

**Elsa M. Núñez**  
**UNIVERSITY MEETING**  
**May 2, 2014**

Good morning! Thank you for being here during the busiest time of the academic year! In two weeks, I will mark the start of my ninth year as your president. Where has the time gone? It literally feels like yesterday when I walked onto this campus!

As I look back, I am proud that our past eight years together have been marked by significant progress at Eastern despite economic and budget challenges. Our time together has witnessed individual accomplishments by students, faculty and staff, as well as major achievements and recognitions for the University. And we have endured the personal tragedies of students, alumni and friends together, as a family. This week, we again were greeted with horrific news when we learned that one of our students—Jerrold Greider—passed away on Tuesday evening. Losing a child, a friend, a student is something none of us prepare for, and only time can heal that pain.

**Condolence From: Marc Provera**

Condolence: Mr. Greider was my student teacher at Illing Middle School. Although, he wasn't just a teacher, he was my friend and he would always stick up for me when no one else would. Mr. Greider had one of those smiles that could make you smile just by looking at him. When I heard the news I was shocked, considering he was just sitting next to me the other day. He taught me so many things, not just about school, but about life as well. He always made sure we understood something before he moved on. He would never get upset. I honestly don't think that Mr. Greider had a bad bone in his body. He inspired me to keep chasing after your dreams because one day you will get there, just like he did. Everyday I would have a conversation with him, whether if it was about what we were learning in school, sports or his family. I would often ask him what he would be doing over the weekends and he would tell me see his family and sometimes play video games. Mr. Greider loved everyone he met. Every person that knew him loved him as well. I tried to hold back the tears when I heard the sad news but I could not. Mr. Greider and I were close. He liked me a lot. I will never forget the first day he came to our school. You could tell that he was happy to be there. he touched the hearts of many students, friends, teachers, and family. I wish that he could have become a professional teacher, but to me, he was. I couldn't have asked for a better student teacher and friend than him. We became close. I would tell him things and so would he.

To Mr. Greider's family, I am deeply sorry for your loss. Mr. Greider will always be with us in our hearts. -Marc Provera Age:13 Illing Middle School.

Please join me in a moment of silence in Jerrold's memory. Thank you.

As hard as such news is, it is our ability to come together as a community that helps all of us through difficult times. In fact, I shared this thought with our administrative assistants at their breakfast yesterday morning.

It is this sense of community—a community grounded in values—that drew me to Eastern eight years ago. It is what sustains me today. We continue to face—as all organizations do—challenges, constraints, and unexpected hurdles in our path.

But we have the moral strength, the intellectual capacity, and the determination to move ahead and meet our goals as a University.

We also continue to have the financial wherewithal to accomplish the plans we have set forth for our future. I won't spend much time talking about the budget, but I do want the faculty to leave campus for the summer knowing that we believe we will again be able to achieve a balanced budget for 2014-15. This is not without the same sacrifice and careful budget management that this campus community has demonstrated for the past 6-7 years. Thank you, each of you, for all that you do to make Eastern a special place to study, teach, and work!

Our expectations for a balanced budget for next year are based on tenuous finances at the state level—made more tenuous with the announcement on Wednesday that the anticipated \$500 million state budget surplus has all but evaporated.

To fund our operating expenses, in particular the pay raises mandated by our collective bargaining agreements, the Board of Regents raised tuition by only two percent, and made up the difference with a one-time appropriation of \$1.5 million.

This has not been added to our base budget, and there is no assurance that it will be there in a year's time. But for now, we can manage.

In addition to this fiscal uncertainty, we continue to face increased competition for a smaller high school graduating class in our state—private colleges, the University of Connecticut and competing out-of-state public institutions present significant challenges to our ability to maintain our enrollment levels. It is imperative that we move forward to improve the quality of the educational experience we provide if we are to survive.

We must evolve because the world around us is evolving—often at a pace that we can only approximate. As we innovate and evolve, our goal should always be to enhance the quality of the liberal arts education that students come to Eastern to receive. What are some of the signs of our continued growth and evolution?

As we conclude the first year of our new Strategic Plan, I wanted to highlight some initial progress that we have made.

These selected activities are indicators that our faculty and staff have been thorough—doing their research, working together, developing strategies so that we not only can do more, but we can use the lessons we have learned to take what we do well, discover and implement new practices, and continue to innovate and grow.

