Welcome Back Breakfast 2011

Thank you and welcome to another exciting year here at EWU.

Most of us have had the opportunity to take a breath and get some rest over the summer, and to reflect on the many achievements of the last year. I think many of us also got a little impatient waiting for that summer weather to finally arrive. In fact, Nadine and I decided to NOT wait for summer to arrive in Cheney, so we came up with the bright idea to take a short trip to visit our grandkids. We, of course, went to Texas; all excited about seeing family and getting some sunshine. Well, summer we got! We went from one extreme to another—from the cold in the Inland Northwest to 100 degree temperatures! An amusement park in the Texas heat does not make a perfect vacation, especially with 4 grandkids younger than 8 years old in tow. You live and learn. In fact, I learned that maybe a little cool weather isn’t so bad.

I guess it’s all about perspective—appreciating what one has. I think that would hold true for all of us here at Eastern. Despite the onslaught of challenging economic news, we must keep it all in perspective, because we have a great thing going here at Eastern. Enrollment is strong, our faculty and staff are doing amazing work - from leading a community study on middle school retention, to providing important economic data and insight into our region. Everywhere you look, EWU is a driving force in the region.

Before I go too much further, I would like to ask all our new faculty members here this morning to please stand and be recognized. I would like to encourage you to introduce yourself and welcome our new faculty. Reach out to them. Offer them help. Make them feel welcome—this is their new home.

I would also like to introduce two members of the EWU Board of Trustees who took time out of their busy day to join us this morning: Dr. Mark Mays and Mr. Patrick Spanner. Will you please stand and be recognized? Our board members work tirelessly on behalf of the institution. Thank you again, Trustees, for all your work and for taking the time to be here today.

As I thought about the start of the year, I kept thinking about my strong desire to continue moving Eastern toward greater levels of excellence. It is clear to me that YOU as faculty and staff are critical to achieving the goal of improving the reputation of Eastern. To bring the best students to Eastern, it is key that we have an excellent reputation for quality programs and a supportive environment for them. That is why it is critical for us to continue to strive to advance our teaching, enhance our research efforts, and further develop methods that support our students at all levels of the University. Your passion for transforming students during their years at EWU is even more important now than in the past. This year the quality of our student body has improved, and I am confident that each of you will assist them in reaching their full potential.
**Strategic Planning:**

Last year, you might remember, I discussed a request by the Board of Trustees to engage the campus in a strategic planning process. The goal was to review our campus **mission, vision** and **values** for the forthcoming years. Since the last opportunity for the campus to participate in a board planning process was in the early 2000’s, it was time for us to review the progress of the University. This meant conducting an assessment of the strengths, weakness, opportunities and difficulties facing the institution. It was my contention that it was also not prudent to spend two to three years conducting this review, given the changing economic climate statewide and nationally. Therefore, we embarked on a nine-month effort to develop a strategic plan and focus the plan on action initiatives that would yield **QUICK** results aimed at improving the quality of our academic programs and increasing the success of our students.

Charting our future with a fresh vision is especially necessary, critical and timely because of the significant changes to the funding of higher education in the state of Washington. In addition, the academic direction and focus of the university have changed, and new demands from the region and state require us to reassess the best ways to utilize our campus resources. It is important for the university to develop new goals, strategies and actions to meet the current and very real challenges we face.

To date, the university has already hosted numerous strategy sessions. A Spokane-based communications firm has also helped us reach out to our constituents for their input. The results have been impressive. More than 100 of you participated in focus groups on the Cheney, Riverpoint, and Bellevue campuses; and 850 people from Eastern and the outside community participated in our Web survey. In addition, almost 30 key business, legislative, and community leaders as well as university board members have been interviewed to gather their unique insight.

We are also branding this effort to give it an identity that reflects our goal. **Inspiring the Future**, as it is called, will truly be a campus-wide strategic planning effort that clearly defines our plan to inspire and enthuse those involved with Eastern. As the quarter begins, the Strategic Planning Committee will continue its work, and we will begin a series of meetings with faculty, staff and administrators about the progress that has been made on the mission, vision and values associated with EWU. As we conduct these meetings, we will garner feedback on what has been developed so far and to check and see if the information we gathered last quarter is reflected in the draft mission, vision and values that have been created. At the same time, the Strategic Planning Committee will begin to craft a plan for discussion later this quarter. I would like to ask the members of the Strategic Planning Committee to please stand and be recognized. Thank you for all your hard work thus far.

