



EASTERN
MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

State of the University

President James M. Smith

September 17, 2018

Good afternoon, and welcome to all of you – students, faculty, staff and members of our Eastern Michigan University community. What a distinct pleasure to be here with you to deliver what I plan to be the first of many annual State of the University addresses.

Eastern Michigan University is a special place, full of even more special people, and for that reason I think it's vital you and I pause at this time to take stock of who we are as a University and a community with a common purpose – to serve our students and help prepare them for successful futures.

And I'm ready for this discussion. I've been here for a little over two exciting and highly instructive years. I led six commencement ceremonies and three welcome convocations. I've held listening sessions and begun visiting departmental staff meetings. I've enjoyed hearing from students all over campus. I've attended hundreds of events and spent time with local business owners and community leaders and talked to so many of you.

These activities have only served to increase how much Connie and I love being here, and how eager we are to focus our energy and continue to lead Eastern forward.

As I will outline shortly, we have many positives; we are set on a good path. We also face significant challenges, the likes of which are being confronted at most other Midwestern regional universities. These challenges require that we reflect on and restructure how we operate.

Today, I want to look back a bit, note our achievements and embrace the great character of this campus, and then to take a powerful look forward and contemplate what must be done.

As we look back and plan for the future, I want to emphasize three themes or takeaways today.

First, we are, and must resolve to remain, a University Of Opportunity. It is deeply woven into our mission and history. But exactly what does that characterization represent? It signifies this: diversity of race, nationality, socio-economic and experiential background.

And, indeed it drives much of what do here.

It's why we invest so heavily in financial aid.

It's why we opened and now eagerly support Swoop's Food Pantry.

It's why we started Engage @ EMU to further connect with the community.

It's why we have the Holman Success Center and programs such as MAGIC.

Fully embracing our important role as a University of Opportunity will drive us, even as we make the difficult decisions needed to reflect the new normal in higher education, and it will be a central element and appeal in our upcoming comprehensive fundraising campaign.

Second, we face significant challenges going forward, challenges that are not unique to Eastern but that demand our attention, to ensure the sustainability of our great University. I will outline some plans today to move us forward in meeting these challenges.

Third, we have much to brag about, and we need to do much, much more of that. Let's tell our story of Eastern Excellence, every one of you!

Now, I want to pause on that point. I'm not talking about a blind faith in administration or the actions of the University. Hardly. I'm speaking of the shared realization that, whatever issues confront us, we understand that so many great things happen on this campus every day.

In speaking with many of you, I've found a deep well of pride in your interactions with students, in what you teach, in how you approach your job, in what you do on this campus and beyond.

Such commitment is, in fact, often embedded in various criticisms I hear of Eastern. Such sentiments often reflect a level of caring and a willingness to personally speak out on issues that matter.

From my view, we're far more united in purpose than divided in spirit, and together, I hope we can, in whatever way possible, tell our story more often to more people!

What do I mean when I urge you to tell our story? What am I asking you to talk about? For one, I'm talking about noting the indicators of our strong academics and exceptional student body.

That's shown in myriad recent awards.

- We're ranked among the Best in the Midwest by the Princeton Review, the 16th consecutive year we've received that designation.
- Our College of Business is ranked among the nation's best for the 14th year in a row.
- Our Clinical Research Administration graduate program is ranked number one, as is our online master's in human nutrition.
- Music therapy is ranked in the nation's top 10.
- Our online B.S. in dietetics is in the top five programs in the country.
- Our Ph.D. in clinical psychology is considered among the very best.
- We're a Center of Academic Excellence for information assurance.
- Our teacher education programs were recognized for national excellence in the recent reaccreditation process.
- Eastern was ranked in the top 25 nationally for our support to students on the autism spectrum.
- And we are a consistent leader in the state in terms of being military and LGBT friendly.

We also have excellent academic teams.

