Welcome Back Breakfast - 2013

I would like to first say “GO EAGLES!!” Okay, thank you for that – because I just wanted to go for the easy applause here as I begin my speech.

Folks, look around -- this is the week we have to come to terms with the fact that summer is really over, the weather is turning and it is time to refocus our efforts to make sure every one of our students stepping onto campus this week has a successful year.

I know you are up to the challenge because you continually overcome any obstacles to ensure our students succeed. An example of that is our improvement in student first-year retention over the past lean budget years. We have gone from a 72.1 retention rate in 2008 to a 76.6 rate in 2013! That is an accomplishment I am proud of. I am also certain that we will see an additional increase this year.

And although we “say it” every year, I have never felt more in my heart than I do today, that it is a great day to be AT Eastern, and it truly is a GREAT day to be an Eagle.

I would like at this time to thank you and welcome you back to campus! I hope you enjoyed a great summer! I would also like to take this time to ask our new faculty who are here to please stand and be recognized.

I would like to ask all of you to take a look around you. Look at these new faces, introduce yourself to our new faculty. Reach out to them. Offer them help. Make them feel welcome — as they are now part of our close Eastern family… and part of a dynamic and involved faculty that is committed to student success.

Speaking of committed, I would also like to thank members of the EWU Board of Trustees who took time out of their busy day to join us this morning. Will you please stand and be recognized:

- Mark Mays

In addition to their “day” jobs and other responsibilities, our board members work tirelessly on behalf of the institution. Thank you again, trustees, for your many contributions to the university and for joining us today.

I would also like to introduce some new administrative additions to the campus, if you are here, please stand:

- Dr. Charles Lopez, Associate Provost for Undergraduate Studies and Student Retention; and
- Dr. Neil Woolf, Associate Vice President for Enrollment Management; and
- Dr. Jim Perez, Interim Dean of the College of Arts, Letters and Education.

I am going to take a bit of a different path this year as I discuss the state of the university. I want to talk about our mascot. Not Swoop – he’s doing a terrific job! But our actual Eagle
mascot – that majestic bird that has been the national symbol of the United States since 1782.

I want you to think about what the Eagle stands for and how it reflects the path this university is flying as we soar to new heights.

Dear colleagues, I truly believe that “soaring to new heights” is not a cliché when you speak about Eastern Washington University – because we are at the height of a remarkable era in many different areas – academics, enrollment, fundraising, facilities, student-athlete success, and increased visibility in our region and around the state.

Let’s take a moment to look at the Eagle.

It is, as you know, a very large and powerful bird, weighing up to 14 pounds with 4 Talons on each foot and a wing span up to 7-and-a-half-feet.

The Eagle is considered one of the largest birds of prey. They are at the top of the food chain in that regard. Now EWU is not a predator – unless you are a ranked Pac-12 football team – but we are at the top of our game!!!

An Eagle has excellent eyesight, almost like binoculars. Their eyesight is so superior that from high in the air they can see below the water’s surface when looking for fish. From the air, they can see prey on the ground from as far as two miles.

The budget crisis that we recently weathered certainly provided the opportunity for us to lose clarity, lose momentum, lose sight of our goals. And as Eagles, we responded, and we adjusted to challenges. In fact, we make our challenges become our opportunities.

In my annual address to you over the last several years, I provided reassurance to you that even though we were under severe budget reductions, I was confident that at the end of this process, we would emerge with a greater focus and stronger than when we went into it. I made an effort to provide you with hope and promised you that we would be stronger than before this budget began. I wholeheartedly believe this has transpired. We are a better university.

Did you know that an Eagle is capable of speeds up to 99 miles per hour when it heads into its hunting dive? Before that bold maneuver, it circles the water in a deliberate, methodical way as it looks for the opportune moment to make its bold move.

I would submit to you that it is part of our culture here at Eastern to make bold moves!!; and we do this after careful collaboration with the appropriate stakeholders – students, faculty, staff and our various boards and community supporters. We move, when the time is right. During the 2009-2010 academic year, we moved to consolidate and/or eliminate a number of degree programs in order to adjust to student demand. These changes allowed us to later complete or begin programs such as Electrical Engineering, the Master in Dental Hygiene,
and this year’s initiation of a Master in Public Health. We also were able to begin upgrades of the Music Theater and other academic facilities on campus.

