaged model, every element of a student’s day is tied together – classroom, residential, co-curricular — with a career or academic goal and a clear plan for achieving it in four years.

3. **Students should be able to articulate their experience.** Just as we are reflecting on our institutional experience today, we want our students to be able to reflect upon and articulate what they are learning, how it connects together, and how it aligns with their overall career and academic plans.

Many of the high impact experiences Dr. Kuh describes existed in some form on our campus before we began planning our future almost four years ago, but they were generally neither connected nor necessarily linked to a clear outcome. For instance, it was not so long ago that we mandated community service to our resident students and there was no attempt to connect their eight required hours of service with classroom learning. A student would go to the Soup Kitchen and serve a homeless person lunch. A good think you and I might say. But what if the student looked into the eyes of the man they served and did not ask – Do you have a family? Where you ever a professional person? What happened in your life to cause you to be here?

How will you ever be a productive person again? Without this reflection, community service means very little. Now we have that reflection piece in place. We also have offered internships before, usually in the junior and senior year, but hadn't been a significant attempt to help students develop a career plan as part of their initial academic planning. We were doing good things, but they were not connected or integrated into a cohesive whole.

We have begun to adopt a deep learning/high impact model at Eastern, but we must be patient. Substantive fundamental organizational change takes time — it affects culture, systems, and each of us as individuals. The pace of our change has been further tempered by our state budget crisis.

Operating fund cuts, hiring freezes, and other shortfalls have forced us to implement the strategic plan in stages. But we are united, we have a strong plan, we have freed up some resources, and have made strategic investments and we are moving ahead. Let us look at a few examples of how we are implementing our new model and how it focuses on an integrated student experience that leads to graduation in four years, preparing our students for success as professionals and engaged citizens.

Advising: Our new four-tiered advising approach provides both professional and faculty advising support for students. Let me ask Professor Drzewiecki to stand. We used the Title III Grant received in 2009 to hire professional advisors for the ASC Center and a career counselor in Career Services devoted to developing experiential learning opportunities for students. Students will receive career counseling earlier in their Eastern career, putting later experiential learning into context and providing them with clear career goals, which, in turn, will increase motivation and retention. Previously our advising system had received poor grades from students, but those figures are turning around.

Most recent data showed student satisfaction went up nine points last year — from 69% to 78%; that's considerable!

ASC Center: This past year, the number of visits to the Academic Services Center soared 48% to more than 10,000! In addition, with a combination of professional staff, faculty, and student tutors, we are demonstrating how our community collaborates, not only to learn, but also to teach. We say to students a C can be a B, a B can be an A. Go there.

SWEEP: The Six-Week Educational Enrichment Program in Residential Life, as well as the one-credit course in the First-Year Program, are helping freshmen transition to college and improve their chances of persistence and graduation.

Late night and weekend scheduling of campus events, intramurals, enhanced computer systems, electronic portfolios, a greener campus, an enriched residential experience — all of these strategic initiatives can be seen for what they are — elements of an integrated model that provides a complete, holistic approach to developing each student intellectually, physically, and emotionally. Those strategies form a cohesive system that will provide students with goals, direction and support from the first day they step on campus, so that they see their four years at Eastern as a path that is well marked, with an end in sight.

And their experiences along the way will be connected, continually reinforcing their academic and career goals and reaffirming that they are making progress.

I do not intend to cover all 18 strategic initiatives but you can begin to see how truly integrated our strategic plan is — focused on providing our students with a complete, connected, goal-oriented, more deeply intellectual experience.

This is a significant change in how we do our work at Eastern, and it has just begun. The Liberal Arts Work! graduation requirement was only recently approved by the University Senate and policies and procedures for this important initiative have yet to be developed. The Center for Community Engagement is only a year old. Electronic portfolios are brand new. And the exemplary programs initiative is also just getting started. So while we have a map for our journey, we are barely starting our journey. But we have secure grant money — almost \$7 million — reallocated resources, and reassigned people. Progress is being made. And we have evidence of that progress.

1. Our incoming students are better prepared.

The average SAT score of incoming freshmen is up 21 points over the past two years. It is the highest in the CSU System. The percentage of incoming freshmen who were ranked in the top 25% of their class increased from 28% to 32% over the past two years. Our overall goal is to have that number at 50%. The average high school GPA of our entering freshmen has also increased (from 2.95 to 3.01). And we are seeing these key measures increase even as our overall number of entering freshmen continues to grow. Kim Crone and the admissions staff work very hard to make these numbers move in a positive direction.

