

University Meeting Remarks **August 31, 2007**

I want to thank everyone for joining me today in kicking off the 2007–2008 academic year. First, I want to welcome the new faculty and staff who have joined this special community we call Eastern. I also want to welcome everyone else back to campus. I am truly excited by what I see developing as a busy but exceptionally rewarding year ahead.

You have already heard a lot of good information concerning the new year. Now I would like to take a step back and give you a sense of where we are as a university — a state of the University update.

As I prepared my remarks for you today, I reflected on the progress our students, faculty, and staff have been making. I had to smile when I thought about the efforts that have been made this past year, building on the great foundation created by Chancellor Carter when he was Eastern’s president; the administrative team; and the faculty and staff. We are in great shape to continue on the path to becoming a “premier public liberal arts university.”

First and foremost, we are an intellectual community, and so it is fitting that we focus our energies on improving the educational experience of our students. Let me begin here! That is why I am so very pleased to recognize today the work of the Liberal Arts Program Committee (LAPC) and the First-Year Program Committee. Through their research into best practices, their thoughtful consideration, and their dedication over the past several years, we now have a liberal arts core curriculum and a First-Year Program of which we all can be proud.

The impact of the LA Program is already substantial. More than 800 first-time, first-year students will be in LA Program courses this fall. We will be teaching approximately 220 sections of Tier 1 classes, representing close to two-thirds of the credits being taken by incoming full-time students. These classes range from Global Climate Change to World Theatre History. This is progress. Let us congratulate our faculty and our students for this major step forward. At the same time, I want to encourage the faculty to continue to submit course proposals for Tier Two courses as we continue to plan the implementation of the LAPC’s second tier in spring 2008.

Additionally, in the First Year Program, we have 21 clusters planned for this fall and anticipate having in excess of 500 freshmen participating. Even so, I encourage the faculty to start thinking about adding more clusters for fall 2008. Our collective dream is have all freshmen taking a cluster during their first semester by fall 2009.

I am also told that planning for the spring 2008 colloquia is well under way, with each course enrolling approximately 20 students. Because participation in a colloquium is mandatory for all freshmen this coming spring, we will need to staff 40 sections. If you are not already part of this effort, I would encourage faculty members to consider offering a colloquium.

I believe that the new liberal arts core and the experiences we provide our incoming freshmen will become recognized throughout the country for their rigor and their quality. As we continue to fully implement the core curriculum and expand the First-Year Program over the coming months, our students will benefit from an education that is more interdisciplinary, that is increasingly integrated, and that exhibits the innovative strengths of our faculty. I am going to be speaking in a few minutes about the progress being made on our 2008–2013 Strategic Plan. The plan includes a number of initiatives designed to take us to the next level as an institution recognized for its academic strength. But without the work done by the Liberal Arts Program Committee(LAPC) and the First-Year Program Committee, we could not even be talking about these next steps. I would like all the members of these two committees to stand to be recognized for their groundbreaking efforts.

Do not forget why we are investing our dollars into these programs. I cannot emphasize enough what the Liberal Arts Program and the First-Year Program mean for this University. A solid foundation of liberal arts coursework and related support courses will enhance our students' chances of success, improve Eastern's retention and graduation rates, and give students the context they need to maximize their education at Eastern. It is critical to recognize that the re-engineering of our general education program did not happen overnight. It was an incredible achievement. It has taken years of work by dozens of faculty members and the leadership of Dr. Maggie Martin and Dr. Dimitrios Pachis.

*Dr. Pachis leaves an enduring legacy as vice president of academic affairs. In addition to his leadership in supporting the work of the LAPC, he leaves the Division of Academic Affairs in excellent financial shape, which has had a tremendous, positive impact on our University's overall fiscal health. Eastern will forever be grateful to him for his steady stewardship of the academic area. **Please join me in acknowledging Dr. Pachis's years of service to this institution.***

As you know, I have appointed Dr. Rhona Free as interim vice president of academic affairs to continue the progress we have made to enhance our academic programs. She will build on the impressive base created by Dr. Pachis, and with her own style, intellect, and leadership she will be a strong successor this year.

FACILITIES

I would like to speak next about the progress being made to give our students a campus environment that rivals their academic experience. Nancy Tinker and Dennis Hannon have given you details on the projects I am going to mention, but I want to share my own thoughts on these wonderful additions to our campus. The new Student Center, which will open its doors for the first influx of students this weekend, is fantastic. The building is 75 percent larger than the previous Student Center and brings all Student Life-related organizations and activities under one roof. One of the initiatives discussed in the Strategic Plan is finding ways to engage our students in more out-of-the classroom experiences, whether they live on campus or not. We also want to provide additional services to support and retain underrepresented populations. Tying the academic experience with the out-of-the classroom experience can happen in this great Student Center building: tutoring, lectures, and academic support.