- For instance, our moot court team went to nationals this past year.
- Our integrated marketing and communications students finished third in a worldwide marketing competition.
- A group of physics students finished second this past year in a national NASA student design challenge. This summer, that group attended a national conference at NASA, where they demonstrated their project, which focused on water extraction from Mars.

We support such efforts through distinct and excellent research opportunities, most notably, the Undergraduate Symposium, a signature event on our campus, along with student-faculty research grants.

I've said it before and will repeat it often – the faculty-student connection here is the foundation of all we do at Eastern. We all agree on this.

We've recently enjoyed some major grant successes, including a major NIH grant that funds a web-based program for tracking infant development.

In addition, this past year three faculty members, Anne Casper, Joseph Breza and Jamie Cornelius, secured major grants that fund their work and undergraduate research.

Importantly, we're adding new academic programs to meet the demands of students and the job market. Those recently introduced include mechanical engineering, computer and electrical engineering, neuroscience, fermentation science, TESOL, religious studies, data analytics, a master's in finance and a master's in africanology and African American studies.

Eastern abounds with opportunities for all kinds of students – first generation, transfers, veterans, working adults, stay-at-home parents and international students.

As part of our ongoing goal of building an inclusive community, we've launched several diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives over the summer. First, a comprehensive campus climate assessment where we hear from all members of the community about their experience.

Second, we will soon launch a new diversity, equity, and inclusion website to serve as a central online hub for people from within and outside the Eastern community to learn about our work and resources in this area.

Third, the continued work of the President's Commission on Diversity and Inclusion. This excellent group of individuals was initially led by an expert in the field, Professor Ronald Woods, to develop preliminary recommendations that we are following, and they will continue to work under the leadership of Dr. Dibya Choudhuri.

Our McNair Scholars program, led by Professor Heather Neff, helps first-generation students pursue graduate studies and epitomizes our role as a school of opportunity. Last year, every one of the scholars was admitted to a graduate program.

In all measures, we are one of the most diverse public universities in Michigan, and that should be a profound source of pride.

To borrow the message we see all around campus and Ypsilanti, all are welcome here.

We can also take pride in our facilities. We're an old campus, at 169 years, the second oldest public university in the state. Yet it's a beautiful campus, and we're working hard to preserve and improve crucial academic facilities. I guarantee you're going to love Strong Hall when it's finished!

Our Student Center has been ranked number one in the country – not just for its aesthetics, but for its overall utility to campus. That building is truly the heartbeat of student and campus life.

Our new co-gen facility is saving on utility costs to the tune of more than \$2.8 million a year, and greatly reducing carbon emissions.

We've also greatly improved our dining offerings, as shown by the positive results from our student survey, and we've invested in campus safety and security, with nearly 900 security cameras on campus, and greatly improved lighting in a variety of areas. Our police force remains an integral part of campus – trusted and caring, whether walking their beats, riding on bicycles or patrolling in their vehicles. The fact is that Eastern's campus is an extremely safe place to work and live, and student and employee safety will remain a top priority at Eastern.

Numerous other improvements are coming soon. Sill Hall will be renovated and expanded to support our growing high-demand College of Technology programs.

Preliminary work on the Rec/IM begins in January, with a full-scale renovation beginning in May. This project is funded in large part by a dedicated student fee that was proposed by Student Government, reflecting their knowledge that top-notch student facilities are vital to a bright future for Eastern and our students.

Work will begin on the new health facility that will include a state-of-the-art clinic serving the EMU and surrounding communities, as well as new space for CAPS and our Psychology Clinic.

And we have commissioned a housing study to further assess our stock, student demand and the market. A student survey and student focus groups will occur this semester.

Another area where we truly excel, and where we don't often get credit, is our exceptional partnerships and level of community engagement. Eastern walks the walk when it comes to contributing to our southeastern Michigan schools and local neighbors.

How do we contribute? Let me count some ways. For starters, we have more than 140 articulation agreements with community colleges – more than any other university in Michigan – agreements that facilitate 3+1 and 2+2 year progressions that make college far more affordable to students.