This fall we expect almost 5,700 students to attend Eastern. Our 4,400 full-time undergraduates is another all-time high.

2. We continue to receive recognition for individual and institutional level performance.

We were again ranked among “Best Colleges in the Northeast” by the Princeton Review. We were named to President Obama’s National Honor Roll for Community Service for the second year in a row. Kim Silcox is doing a great job as the Director.

Our Business Information Systems students won a national first-place award for the website they designed for the Covenant Soup Kitchen, and our faculty and students also took home three of the five Connecticut Department of Higher Education Community Service awards.

3. Our commitment to inclusion and access has gained national attention.

Earlier this year The College Board recognized our Dual Enrollment initiative with Hartford Public High School with a CollegeKeys Compact Innovation Award for the New England Region. This project has been successful even beyond our hopes and enters its third year this fall with another group of students from inner city neighborhoods in Hartford. Sixteen of the 19 students who enrolled in the program’s first two years are still with us — that is outstanding! Connie Green has worked on these numbers her entire career at Eastern. Indira is an inspiration to us all.

It is important to recognize that the reason inner city students, many of them students of color, feel comfortable on our campus is because of our commitment to inclusion and the hiring of faculty and staff from different backgrounds. In fact, we rank #1 among all 25 COPLAC schools in percentage of minority faculty.

4. National Survey of Student Engagement data is promising.

According to 2009 NSSE data, Eastern freshmen AND seniors did as well or outperformed the overall NSSE cohort as well as our CSUS counterparts AND our Carnegie Class cohort on a number of measures, including performing community service; participating in a learning community; fulfilling a capstone experience; working effectively with others; receiving a well-rounded general education; being prepared to solve real-world problems and contribute to one's community; and perceiving the campus community as being culturally rich, inclusive and supportive.

Notice how these measures closely relate to Dr. Kuh's deep learning model. This is why they are so important.

I believe the ultimate proof of success is our ability to retain students and see them graduate on time. **Our two key measures of retention and graduation continue to tick up.** The first-to second-year retention rate has moved up, most recently from 74% to 78% in our 2009 cohort. This figure of 78% is four points higher than our Consortium for Student Retention Data Exchange cohort. The consortium is one of the national measures we use to compare ourselves. COPLAC is another, and our retention rate is slightly higher than the COPLAC average. Our six-year graduation rate is at 51%, up five percent from the previous year.

This figure is also four percentage points higher than the consortium counterparts. We need to do better, of course. But we can feel good about our progress.

Over time, our goal is to recruit a more prepared freshman class, a smaller class at that. By retaining more of them, we will have a more stable student population, with higher graduation rates. As I have said, some of the changes we are making at Eastern will take time before we see substantial shifts in our numbers. But they are moving upward, in the right direction. As this cycle continues to unfold, we will see a stronger Eastern, better prepared to reach our vision of being a University of First Choice.

The Budget

I would like to move from looking at the changes that are beginning to take place at Eastern to speak about this year's budget. Every member of this community must care about the budget, and it is good that you are vigilant and ask hard questions. So how are we doing? I have some new information for you as well as updated figures on several items we have previously discussed.

- This coming year we have to put money aside for a 27th payroll in Fiscal Year 2012; the cost of that is \$1.2 million.
- The raises we are all now receiving cost us another \$1.8 million.
- We have also set \$3 million aside to meet our Board and NEASC reserve mandates, along with \$500,000 for repair and replacement of housing and food service equipment.
- We started off this year's budget a month ago with a \$2 million cut that had been announced by the Governor back in the spring. And the state is looking at a budget shortfall of almost \$3 billion for Fiscal Year 2012. So the departmental sacrifices, innovative Works-Smart cost saving initiatives, and frugal spending habits you have all been practicing for several years

must continue. What will a new governor do in terms of cuts? What other cuts will this governor or the legislature purpose? We just do not know.

There is certainly some good fiscal news to report.

- Through your efforts, we reduced spending by \$950,000 the last quarter in FY10.
- The tuition for this year was locked in many months ago and is going to provide us with \$1.7 million in much needed revenue. In addition, through a system-wide CHEFA debt service account, the CSUS is saving us almost a million dollars a year off our debt service costs. Also, we have added 13 new faculty lines since I arrived on campus four years ago, although they are temporary lines, they will be permanent as soon as the System Office allows us to do so.