We want our students to witness from day one what it means to be part of and to contribute to a residential, academic community. And we want our students to become more involved in our service-learning initiatives. All of these strategies are being developed in the context of our new Student Center programming.

If you have not toured the facility, I encourage you to do so. It is beautiful yet functional, modern yet elegant. It will become a place where students, staff, and faculty can either relax or find active pursuits. Mark your calendars, please, for the dedication ceremony for the center, when Governor Rell will join us at 10 a.m. on September 25 to formally cut the ribbon.

You have doubtless heard some things about the new recording studio and radio station being built in the Media Building. I understand the radio station will have a see-through window so that everyone on campus can walk by and watch our student DJs, radio announcers, and engineers at work. We plan to have a grand opening for the studio and station facilities and will keep you posted on that as well.

As you have been told, the Science Building is on schedule to open in fall 2008. I know that faculty in the mathematics and science disciplines are looking forward to that day. Just as our new Student Center is a symbol of our state's commitment to student life, the Science Building says, loudly and clearly, that we are serious about science and mathematics education and want to put Eastern and the state of Connecticut on the map when it comes to enhancing the United States' position in scientific fields. As the school year progresses, we can plan on hearing more about the wonderful potential of this new science building. There is a great deal of planning still to be done.

We have shared good news, as well, this morning, on our plans to build a new Campus Police Station and another parking garage. The Police Station will be across from the Child Care Center; the parking garage will be next to the existing one. More cranes, more cranes: they make me happy. Pending approval of the CSU capital budget by the General Assembly and action by the Bond Commission, we also hope to begin the design of our new Fine Arts Center this year. I think all of us can be very pleased with the continued evolution of our physical plant.

When I take visitors on a tour of our campus, I am very proud of the compliments I receive. Visitors are not only impressed with our buildings but routinely remark on the well-kept condition of our grounds. I want to thank Nancy Tinker and all the maintainers for the work they do to keep our home in magnificent condition.

In alignment with our Strategic Plan, we are also ready to update the University's Master Plan. Although I don't expect that we will be constructing as many new buildings as we have in the past 15 years, we need to assign use for the spaces being vacated when we open the new Science Building, as well as think of the long-term use for Shafer, Goddard, Winthrop, and other older campus buildings. I will be called the President of Renovations. This process will require the same diligence and thoughtful review of data and other information that we have used in the past to bring the campus to its current state as a modern, attractive learning community. Dennis Hannon will be chairing the Master Plan committee, which will begin its work soon.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

So now to Strategic Planning . . . Where are we now? More than 200 staff, faculty, students, and friends of the University worked this past spring with the Committee on the Future of Eastern to develop a new mission statement, vision, core values, and strategic initiatives for the next five years. We used forums, the Eastern web site, e-mails, and other means, to gather your input. We held a stakeholders' conference in May to further process our collective thoughts on our future. More than 200 people attended the conference. No one can say to me that he or she did not have an opportunity to participate. This past summer, a writing team developed a first draft of the Strategic Plan, and shortly we will share the draft with the campus community for additional feedback.

My hope is to refine the document so that a final version can be reviewed and approved by the University Senate this semester, followed by approval by the CSU Board of Trustees during the coming spring. I encourage you to continue your own personal involvement in the process. Check the web site regularly.

Through this collaborative enterprise, we have an opportunity to enhance our educational program while providing our students with an uncommon campus experience. As you review the planning document, I hope you share my pride in the work that has been done to date.

The Governing Ideas Subcommittee developed a set of core values that define this institution's belief system. We have an opportunity to give these principles life as we strive to reflect them on a daily basis. The six values are:

- ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE
- ENGAGEMENT
- INCLUSION
- INTEGRITY
- EMPOWERMENT
- SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

The same subcommittee updated our mission statement and created a vision statement that can serve to inspire all of us in this room.

The vision statement says we should aspire to be a public liberal arts college of first choice, offering an unparalleled college experience to our students while achieving national distinction for our academic programs.

The vision statement describes Eastern as an intellectual community acknowledged for its engaged teaching, learning, research, and creative work and for modeling social responsibility, environmental stewardship, and educational access.

I don't know about you, but hearing these words gives me the motivation to get up in the morning and join you each day as we embark on our future together.

Other members of Committee on the Future of Eastern (COFE) and its subcommittees developed some exciting initiatives for possible implementation over the next five years.