- **Affordability and the value of an Eastern degree.**

- We have made great progress on “Eastern in Four,” our plan to ensure that students graduate on time. In addition to establishing an advising model that has freshmen developing a four-year academic plan, we have also created an “exploratory status” to replace the undeclared designation.
- We have increased the availability of merit- and need-based financial aid for students with unmet need and to attract more highly qualified entering students.
- We continue to find ways to increase alumni engagement. They are coming back to campus to speak with our students, they are providing internship opportunities; they are hiring our graduates. The Eastern “Family Network” is working!

Let me give you one example: two days ago, Institutional Advancement, Alumni Affairs, and the Center for Internships and Career Development co-sponsored the “Etiquette Dinner.” One of our alumni who was at the event ended up offering a summer internship to one of the participating students.

- Alumni are also investing in the University. One of our two new members of the Eastern Fellows started a \$40,000 endowed scholarship the day of his induction!

- **Academic Quality and Integrative Learning.**

- We conducted 27 tenure-track faculty searches for fall 2014, and have already hired 17 new faculty members. We have two more offers out and we will complete another search next week.
- To the east, our Fine Arts Instructional Center is growing before our eyes.
- We are improving our undergraduate research program, and I will speak at length on that in a moment.
- We continue to make progress in lowering our class sizes to meet our goals as a liberal arts university. It is a slow process, but we are moving in the right direction.
- We are also getting ready to launch a number of new majors—more on that in a moment.
- A new Dean of the School of Education and Professional Studies has been hired, and we look forward to him implementing plans for enhancements to our Graduate Division programs.
- We also are working hard to increase the clients served by our on-campus Work Hub.
- **Retention.**
  - We are in the process of upgrading software and technology in our advising center to better track and serve students who are at-risk or have special academic needs.
  - Financial management counseling, tutoring services, and other elements of our academic support and retention model are being added to our summer orientation program and/or planned for delivery in our residence halls.
- **Community Engagement.**
  - We are engaging faculty in service learning through the new Faculty Fellows program.
  - Yesterday was Community Engagement Day on campus, and we had four alumni return to speak to their careers in public service, forged from their work when they were students performing community service.
  - We are also supporting our staffing in the CCE by converting the VISTA volunteer position to a permanent position.
  - Our RAs and other housing staff are being trained to better connect our resident students to community engagement opportunities available through the CCE as part of our themed housing initiative.
  - And the CCE is leading the University's plans to increase engagement in Windham Public Schools and the Willimantic community.
- **Sustainability.**
  - We just learned that the U.S. Green Building Council has named Eastern a “green campus” for the fifth year in a row. This doesn't just happen; it isn't automatic. It is because this campus is a state, regional and national leader in sustainability.
  - In fact, two days ago, the Institute for Sustainable Energy was honored with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's 2014 Star Energy Award.
  - We are fortunate to have continuity in our ISE leadership. Our friend, Bill Leahy has retired, but Lynn Stoddard has arrived on campus and is demonstrating her own expertise, knowledge and leadership. Lynn, please stand.

These are just a few of the indicators of progress that have been achieved in the first year of our 2013-18 Strategic Plan. Among the strategies we are putting in place for our development as a public liberal arts college over the next five years, I wanted to highlight two areas that believe are critical to our future. One speaks to relevance, the other speaks to capacity. If we are

to continue to attract highly qualified and prepared students to our campus, we need to be able to provide them with a relevant educational experience and a wider range of academic offerings.

As we have refined our liberal arts mission over the past decade, the faculty and administration has learned a great deal about the impact of high impact practices and engaged learning. In addition to internships, co-ops, service learning, and creative expression, we also know what a special opportunity we have at Eastern—on a relatively small campus—to provide our undergraduates with research options largely available only to graduate students on larger campuses.

Today, the research of Eastern undergraduates includes everything from DNA sequencing to perspectives of American history to research on Alzheimer's disease and autism to performing their original plays off-Broadway. The key to this success has been the support our students receive from faculty mentors who are experts in their field of study and genuinely want their students to grow intellectually as scholars. Eastern undergraduate researchers have won fellowships from the National Aeronautical and Space Administration and the National Science Foundation, and have attended graduate programs at Dartmouth, Yale, Georgetown, and other prestigious universities. This past year has been a breakthrough year for undergraduate research at Eastern.