Through the engagement process that many of you participated in, four areas have consistently risen to the top as being most important. These four items have been:

- Student success
- Institution of innovation
- Reputation; and
- Community engagement
As *Inspiring the Future* takes shape, the committee will focus on these areas as it develops strategies and achievable goals. These four goals will also be discussed during the fall quarter with members of the campus community by way of open forums and surveys. The intent will be to complete the work of the Strategic Planning Committee by the end of November. I will keep you posted on the progress through my *Inspiring the Future* newsletter.

**Board Goals:**
Consistent with the development of a new Strategic Plan is the positioning of the Board of Trustee Goals for 2011-12. During this year’s Board planning session, they discussed the strategic planning process and participated in a work session to focus on defining the mission, vision and values of the University. Their discussion about the future direction of the University and the strategic issues we face led the Board to identify THREE major goals for the coming year. Narrowing of the number of goals to three critical areas reflects the board's desire to ensure we remain highly focused and make measurable progress in achieving the goals set by them. The three goals are:

- Academic excellence and student success
- Institutional strength and security
- Raising awareness and visibility

**Goal one** is intended to foster an environment where academic excellence and student success are ensured for all students, including those who are the first in their families to attend college. The Board of Trustees supports the continued improvement of first year retention and the removal of institutional impediments to increasing Eastern’s four-year graduation rate. They are also interested in continuing efforts to promote an inclusive university environment that supports diversity initiatives that are key to creating a platform for academic excellence.

**Goal two**, Institutional Strength and Security, challenges us, to create for the citizens of Washington State, a university that is on the leading edge in higher learning. This University has the flexibility and foresight to thrive in times of adversity and budget cutbacks through innovation and organizational strength. To do this, we must implement policies and programs which allow us to find creative approaches to address the state budget crisis, while continuing to streamline operations and maximize our resources. The University will also be strengthened by the implementation of a new strategic plan, and continued efforts to increase our sustainability.

Finally, the **last goal** - raising awareness and visibility - means we have to make EWU the FIRST choice of students, faculty, the community, business and government, when looking for academic excellence and innovation. We will continue to develop a focused set of activities and messages that define the role of Eastern in the local community and in statewide educational efforts. The University will increase its involvement locally by actively pursuing and providing leadership in key groups and programs in Spokane and the State of Washington.

**New Initiatives:**
In an effort to support these goals which the Board and I have agreed upon, we will be launching THREE new academic initiatives this year:

- Student Retention
- E-learning; and
Community engagement

**Student Retention:**
Our most significant initiative will focus on improving the success of students attending Eastern Washington. This initiative is directed at the enhancement of academic support services for students by consolidating existing programs and by expanding additional resources to increase accessibility to more students on campus. This consolidation will provide a broad base of support services to all EWU students. This will include improved access to our Writing Center, math tutoring services, supplemental academic instruction and basic skill development. The consolidation will bring together programs currently in Student Affairs and Academic Affairs under the leadership of our Provost and Chief Academic Officer, Dr. Rex Fuller.

In order to achieve this consolidation, we will need to make significant reorganizations in Student Affairs and Academic Affairs. This will mean strengthening the Provost’s Office by identifying a key senior administrator to lead the Office of the Associate Vice Provost for Undergraduate Affairs. The reorganization of a number of units and reporting structures will result in the co-location of some units, as space availability will allow. In addition, a clearer path for student success will be developed and outlined for all students, faculty and staff to follow as they work together to help students chart their academic direction.

A focus on improving student advisement, mentoring, and tutorial services will be a key to achieving greater success for our students. But the most important ingredient for student success at EWU is increasing expectations of what our students CAN do. The rigor of our courses cannot be compromised, and students should be held to a high standard of performance. With that high standard, all of us need to provide the encouragement and support to assist them on their journey toward success and achievement of their dreams. We will be discussing with Deans and Department Chairs how they can assist with student retention in their colleges and departments.

We must look beyond just offering courses; we must also review and carefully consider college and departmental policies that potentially create impediments for students to complete their degree in a timely manner. Our Board of Trustees is uncompromising in their commitment to increase the number of students that complete their degrees in four years. To achieve this goal will require ALL OF US working together.

