

# EASTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

*Education First*

**Inaugural Address**  
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**November 20, 2008**  
**Eastern Michigan University**

Good morning! Thank you for being here to celebrate with us today. It is an honor to stand before you, to pledge my service and leadership, and to become the twenty-second president of Eastern Michigan University. I will give this remarkable institution my best thinking and my hardest work each day.

I want to express my deep appreciation to the University's Board of Regents, and to Chair Tom Sidlik, for this great opportunity. Thank you, too, to Regent Emeritus Richard Robb, for the long view – to help us remember Eastern's pivotal role in the Ypsilanti community and in Michigan.

Also, I want to recognize the many federal, state and community leaders who have joined us for this milestone. We are all members of the EMU family, and we appreciate the collaborative spirit you so generously offer.

Today is a day for honoring the past, our foundation, even as we press ahead with energy and optimism. For me, it is a day that could not have happened without many on whose shoulders I stand.

My parents, now deceased, who brought me to join my brothers Sam and Tom at a one room school house in Crosswell, Michigan when I became tired of reading *Dick and Jane* at age four. They gave me the unstoppable gift of learning.

My family, many of whom are with me today: my husband Larry, our son Brian, his wife Kate, our son Sam, our daughter Diana, her husband Kevin Marsh, and our sweet grandson Owen.

My mentors, leaders who have loved this state and recognized its public universities as national jewels including Grand Valley State University President Don Lubbers and former President Mark Murray; University of Michigan-Dearborn Chancellor Dan Little; University of Michigan's President Mary Sue Coleman; and Governors William Milliken, Jim Blanchard, John Engler, and Jennifer Granholm, all of whom I have had the privilege to serve.

Finally, I am inspired by my colleagues at Eastern, the faculty, staff and students who are dedicated to excellence and who continue to teach me so much. Our university community is passionate about Eastern and, since my first day as President, I have been overwhelmed by the enthusiastic commitment to this university that each of us shares.

This morning, please join me in acknowledging the Inaugural Committee and support teams who produced today's events. I am grateful for their work.

We meet here, on this historic campus, during Eastern Michigan University's 159th year. As at other critical junctures in history, we see change, and the demand for change, all around us. The times are

uncertain, unprecedented, sometimes deeply unsettling. Industries we have relied on for decades are struggling; traditional ways of going about our business are no longer feasible; the planet strains under the very weight of us.

In his widely read book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, American intellectual Thomas Kuhn observed that while some changes come to us incrementally, in small and easily digestible doses, others require us to engage in major paradigm shifts. Such changes deeply and dramatically challenge the way we experience, think about, and understand the world.

And yet, along with these sweeping changes comes great opportunity: opportunity for dramatic impact; opportunity for revolutionary new ways of teaching and learning; opportunity for innovation, for renewed energy, and for whole new ways of looking at the world.

All of us at Eastern feel this in the air. We feel a great sense of excitement about the important role our university can play at this transformational time. We are prepared, and we are ideally well positioned, to be a catalyst for the kind of change and opportunity our state, and the world, desperately needs now.

Consider our university's distinctive characteristics and special values:

We offer academic excellence and enormous depth and breadth in academic disciplines. Eastern is known for the quality of its curricula, especially in education, in health and human services, in art and music, and in business. Now we are crafting fresh, new approaches to our general education core and to the teaching of science, math and technology.

This institution puts education first, and it shows in everything we do.

We are committed to our students' success. Employers often tell us that our students "hit the ground running," due in no small part to the faculty's individualized attention and our university's engagement with the world around us.

In addition to the University's academic excellence and commitment, Eastern has been able to adapt to changing market demands with the introduction of new coursework and new ways of delivering education. We are nimble. We have proven we can offer innovative new courses quickly, and the University has done an excellent job in adapting coursework so the state's experienced workforce can "return to learn" new skills.

There is one distinctive characteristic we do not always recognize, and yet is enormously powerful. We are a natural complement to our research-intensive neighbor down the street. The region is remarkably well served with the combination of EMU and the U of M standing together, side-by-side, shoulder-to-shoulder. The state's public universities have always been a significant asset to attract innovation, investment and industry, and you can see that first hand here in Washtenaw County.

We also enjoy a strong tradition of collaborative partnerships with community colleges throughout Michigan. Together, we provide a seamless continuum of education for Michigan students. This is critical if we are to encourage advanced education in a greater percentage of our state's population. The average age of our undergraduate population is 24, so transfer students have long been welcomed and well served at Eastern.

Among this university's most dearly held values is the rich diversity of our campus. We celebrate the mix of unique perspectives and backgrounds that so beautifully reflects the global society in which we live and work today.

And finally, I offer one more characteristic of our university that perhaps never has been more important than it is now. We educate a substantial number of Michigan residents. Ninety percent of our students hail from this great state, many of whom settle here at home to become highly productive members of Michigan's workforce and lifelong contributors to our vibrant communities. This University's alumni are a powerful, positive force for change; more than 142,000 strong with 105,000 alumni living and working in Michigan.