- We are now providing significant funding for Eastern undergraduate researchers for their research/creative work and so they can travel to present research. Jean H. Thoresen ECSU-AAUP scholarships, Library Research Awards, CUR, and Fulbright Research study grants are also available. The EES department has received a large special budget allocation for the past two years to allow their students and faculty to complete their fieldwork.
- Thanks to this budgetary commitment to undergraduate research and the work of Dr. Carlos Escoto, coordinator of undergraduate research and creative activity, we had a number of students attending regional and national conferences this year to present their research findings. In April, two Communication students attended the National Conferences on Undergraduate Research conference in Lexington, Kentucky. Also in April, 10 Eastern Honors students presented at the Northeast Regional Honors Conference in Niagara Falls. Our Concert Chorale performed at Carnegie Hall for the fifth time in March.
- Last month, more than 200 Eastern undergraduates presented their research on campus at the 14<sup>th</sup> Annual Research Conference and Exhibition and the 14<sup>th</sup> Annual Excellence Expo, ranging from research on shoreline erosion in Bangladesh to the study of English Romantic Literature.
- Eleven students received support to present or exhibit their work at the 2013 COPLAC (Council of Public Liberal Arts Colleges) Northeast Undergraduate Research Conference.
- And this summer, as we did last summer, we will host the Board of Regents' Summer Undergraduate Research program as part of their Health and Life Sciences initiative.
- We owe much of the success of student researchers to the faculty members who have been committed to being there for them as faculty mentors. To recognize faculty mentors, this year we announced mentor awards at the Research Conference and Exhibition and at the Excellence Expo.

Mathematics Professor Mizan Khan received the award at the recent on-campus Research Conference for his work with our first Undergraduate Research Fellow Ricky Magner, and CSU Professor and Endowed Chair Jeffrey Trawick-Smith was honored for his work with his students on the TIMPANI Toy Study. Please stand!

\*\*\*\*\*

The second element in our academic plan that I want to focus on for a few minutes is the development of new majors. We have one new major for the fall ready to go and four more that are pending Board of Regents' approval.

I am going to ask faculty for each major to come up and give us a quick review of each major in a second, but let me summarize the meaning and significance of each of these new majors. All of them make us more relevant and increase our capacity. It is critical that we find ways to offer our students majors that support careers that respond to Connecticut's economic needs, so that our graduates will continue to stay in our state and become productive, engaged citizens.

- **The Finance Major** has already been approved by the Board of Regents. It will be housed in our Business Administration Department, and give us another important career option in the broad area of business and finance.
- **Liberal Studies** is targeted for our early childhood and elementary education students so that they will be better equipped to succeed as teachers; they will be able to select from four areas of concentration—English, math, natural science or social science.
- **New Media:** What an exciting new major—the world of media today is constantly changing, with digital media, web design, social media, digital video production, animation, mobile apps, and other technology-driven industries evolving before our eyes.
- **Health Sciences:** This is a huge addition to our campus. We know that career opportunities in the health sciences field are expanding rapidly. This major will provide concentrations in health studies, pre-nursing, and pre-physical therapy. It draws from many disciplines and course areas. And it will attract many new students to our campus.
- **Philosophy:** Every great liberal arts university needs a philosophy major. Philosophy is the foundation of all knowledge—where reason, creativity and complex thinking are exercised. Students in this major will learn western- and non-western perspectives on a variety of philosophical issues.

Let me stop and ask faculty who have put these proposals together to tell you more. **(BREAK)**

Thank you Professors Liu, Pellegrini, Toedt, Nsiah, and Fitz for sharing information about our new majors with us. With these new majors, next fall and the years following will provide new and exciting experiences for our students and the campus community. We are going from 35 to 40 majors in one semester—what a tribute to the vision and hard work of our faculty. A special thank you to Gregory Kane, our Senate President. Bravo!

As you get ready for Commencement and a well-deserved summer break, I want each you to be thankful for what we have at Eastern. We have a group of talented faculty and staff who work together as a team, dedicated to offering our students the best liberal arts education we can provide. We have a plan for our future and have made great progress in its first year. We have a host of new majors coming on line in the fall to attract new students to campus, thanks to the hard work of the faculty. We continue to meet challenges, hurdles and difficult times with determination, ingenuity, and unity. We know our future is not entirely in our own hands, but you continue to demonstrate to me a faith that we will do our best with what we have. I could not be more proud to be one of you. Thank you for being Eastern, and have a wonderful summer!