Our Early College Alliance Program, which allows high school students to attend and receive college credit at Eastern, boasts some of the highest academic success rates in the state.

Each year, our Digital Divas program hosts middle and high school girls to learn about cyber security and the STEM opportunities available to them. And, this summer, middle school girls attended a four-week summer camp on campus focused on promoting awareness of STEM careers – hugely important topics these days, you'll agree.

Our fermentation science program is working on a project in midtown Detroit to help prepare people for careers in the brewing business.

Our student athletes performed more than 7,000 hours of community service last year, and our Bright Futures and Upward Bound programs help hundreds of area high school students.

The Eastern Scholars program brings our graduate assistants into local public schools to help students prepare for college.

The VISION volunteer center continues to provide excellent opportunities for students, such as the Pen Pals program at Estabrook Elementary in Ypsilanti.

Our LiveYpsi program has helped more than 50 Eastern employees purchase homes in the community.

And WEMU, Eastern's National Public Radio station, was honored as Michigan's "Station of the Year" as it celebrated its 50th anniversary with new community-based features and skyrocketing ratings.

Such activity is reflected in our Carnegie classification as a "community engaged" university, a label that is not lightly bestowed, and for which we had to demonstrate a high level of collaboration and results.

Last year, as an indication of our institutional pride and potential, we shattered our record on the annual day of donations known as Giving Tuesday.

Based on all of these positive initiatives and more, the Higher Learning Commission re-accredited us for 10 years. They also gave us quite a to-do list, which I'll get to in a moment.

These are just a few of our successes. I do not highlight these achievements to pat myself on the back. Many others are responsible for these achievements and much of this work began before I arrived. Instead, I remind us of these successes because I sincerely hope they give you a sense, an attitudinal tip of the iceberg, of why it's worth banding together and supporting each other as we more proactively tell our story.

We need to tout these successes more, and more broadly! We – and I mean all of us on this campus – are worth it.

Why is this so important? Because we now find ourselves in a time of distinct challenges, which come in a variety of forms. UNMET, these challenges threaten the very existence of our institution.

First off, we face stark challenges in terms of the state's declining number of high school graduates, which is our sole source of first-year students.

Nationwide, the higher education market has contracted 12 percent since 2011. The number of high school graduates in Michigan has declined 15 percent since 2008, and is projected to fall by another 15 percent through 2028. And within that shrinking pool of high school graduates, a smaller portion are choosing to attend four-year universities. Those are scary numbers.

Meanwhile, neighboring states are experiencing similar declines in high school graduates. Indiana is projected to decline 7 percent through 2028. Illinois is projected to decline 11 percent and Ohio 12 percent during that period.

Not surprisingly, the changing demographics also mean that community college populations are declining, cutting into a key source of our transfer students. All of our community college partners have seen declines, and our transfer student headcount is down 36 percent since 2010.

International students have also declined, falling 29 percent since 2012, and more hurdles loom because of the politics in Washington.

The result? Our pool of potential students is getting smaller and smaller.

Indeed, our total student headcount decreased 13.5 percent since 2010. Student credit hours, the lifeblood of our revenues, are down nearly 8 percent from 2014-17, and projected to decline further based on existing demographics.

We're not alone in having to adjust our budget to meet these realities. A quick glance at newspaper headlines reveals that our peers in Michigan and around the country are slashing tens of millions of dollars from their budgets, eliminating positions, cutting academic programs, and ending sports programs.

We cannot look to Lansing or Washington to solve our problems. From our high in the early 2000s, we now receive about \$8 million less from the state, and that's before adjusting for inflation. In addition, federal Pell Grants, which 40 percent of our undergraduate students receive, are up less than one percent a year over the last five years.

We also need to continue to deal with our aging infrastructure. Our beloved campus needs continued R&R – rebuilding and renovation.

A final challenge concerns our level of communication and self-image.