In the last few months I have heard countless stories from alumni who stepped onto this campus in search of an education that would give them opportunities for a fulfilling life and career. In many cases it has led to generations of the same family proudly claiming Eastern as their alma mater.

A few months ago I met several members of the Curran family from southeast Michigan; three generations of Eastern graduates who all wanted to settle close to home in careers ranging from real estate to speech therapy to medical sales.

Sometimes our alumni become local legends. I had the privilege to meet 99-year-old graduate "Red" Simmons, who came to Eastern in 1929 with a loan of eighteen dollars and fifty cents for tuition. Red's passion was track and field. He raced against Jesse Owens many times, went to the 1932 Olympics, and ultimately launched the first women's track program in the state at the University of Michigan. I am thrilled that Red and his wife Lois are here with us today. Please join me in acknowledging them!

Our alumni make an impact all across the country and the world, not just in our home state. On a recent trip to Washington, DC, I talked with alumnus Rodney Slater during a Nationals game. Rodney came to Eastern from Arkansas to play football. He participated in our nationally recognized forensic program, and as part of that was able to take his very first trip to Washington. He then went on to law school and became a member of President Clinton's cabinet as the U.S. Secretary of Transportation.

There are so many stories like these. Eastern has always been a university of opportunity. But now, at this time and this place in our history, we feel an energizing sense of forward momentum.

Our mission is simple; harness that momentum. Fuel it. Run with it. I see opportunity and hope all around us. Eastern can and must be a driving force for the change our state needs right now. A university first known for teaching teachers is now ideally suited to educate those who will be tomorrow's innovators and leaders.

Eastern can and must prepare our students not just to hit the ground running, but to be well-grounded in the skills necessary for today's global, paradigm-shifting challenges. The state of Michigan needs new industries, new technologies, and a highly educated workforce that can help transition the state to a 21st century knowledge-based economy; an economy based on entrepreneurship, innovation and creativity.

This is precisely why I was so drawn to Eastern. This university will play a pivotal role in this state's future success. Just as importantly, it is an institution that changes the lives of Michigan citizens.

I believe Eastern is destined to be the "university of choice" for a whole new generation of students – students from Michigan and around the world – who follow traditional and not-so-traditional paths to

educational excellence. We want to educate more of these future leaders than ever before. We will open our doors wide for students of all backgrounds, students who are willing to give us their best, students who are looking for the opportunity to excel in today's complex, interconnected world.

Our vision for this university is an ambitious one. It will require hard work and new ideas, and yet all over this campus I hear support from our faculty and staff. Like me, they are eager to achieve this university's great potential. Together, we will establish strategic priorities and meet concrete goals.

We will build on our pillars of academic excellence to foster dynamic academic programs which meet contemporary needs.

We will earn the public's trust by our actions with a non-negotiable commitment to fiscal integrity, transparency, and to campus safety.

We will educate more students than ever before; those on traditional undergraduate and graduate tracks and those who are returning to school to re-tool for the new economy.

We will enhance the student experience so that every student continues to enjoy a well-rounded and satisfying collegial life in everything from customer service to residential living to intercollegiate athletics.

We will refresh our relationship with alumni as members of the EMU family. Our alumni represent not only this university's greatest accomplishments, but also the foundation on which we will build Eastern's future. We hope our alumni will share their insights and their expertise to enhance the University in the years to come.

We will launch a comprehensive fundraising campaign next year to support our future growth and excellence. Those of us in higher education understand that, indeed, a paradigm has shifted when it comes to the funding model for public universities. Philanthropy has become critical to a public university's ability to advance academic quality while keeping the cost of education affordable for students and their families.

And finally, we will encourage a greater level of collaboration with community colleges, public and private universities, industry and government, so our academic resources are put to the greatest use for the greater good.

While you are here on campus today, take a walk across Eastern's long history. Walk past the venerable oldest buildings, Welch and Starkweather Halls, the McKenny Union, the one-room school house, Roosevelt High School and the Sherzer Observatory. Feel the generations of students who studied here long ago. Remember your own college days here, those professors whose words stay with you still because they inspired you to succeed. Keep pressing forward in time to the beautiful Halle Library and its bell tower, to the new Student Center. Now imagine the soon-to-be built science center for which we broke ground this week. It will be among the finest in this state. Walk with me and lift up this great university for the world to see. Invite the next generation to join us here.

All the buildings on our campus, all the generations of students, faculty and staff who have passed through these halls; all of it, all of us are united by a common thread – the importance of education, research, teaching, and learning.

We care deeply about our students and we know there is no higher calling for a university than to provide an education which creates opportunity – especially today – especially right at this moment.

We cannot afford to let a single good mind be less than the best it can be. We cannot afford to lose sight of the fundamental truth that the world can be made better, and that each of us has a role in making that happen.

As we stand here now, the old paradigms are shifting. New energy is emerging. New opportunity is born. As Mary Oliver wrote in her poem "Wild Geese":

*"The world offers itself to your imagination,  
Calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting –  
Over and over announcing your place  
In the family of things."*

Let's not waste a moment.