**E-Learning:**
Our second major initiative this year will be the further development of e-learning capabilities across the university through the creation of a Virtual College. The creation of a Virtual College will focus Eastern’s resources on the development of a premier learning environment for place-bound students and working professionals seeking to improve skills and promotional potential.

The foremost reasons for delivering undergraduate courses and programs online are to accelerate the time it takes to earn a degree; to provide convenient access to education for students, particularly working adults; and to facilitate retention. The MOST IMPORTANT need and opportunity for online education is to offer alternative sections of popular undergraduate courses and selected undergraduate and graduate programs. We will devote resources to instructional
design support for online education, provide technology support that meets the 24/7 needs of our online students, and enhance our Blackboard structure to improve the delivery of e-learning.

The guiding principles for online learning activities should be based on the following:

- Quality expectations for online education should be equivalent to those for on-campus education. As part of this, criteria for selection of faculty to teach online courses should be the same as for on-campus courses.

- Academic control of online courses and programs should be equivalent to that of an on-campus education; online education simply should be considered a different delivery mechanism by Academic Affairs.

- The primary market for online education should be EWU’s regular service areas including residential students, off-campus locations, and high schools which request our courses.

- E-learning delivery should be selected primarily in cases when it is equally or better suited to high quality educational outcomes for the particular course or program in comparison to on-campus delivery.

As we move forward with the implementation of this initiative, we will be recruiting an individual that has significant e-learning program development experience and is well versed in online educational best practices. Our ability to move in this direction is due in part to Academic Affairs’ willingness to restructure DIEO and the resources found within that unit.

**Institute for Community Engagement:**

The third initiative will be the implementation of the Institute for Community Engagement. The Institute will be a central focal point for the University's efforts in engaging students and faculty with the local community. The Institute will provide students with opportunities for active learning, and will involve both undergraduate and graduate students in applied research projects and volunteer opportunities that will further their educational goals.

- The Institute will be anchored in existing programs that integrate applied faculty scholarship and discovery, community-based student learning, student skill-building, and connections with ethnically diverse partners.

- It will be housed on the Riverpoint Campus, providing a front door for community and regional partners. An affiliated office on the main campus will focus on providing student development in service learning and volunteer training.

- A cross-divisional partnership will unite Academic and Student Affairs, providing both curricular and co-curricular opportunities for students to be placed in internships and volunteer placements.

This office will broker a service for students and faculty to identify community projects that are consistent with the learning objectives expected by our faculty. Again, this initiative will be headed by the Provost’s Office and you will be hearing more as the project develops. These new and expanded efforts are all directed at improving EWU'S ability to make EACH student more
successful. I hope all of you will explore how you and your department can contribute to the success of these efforts and of our students.

As I am sure you can see by now, the landscape of higher education is changing. We will not only embrace these changes, we will thrive in them. Today marks the beginning of a new academic year; but not only that. It’s the dawn of a new day at Eastern Washington University. I wish ALL of you great success as we begin this academic year. Know that I promise to keep you abreast of all important issues relating to the budget. This year we have already heard of a pending 5 to 10 percent reduction in our new budget. At this point, I believe we are poised to absorb those cuts with resources that I have already identified - therefore, I don’t foresee your current budgets will be affected. Of course, if the state's deficit continues to grow, we will have to come back and take another look at all budgets approved this year. Overall, the Legislature has acknowledged Eastern's unique role in the higher education system, and they have listened to several of our recommendations.

My challenge to each of you this day is to think positively about our future. One year ago at this time, not many people thought of Eastern Washington as national champions. But with limited resources and amazing courage and determination, the Eagles indeed became football champions. I can assure you that the whole Northwest knows about this fine University, as pointed out in a Seattle Times article on September 3rd. So with the same limited resources and the same focus and determination, we too can accomplish excellence in other areas of the University. Please join me by actively taking part in the new and challenging opportunities that lie ahead. It truly is a great day to be an Eagle.

Our new freshman class will Pass Through the Pillars in front of Showalter Hall once we adjourn. Together, let’s welcome them to their new home. Please join me at this EWU tradition, and also at the Ringing of the School Bell on the morning of the 21st.

Thank you, and have a great year!