This current year, we have been able to hire some critical staff positions such as the Associate Vice President for Finance and the Purchasing Director. Mr. Hannon tells me that despite our budget challenges, we have three new staff slots (two FTEs) in support of the strategic plan in the new budget as well; with additional operating funds, it amounts to around \$700,000 in support of the plan.

- Our Institutional Advancement efforts continue to pay dividends: a record 280 students received \$334,000 in scholarships this past year. We had a record 2,852 donors, which was a 7.5% increase over last year — this is commendable, especially in these economic times! This past year, new endowed scholarships were established in memory of Spanish Professor Lee Watts, and in honor the three founding faculty members of the Environmental Earth Science Department. The High Five initiative is also helping to drive up the percentage of alumni donors. In fact, the number of alumni donors has increased by 151% to 1,580 alumni donors during the past five fiscal years, while the average alumni gift has increased 31% to \$128. During the same period, parent giving has increased 454% to almost \$40,000 annually. This is a good barometer of how parents are feeling about the Eastern education their children are receiving.
- As I mentioned, we continue to seek and receive grants, and will continue to expand that effort. I should also note that the Nellie Mae Foundation increased our third-year allocation for the Project Compass grant due to the outstanding work being done on that project. Dean Cid and her team are to be commended.
- Finally, I cannot thank the Ad Hoc Budget Committee enough for helping to think through and communicate our budget challenges to the entire campus community. These are committed colleagues who come to the table with a constructive attitude and willingness to be helpful, and they are each resources to this University.

We also continue to improve our facilities. In addition to the new parking garage, which opens this coming December, we are putting a new roof, new doors, and a new elevator in Occum Hall. Two new data centers — one in the Communication Building (as you can see, we've renamed that from "Media") and one on the fifth floor of science — will give us a more secure, more environmentally sound home for our 70 servers, along with a complete backup system as well. You may have noticed scaffolding all over the sports center; the concrete band at the top is being redone in response to safety concerns.

The biggest news regarding our physical plant is that we are currently reviewing architect credentials in anticipation of awarding a bid to design our new Fine Arts building. Nancy Tinker is making this all happen. This coming year, our Performing and Visual Arts departments are planning a year of events to highlight the arts on our campus; please support them as those activities are announced. Gail Gelburd and David Pellegrini are working together as role models for all of us as to what can happen at Eastern when people work together and harness their resources.

So we have some reasons to feel good about our fiscal affairs. However, the state economy continues to be sluggish, and further budget rescissions are possible. The bottom line is that we are going to have to be very careful this year, even more so than last year. If we do so, we can save jobs, maintain our campus morale, and move ahead on our plan for the future.

CONCLUSION

In closing, let me say that I look ahead to this next year with much optimism. We have a strong spirit on this campus that inspires us to approach our work with high standards and professionalism. We have a shared vision for our future that is integrated and showing signs of success.

I have shared a number of those indicators with you today, but I have deliberately saved one until last — it's a very special designation that we just received just a week ago. For the first time, we have entered U.S. News and World Report's Tier One Rankings as one of the top 100 regional universities in the North—that's from Maine to Pennsylvania, Vermont to Maryland.

And we were the 28th top public institution on the list. Bravo, Eastern!! (**Applause**)

As we use the U.S. News and World Report rankings and other signs of success to inspire and motivate each other, we must always remember that at the center of our aspirations as a University are our students. And at the center of our aspirations as a University are our students. They are why we are here today.

Imagine, if you will for a moment, what a typical classroom at Eastern looks like. Who is sitting in the room? Where are they from? You might find the daughter of a dentist from Trumbull, or the nephew of a millworker from Norwich. The son of an insurance executive from Avon. The granddaughter of a dairy farmer in Vermont. The stepson of a migrant worker. These are not imaginary students—they are real students, living on campus, eager to learn from you. Together they make up a richly diverse student body. This is why we are here, my friends.

As they get to know each other in class, perhaps working together on projects; serving our community as members of the same student club; or cheering on one of our athletic teams, they will learn that their similarities are much more important than their differences. Yet they also learn to respect and appreciate those differences.

In so doing, they prepare for lives as professionals and citizens, ready to meet a world that desperately needs their leadership, compassion, and ability.

We have more than 5,600 students on our campus this fall, each with a unique personal history and heritage. All of them deserve an opportunity to succeed. It is for **all of our students** that we come to work each day. And it's our job to be there for each of them. I know you will do your best to help all our students pursue their dreams this year. Thank you so very much for making Eastern a Great University!