In addition, back in 2010, many critics wondered why EWU wanted to install Red Turf on the football field. But now the Inferno, as it’s called, is one of the most challenging places to play for opposing teams. That was a **bold move**, and just like an Eagle flying with the current before it strikes, the Eastern Eagles use that field to their advantage each week. It has become a recognizable marketing symbol for the whole university. The **bold move** to install red turf during a poor economy was highly criticized; yet it enabled us to gain visibility, community involvement, and momentum. It inspired us to move forward, to plan and dream . . . even when times were bad.

**Another bold move for EWU** – was making the decision to try and host the prestigious NCUR symposium. When we **boldly** decided to make a bid, EWU went all out, showcased our fine programs and what we had to offer. Guess what? We WON THE BID! Come 2015, Eastern Washington University in Cheney, Washington, will be **center stage** for undergraduate research around the country!

And like an Eagle, Eastern isn’t afraid to spread its wings.

For example, this past year we opened a new center in Kelso in partnership with Lower Columbia Community College--adding to our ability to offer professional degrees to students in all corners of the state.

We also continue to develop our virtual campus, creating more offerings for non-traditional students and improving access to our online offerings.

I expect us to continue to look for innovative ways to spread our wings.

Now, when they aren’t hunting for food, Eagles are caring for their young. In our case, we are caring for our students. We provide them an excellent academic environment for developing their skills. We provide them a safe spot to land -- that is why we consolidated and relocated our Advising Office; we created the Learning Commons; and we spent time and energy into the conceptualization of our entry level mathematics program. Hopefully, in four years or less, our students will graduate and move on, well-prepared for the real world. It’s interesting to note that the mother Eagle stirs the nest to force her babies to fly. She ruffles the nest so that it’s not comfortable any longer—she makes it so small sticks are poking the underside of the baby eaglets. It’s time to move on!

The mother eagle carefully puts her eaglets on her wings and she leaves the nest with them on her back. Much to the surprise of her baby eaglets, she drops them in mid-air in an effort to force them to fly. She does this because she knows it’s how the eagle survives—they must learn to fly and hunt on their own, they must strengthen their wings, they must grow and expand their boundaries and view.
I want to challenge you today: will we ever grow or expand if we don’t challenge ourselves and stir up the nest? Are we comfortable with the way things are? Are we afraid to change, possibly resisting new ideas that could further strengthen the university?

One example that comes to mind is how for many years we have struggled and even shied away from becoming fully engaged in improving retention of students. Last year, thankfully, the Faculty Senate jumped into the discussion and began an initiative to address critical issues concerning retention of students. In addition, the Senate has also placed a significant focus on a review of the general education curriculum and has set an aggressive time frame for completing their review. Thank you!

**Other Eagle features worth mentioning:**

They work TOGETHER. One bird will scare the prey while the other will grab it with sharp talons.

The level of collaboration and cooperation between the Administration and the Faculty Senate and UFE have resulted in some of the efforts just noted, but it also led to the ratification of the unprecedented faculty contract for the next three years.

This contract takes a very creative and different direction for addressing salary issues that have led to a lack of competitive advantage for maintaining our best and brightest faculty. The market approach that has been developed and that is the focus of the new faculty contract allows for differentiation of academic salaries by discipline and by rank. This approach will allow us to achieve a level of parity that would never have been accomplished by simply agreeing to across-the-board raises.

It is also different from other union contracts because it provides for merit increases during the post tenure review process. Historically, the review process, while important to faculty and administration, did not provide incentive for faculty during their senior years to continue to excel. I can tell you from my own personal experience, our senior years are our best! I would like to personally thank the members of both sides of the negotiating teams for their commitment to resolve this historical issue. Faculty are key to our success, and we must work TOGETHER. Our relationship is interdependent. I hope you have received this one very clear message: you are appreciated, you are valued. No one was more pleased than I with the new agreement. It is indeed a GREAT day to be an Eagle.

As a matter of good housekeeping, I would be remiss if I didn’t mention our strategic planning efforts. But I don’t want to talk about the details at this time. I want you to hear all about it on Thursday of this week when we host EWU’s 2nd Annual Strategic Plan Conference to celebrate the outstanding progress that has been made in the first year of the Strategic Plan and to look ahead at year two actions.

I assure you, we have an IncREDible future, so please join me again on Thursday to hear all about it. This conference is a chance for you to see all that has been accomplished and
what we have in store for the future. I hope to see you attend with your colleagues and staff members.