Among many, there is a perceived lack of communication here at Eastern. Indeed, when I arrived on campus, I was surprised at how little information was shared. I understand this is a concern. We have not done enough to fix it. I pledge to do more. I will expand on that promise shortly.

Perhaps the most startling thing I sensed soon upon arriving was the negativity that can permeate our campus. It's understandable to feel anxious and angry during difficult times, or moments of great distress, but at times such an aura seems to flow through our daily lives at Eastern.

Now, I'm not asking you to simply cast aside such feelings, which can have deep historical or personal roots. It can be said that Eastern is big enough to matter, but small enough to be a tightly-knit, highly self-aware community, in which the issue du jour can overwhelm a broader sense of what we stand for and seek to accomplish.

I am asking you to look deeper into who we are, to take greater pride in our shared purpose, as opposed to dwelling each day on the inevitable issues that arise on a diverse campus of nearly 20,000 students and highly intelligent and aware faculty and staff.

I hope you can take a fresh look around – particularly during these times of economic challenge – and see all the great activity taking place and the caring staff and faculty behind all of it.

We have so much of which we can be proud and on which we can collaborate.

So, what are we going to do to address these challenges? What is our plan? I'd like to outline five areas to focus on, along with several associated actions or tasks in each area.

These areas of focus are:

1. To increase enrollment and student persistence;
2. Improve communication;
3. Update the University's Strategic plan;
4. Continue on our path to fiscal sustainability; and,
5. Crush our upcoming Comprehensive Fundraising Campaign.

These priorities will not be one-year initiatives; work will surely continue into future years.

Right now, our most pressing challenge is enrollment & student persistence, which is sometimes phrased as “retention.” This requires support from every employee. The focus is clear: We need to enroll more students ... but we also need to retain our current students.

This isn't going to be easy. As I noted, student demographics are changing. In general, there are fewer students available to enroll in college. And those students who enroll are different: they are the technology and social media generation.

To better understand the new ways students seek and process info, and make decisions, we will ask University Budget Council to examine why students considering Eastern change their mind through the various stages of the admissions and enrollment process, and they will help identify what might we do differently to address these issues.

We must also undertake a comprehensive review of how we market Eastern to students – both in content and delivery – to ensure we are in tune with the market.

We need to highlight key academic programs that are in high demand. We need to acknowledge and act upon the fact the world is changing. The top jobs of the future include areas such as drone applications, augmented virtual reality, 3D print design, health care, IT, alternative energy, robotics, cyber security and biometrics.

Then we must look at graduate programs, because as the job market changes, demand for advanced degrees increases. The top areas include MBA and healthcare, but we also have signature programs such as education leadership. Graduate study, for us, is an untapped market. We must do more to market our excellent programs.

With this in mind, I call upon you for help: We need a collective effort by all employees to put student service at the forefront.

Every day, I remind myself how lucky I am to work at Eastern – and how hard our students work to achieve their dreams and earn a degree. For employees, it is too easy to get mired down in our day-to-day to-do lists and forget about why we are all here, and why we have a job: to serve students. This must be our continued priority.

I also call upon you for help in another key area. I ask all employees – especially faculty and supporting staff in colleges – to help recruit new students.

This is a crucial effort, more so because each program is unique; exact action items will vary based on college.

We must target adult learners; we cannot simply focus on 17-year-olds. Here's a startling statistic: Nearly 25 percent of Michigan adults age 25-64 have some college credit but no degree. Our state ranks number one in the Midwest for what are called college “stop-outs.” In southeast Michigan alone, there are nearly 700,000 adults with some college credit but no degree.

Nationwide, the market for adult degree completion is larger than the market for traditional high school students entering college.

So we must target this population, which tends to be working and has different needs and demands from 17-year olds. That means marketing... flexibility... and online options, which will be a key part of a new marketing strategy.

Today's adult learners – including those seeking an undergraduate degree – increasingly demand online learning for two primary reasons: First, they have jobs in a booming economy they don't want to quit. Second, they have families to care for.