Consider just a few of them:

- A new “Expanded Horizons” program that codifies such out-of-classroom experiences as Study Abroad, an area that Dr. Horrocks has lead so ably at Eastern; attendance at campus cultural events; and service learning into a formal graduation requirement.
- A new center, the Center for Community Engagement, which will promote social responsibility among our students and result in an 80 percent participation rate by 2012.
- “Liberal Arts Work!” a requirement that ensures that 90 percent of all Eastern students will have engaged in an internship, co-op, or other field experience by 2010.
- A goal to be one of the top five Council on Public Liberal Arts College (COPLAC) schools in the country by 2013.
- Creation of a Student Success Center that focuses our attention on advising and support as we continue to improve graduation and retention rates.

All of this is to strengthen and enhance our out-of-the-classroom experience, which is the cornerstone of a Liberal Arts college.

I want to take a moment to acknowledge Dr. Laura Tordenti’s contributions to the area of Student Affairs. Dr. Tordenti has been a strong advocate for our students, supporting healthy alternatives and options within our Student Life programs and improved support services outside the classroom. She has been dedicated to helping our students succeed. Please join me in thanking Dr. Tordenti for her many contributions to Eastern and its students.

I now ask you to help me welcome our Acting Vice President of Student Affairs, Paul Bryant, and Ken Bedini, Acting Dean of Students, both whom have a longstanding commitment to ensuring that our students succeed in college. They are committed to realizing the vision for Student Affairs that is articulated in the Strategic Plan.

BUDGET

Let me say a word about the budget. We are financially sound because we have been financially prudent. We presented a balanced budget to the Board of Trustees and credit for this goes to Mr. Hannon and Mr. Sweeney, who always say no to me when I ask them to approve my spending.

Even though we have enjoyed wonderful support from the State of Connecticut in expanding our campus, adequate public funding of Eastern’s operating budget in support of the educational programs and services we offer has been a challenge for many years. Given our ongoing financial situation, it is very good news to hear that the General Assembly’s additional appropriation means Eastern will receive funds to hire five new full-time professors. Dr. Free will be working with department chairs to begin these searches. It is truly exciting to add five new faculty lines to our instructional faculty! These lines, as you know, are like gold. We make commitments to faculty through tenure and promotion for a career length of about 40 years.

The Governor and the General Assembly also have made student access to higher education a top budget priority. The approved budget increases state funds for student

financial aid by \$655,975 — a 67 percent increment. Almost 300 additional Eastern students with unmet financial needs will be assisted by this financial aid increase. These are 300 students who would not have received the additional aid that we can now provide.

The success in our private fundraising that I shared with our campus community at my Inauguration has progressed. As part of the Brown Estate gift, we now have the **Brown Faculty House** on Bolivia Street that we can use for national and international faculty and guests. I hope to see you at the Brown Faculty House on October 1 for a reception for Dr. Anchalee Wongla, who will be coming from Thailand to teach our students.

The Zaring farm in Ashford is now ours—more than 100 acres of land plus a stately house and barn that we intend to use for cultural, educational, and cultivation purposes. The gift is valued at \$2.5 million.

With these two gifts and another estate gift from the Hicks family, we have more than doubled our endowment - great news for our programming, but especially great news for students with unmet financial needs. Another gift of special note is the recent \$250,000 endowed scholarship given to the University by the Savings Bank of Manchester (SBM) Charitable Foundation, Inc. The funds will be for undergraduate students who are studying early childhood development, and is SBM's second major contribution in support of Eastern's Early Childhood Education program.

As much as these recent gifts to the University inspire me, I know we cannot stop here. Mr. DeLisa tells me that Eastern faculty and staff give generously to our Annual Fund. I thank you for that generosity; it helps greatly in attracting major donors and other gifts to Eastern. Every dollar we give is matched with a 25 cent contribution by the State.

The percentage of giving from faculty and staff really affects the U.S. News and World Report rankings. I encourage each of you to think about a donation — no matter how small — to the University.

Although we cannot control tuition rates or support from the state legislature, we can continue to use our own energy and time to persuade private friends of Eastern to make an investment in our students' future.

Lately, I have been encouraged by various signs of improved institutional reputation, but I know we have a long way to go. I have no doubts, however, that with the values and vision that we share as a connected community of people dedicated to giving our students an exceptional education, we will reach our goals.

So again, thank you for being here today; welcome back to campus this fall, and let's be focused on what matters in our society: Each time a person has an opportunity to develop intellectually and to be exposed to ideas he or she does not hold, we strengthen the base of our democracy. As you know, it is all about the development of ideas and the actions we take to implement them. These ideas and actions can make our global society a better place for all children, a better place for the poor, and a better place for humankind. And through our institutional values, we can inspire our students to believe that they can change the world.