**Are We All in Agreement that Big Things Are Happening at EWU?**

This month we opened the first new residence hall in more than 40 years. The state-of-the-art building will serve as the residential hub for campus, more proof that EWU is no longer just a commuter school for students passing through. Eastern is a **destination** which serves the needs of every student seeking the full college experience.

By the end of the quarter, we will reopen our main academic building – Patterson Hall. It is the latest in a line of environmentally-friendly, state-of-the-art facilities that will enhance the college experience for our students and will provide faculty with the room they need to do their jobs well.

With the Rec Center, Hargreaves Hall, the Computer Science building, and Senior Hall, it brings our total investment in new or renovated buildings at Eastern to approximately $60 million dollars in the last seven years. These investments in Eastern have assisted the local economy and provided much needed jobs to many in our area.

We will continue to work with our local communities to promote economic growth and development. As we advance our health, engineering and computer science academic sector, we will continue to add to the vitality of Eastern Washington and the Greater Spokane area. Once again, this year Eastern will lead the way in programs that engage the community … Get Lit! , the annual Jazz Dialogue Festival, and the Robotics Competition to name a few. Our students will become more engaged in the community though internships, co-op programs and volunteer classroom projects.

This year, once again we begin a new degree program. Our Masters of Public Health brings together the expertise of our College of Health Science and Engineering with the College of Business and Public Administration.

This program is unique for us and the State, for it is the first such program at a public university in Washington that is available to the general public. It is our intent that this will assist the Health Science Center being developed by two of our sister universities with the provision and training of professionals in the prevention side of medical issues. It is also my intent to ensure that critical research activities become part of this degree program and that this will increase our entry point for increased external grant activity. We will seek exceptional research faculty to become the core of this new program.

**Faculty are up to some really Big things**

- Mary Ann Keogh Hoss received the American College of Healthcare Executives Regent Award for 2012 in recognition for her service with the Washington State
Healthcare Executive Forum. She is an associate professor of Health Service Administration at EWU.

- Damon Aiken was a recipient of the National Marketing Management Association’s 2013 Teaching Excellence Award in Chicago, Illinois.
- Gregory Spatz, an associate professor in English, has published *Half as Happy*, a book of eight short stories. His awards include the 2012 National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Literature Fellowship as well as a Washington State Book Award. Spatz, an author and musician, has written and published novels for the last 30 years and his short stories have been published in elite literary publications such as the *New Yorker* and the *New England Review*.
- Dr. Byron Russell (Department of Physical Therapy) - received the Outstanding Service Award from the Federation of State Boards of Physical Therapy. The award will be presented at the Federation of State Boards of Physical Therapy Annual Meeting in San Antonio, TX on Oct. 12, 2013.
- Dr. Jamie Manson (Department of Chemistry/Biochemistry) – He has received another grant from the National Science Foundation Division of Materials Research for $276,000. The grant is to support his research into organometallic materials.
- The EWU Concert Jazz Band, under the direction of Phil Doyle, was selected as one of 6 bands nationally to perform at the 2013 Next Generation Jazz Festival in Monterey, CA as part of the 56th Annual Monterey Jazz Festival.

Please give a big hand to these outstanding faculty members. Thank you for all you do to enhance the learning environment for students.

**CONCLUSION**

I can’t thank you enough for the hard work you do every day here at Eastern. I know we said that a lot during the difficult budget years, and now that things are improving I can honestly say your hard work is why Eastern is positioned so well.

We, like the Eagle, will continue to soar to new heights. Eagles work together to achieve their goals, and everyone in this room has worked together to create a truly great university. When we have to, we stir up the nest….we are certainly bold…and we are also very proud. I am proud of each of you. After 7-1/2 years as your president, I hope that are beginning to understand that before making decisions that will affect you, I think about them. Sometimes, for a very long time.

Some decisions I have made are for your protection, some are for your general welfare. But these decisions are always without malice: I want you to succeed, I want you to do well, I want you to lead happy and productive lives.

Before we get on with our busy day, I want to remind you about the journey that starts today for our freshman class. At 11 am, they will Pass Through the Pillars and walk up the brick pathway in front of Showalter Hall.
I invite you to join me in welcoming them to campus; it’s a special moment for each student, and it’s their first step toward a successful experience at Eastern.

Every year we have a chance to start something big, and it begins TODAY!

Thank You, and have a great year -- Say it with me: It’s a GREAT day to be an Eagle; one more time, It’s a GREAT day to be an Eagle!