Even today's 18- and 19-year old students demand more online education. Approximately 30 percent of higher education students nationwide take at least one online course. The conclusion is obvious: We must develop more online courses and programs. We have been slow to move in this area, and our peers – as well as top-tier universities with global reputations – are far ahead of us in this critical growth area.

Those online courses and programs can be marketed broadly; this is our chance to showcase our top programs to a much larger market of potential students. By expanding online, we are also providing broader opportunities for non-traditional students – which is part of our Mission.

Our online RN-to-BSN program, led by the outstanding faculty and staff in nursing, is a perfect example of this great potential.

Student credit hours in ground-based nursing programs have been relatively flat since 2013, but the nursing department has nonetheless enjoyed a 58 percent increase in student credit hours – thanks almost exclusively to the online RN-to-BSN program. There are real dollars at stake: the online RN-to-BSN program turned the department's recurring operating deficit into a surplus.

Moreover, the online RN-to-BSN program is flexible. Most of these students are currently working as nurses who, as we know, do not work regular 8-5 shifts. They complete their coursework after hours and on weekends. Rather than being forced to matriculate in September or January, students choose from six different times during the year to begin their coursework. Students may also stop and start their coursework as needed.

By providing this flexibility, we are providing educational and career opportunities to students who may otherwise not have the chance to earn a bachelor's degree. And there is undisputed and significant financial benefit to EMU.

Online education will not replace the traditional classroom model. But expanding online education IS the future and it's what our students demand.

I readily acknowledge that our collaboration with Academic Partnerships, a group EMU retained to market online courses, has generated controversy. But I want to be clear: AP only handles marketing for certain programs; EMU faculty develop and teach all of our courses – period.

But what can't be disputed is that our partnership with AP is a success. AP helped expand the reach of our RN-to-BSN program to students we would otherwise not have reached – and those marketing expenses are borne by AP instead of EMU. That's why our peers are using similar partnerships to market their online programs.

Another example of success is our online master's in educational leadership program. Online credit hours have grown significantly since 2015, and the growth continued last year when AP began marketing this excellent program to a broader market.

So we know where the demand lies; now we must meet that demand by developing and launching more online programs. We can focus on the MBA degree, on curriculum & instruction and special education, on our master of science in nursing, and on information assurance, just to name a few.

In summary, online education is not just a major revenue stream – something we cannot ignore – but it also provides opportunities to undergrad, grad students and adult returners – and that is again part of our mission.

In addition to online, we must focus on increasing international enrollment. You heard the alarming statistics: international enrollment at Eastern and at many universities around the country is down. It's clear that part of this is caused by Washington politics. But our decrease pre-dates the current administration in Washington, and thus also reflects a failure of past years that de-emphasized this vital element of Eastern's academic and campus life.

Knowing this, I want to double international enrollment at Eastern Michigan University during my tenure.

We've made a start on that goal, with numerous partnerships underway in Asia and elsewhere. Our new, TRUEMU Global Rate tuition plan that offers instate tuition has attracted considerable national and international attention and will help bolster international enrollment.

Our #YouAreWelcomeHere campaign has helped create greater awareness of the role of international students, faculty and staff in contributing to the rich diversity of our community.

And our Global Engagement Council plans to create a tool for searchable international agreements to spur faculty global efforts and support mentoring and alumni activities.

Again, this is a collective effort – every employee helps make a positive experience for every student, especially students here from a foreign country who can't see their parents with a 30-minute car ride.

It is not enough to talk about enrolling new students – we must also do more to retain existing students, and help them persist toward graduation.

To that end, we are proud to have been selected as a member of the fall 2018 cohort of the Higher Learning Commission's Student Success Academy. A team of faculty and staff will work with HLC scholars and mentors over the next three years to build on our current efforts to improve student persistence and success. Starting with a close examination of data about our institution, this experience will take our Degree Completion & Retention Plan to the next level.

Additional strategies will be developed in concert with faculty, staff, and students -- again, this is a collective effort; every employee at EMU has a role to play.

A second key focus area for the coming year is to improve communication at Eastern.

I realize that communication has at times been insufficient. I want to emphasize that our goal is not just to tell you more, but to hear more from you – communication must be two-way to be effective.

Communication, in part, means us giving you information, and we clearly need to do more of that. But I also commit to also seeking consultation from applicable groups before we take action.

With that goal in mind, we're launching several new initiatives to improve and expand two-way communication. We will continue the administrator and department head meetings that started under interim President Don Lopppnow. Those have resulted in significant sharing of information and positive interaction and understanding.

Another action will be a monthly e-mail to all employees. This communication will be included as part of the Wednesday EMU Today news updates. It will touch upon a variety of topics, from academics to budget to facilities.

We also plan to hold coffee chats and front desk hours. Division leaders will begin holding coffee chats with employee groups. The goal will be to exchange information and ideas in an informal but scheduled setting.

Division leaders will also begin working some hours at "front desks" in their areas a few hours every quarter. This will help them understand some of the questions and issues that they may not see first-hand in their day-to-day work, as well as increase access to them.

Along the line of communication, I want to announce a special new initiative, which is the President's Sustainability Commission, to be chaired by Thomas Kovacs, a distinguished professor of meteorology and an authority on our Eastern campus environment. The Commission will be charged with working with various units to assess Eastern's sustainability efforts and make recommendations on how to become more sustainable.

What do I mean by sustainable? “Sustainability entails both principles and practices that promote and maintain the responsible use of natural resources by current generations to ensure the availability and well-being of those resources for our future generations.”

We’re already doing a good deal in this area, including the introduction of our co-generation electricity and heating system, the installation of energy-saving glass in residence halls and other buildings, and energy efficient lighting throughout campus.

But how can we do more? The commission will be a great opportunity for the campus to show how cross-sectional groups can work together to produce terrific results. I’m excited about this effort and what it can mean for the future of our campus and community.

A third key focus area is taking the next steps in updating the University’s Strategic Plan.

Most of us are well aware that we have a Plan anchored by excellent Mission, Vision and Values. The plan also includes several strategic themes that have driven, and will continue to drive, our collective efforts.

But Eastern’s Strategic Plan as it exists now lacks measurable and substantive action items that carry tangible metrics and goals. This omission has been noted by many of you, and a quick review of our peers’ strategic plans confirms that our Plan differs from those in that key respect. Most importantly, the Higher Learning Commission demanded we address this lack of specifics with well-articulated, measurable goals.

The Strategic Plan was always intended to be an evolving document; indeed, all strategic plans must be a living and breathing roadmap for the institution. In that spirit, we plan to launch a collaborative process to update Eastern’s Strategic Plan. We will create work groups for each of the Plan’s strategic themes which, collectively, will include stakeholders from across campus: faculty, staff, students, even a couple alums.

What will this process do? Using the Mission, Vision, Values and Themes, these groups will propose updates to the Plan with tangible goals and measurable outcomes. The initial focus will be on institution-wide goals and outcomes. These groups will also propose updates to the Plan to reflect the constantly changing demographic and technological landscape in which we operate.

Then, individual departments will develop specific goals and measurable outcomes for their areas. It’s important to note that this will be the job of each division or department, AND NOT the job of central administration or these work groups. You all know your areas best, and you all need to help shape the work you will do in the coming years to best fulfill Eastern’s Mission.

Key focus areas of our updated Strategic Plan will involve student enrollment & persistence, online education, and experiential learning (which is clearly beneficial for students, and demanded by employers).

The message I want to make clear is this: This Strategic Plan cannot be a document that merely sits on a figurative shelf. Rather, it must be a powerful and clear call to specific actions and outcomes.

A fourth focus area is not unique to Eastern but has particular importance because of our history: we need to continue to stabilize our finances.

When I arrived at Eastern in July 2016, Eastern had incurred multi-million dollar budget deficits for six consecutive years. You cannot operate your household that way, you cannot operate your small business that way, and you cannot operate a university that way.

Not surprisingly, we had also been depleting our financial reserves – in layman's terms, our savings account was disappearing. Our reserves are low by all benchmark standards, and those low reserves have placed us on the watch list of our accreditor, the Higher Learning Commission.

I was committed, from Day 1, to reversing these dangerous trends.

You all know firsthand the difficult decisions we have made to stabilize our finances because you live it every day. No president accepts a job hoping to make painful decisions that impact people's livelihood. But I would not be doing my job if I ignored reality.

I am pleased to say that, after the heavy lifting you all endured, we have made tremendous progress. The last two years, we have dramatically reduced those deficits and, for the current fiscal year, we project a balanced budget.

We have also increased our operating reserves thanks to our partnerships in parking and dining. Those partnerships also leveraged investments in our campus infrastructure – investments that we would not have been able to afford on our own.

Despite this progress, work is not done in this area. As I mentioned earlier, we continue to face challenging demographic trends. Every year will require difficult choices. I commit to you, however, to ensure a more engaging process to work with key campus stakeholders as we tackle these challenges and ensure a stable financial future for Eastern Michigan University.

I want to end on a brighter note. A final key focus area for this and future years is our Comprehensive Fundraising Campaign.

As many of you know, we plan to launch a comprehensive fundraising campaign in the next few years. The aim will be to generate significant new dollars to sustain University goals. This will be a critically important, campus-wide sustained effort.

Our comprehensive proposal is in the early stages of development, but its focus areas for gifts will include student success, signature academic programs and experiential learning.

Of course, any discussion of fundraising, revenues and spending at Eastern must acknowledge the persistent question of athletics expenses. I acknowledge the concern many on campus register regarding athletics spending.

Thus, building upon the actions of last year, we must recommit to increasing revenues – including fundraising – for Athletics. I want to emphasize that it's not the central campus vs. athletics. Our student athletes are outstanding and hard-working members of this campus. They consistently win awards for their academic and service achievements, as well as their successes on the playing field. They reflect the fact that we are all on the same team, pulling largely in the same direction, on behalf of our students.

Our comprehensive campaign must be a team effort. It will require the input and support of every employee, because of a central fact of giving: Donors invest in YOU, the memorable and inspiring faculty member, the engaged administrator, the caring staff member. I hope you never forget that reality and the difference you as an individual can make.

We have other initiatives already underway that will continue. I have touched on some of those, such as the construction projects at the Rec/IM, health center, and Sill Hall. Others may not even be on the horizon yet. But my goal today was to highlight five key areas that, on a broad level, should help guide all our efforts this coming year.

In closing, I readily note that this is an aggressive agenda for an annual blueprint. Some may complain that I failed to mention a particular area. I apologize in advance for that.

This leads to an important closing point: It's clear to me after two years here that negativity hangs too heavily on our beautiful campus.

I fervently hope we can all take more pride in Eastern and our work here.

And I must emphasize this: The strategic priorities I've outlined today need your expertise. Only with your involvement can we be effective and succeed. This is above all a collaborative effort that sweeps in all the ideas, insight and energy on our campus.

This is a wonderful institution, one with a rich history that is too often marred by our own negativity and tendency to dwell on the issue of the day.

I know we are not perfect. I will make mistakes. I have made mistakes.

But it is vital to our long-term success as an institution, and the daily success of our students, for us to commit to a more collaborative, empathetic, future-oriented and thus more positive outlook about this outstanding University!

Thank you so much for your time today. Many of you may have questions or feedback. I and the members of the Executive Council, who are seated in the front row, will be available for conversation after I conclude my remarks. Please come on down!

And now, with thoughts of all the exceptional academic, social and athletic aspects of this diverse and vibrant campus, I have to say, Go Green!

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