

Thank you, Dr. Mueller for your very kind words. Welcome President Perry, Dean Hanner, Faculty, Staff, Student President Murphy, and most importantly, and the reason we are all here, welcome students, the class of 2013. I am EIU.... and now you are EIU!

Convocation is the annual gathering of students, faculty, and staff to welcome the newest members of our Eastern family, the class of 2013.

Remember — you are intelligent, creative, and capable. You belong here and every one of you is here because we know that you can succeed and flourish

The next four years will be the journey of a lifetime, but the course and destination of that journey are yet to be charted. It is your life and your journey so it is important that you start thinking now how you will chart your course of growth and discovery.

My remarks this morning will center on three topics; Learning, Living, and Giving Back.

The sole purpose of Eastern Illinois University is to ensure each of you receives an exceptional comprehensive education that will allow you to grow as individuals, thrive in your careers and become outstanding citizens.

Your general education classes will be instrumental in providing you the foundation you need to succeed in your educational endeavors and in life.

It is important to have a broad education with courses in the arts, humanities, and sciences so you can apply these skills to the career you choose.

You must realize that most people change careers several times in a lifetime and many are working in fields outside of their major.

While one's specific major is important, you must still be able to think critically, communicate clearly, and become responsible citizens and leaders.

Most of you have not decided on a major and the first two years of your general education will allow you to sample classes across all colleges and departments and choose a major that is exciting and challenging for you.

To succeed at Eastern, I'll share with you lessons that would have helped me when I was sitting on the other side of this podium.

Take responsibility for your own learning. You should not consider your education to simply be an entitlement!!!.....You must earn your degree!

Beyond just sitting in class, you must be “plugged-in” thinking, paying attention, and interacting with your classmates and professors. Even though you are required to attend classes no one is making you get up and be on time. This was not easy for me and it will be difficult for most of you. Think of it this way....with a Tuesday/Thursday format....each class period you miss costs you \$34...if you miss all three classes in one day, then you have just thrown away \$100 of your hard-earned money. Most of you will be working and are playing for, at least part, of your education. Are you inclined to just throw away money you have already spent? I wouldn't think so?.....Go to class and get your monies worth!

Follow the advice of one of my undergraduate professors...**Think Smart!**

My introduction to higher education was as a student-athlete on scholarship at a two year institution.

Unfortunately, I was not prepared for college so while I excelled in my social activities my academics faltered. I somehow managed to get by, but in hindsight I simply crammed the night before my exams, as I did in high school, and really did not know how to study.

After two years, I launched myself on the market with my Associate degree in hand, I thought I had the world by the tail; surely I would be able to find a job.

This was not the case. I applied for a dozen jobs and interviewed for several.... I couldn't even get hired on as an assistant “night” manager at a Godfather's Pizza. Eventually, through a friend of a friend, I found my way to a construction job. I worked in this capacity for two years when the economy crashed and I found myself looking for employment and direction once again. Losing this job was the best thing that could have possibly happened to me.

With no prospects, I decided to borrow the money, work three jobs, and finish my education.

For the first time, I was motivated and excited to attend college. My first semester back, I took a Family and Society class from the Chair of the Sociology Department – Nevell Razak.

He was one of those professors who just compelled his students to learn. I really wanted to do well in his class, and was surprised when I got my first test back and had earned a 68%. I was taken back, frustrated, and more than a little bit miffed.

This time I was serious about my education and actually thought I studied hard for this test. I certainly spent more time studying for this exam than I had for anything in my life prior and I still performed miserably.

I followed Dr. Razak back his office and after I calmed down, he sat me down imparted the following words of wisdom:

“Reed there is no doubt in my mind that you are working hard, now you need to learn to think smart.”

It took several days, but this was an epiphany for me, as it finally dawned on me later that...memorizing is not learning and..... reading is not necessarily equivalent to that of comprehension.

From my lecture notes, I could tell you six pages in and six lines down what was written verbatim, but I still did not do well on my exam. Why do you think this was the case?

Clearly, I memorized the material, but did not understand or comprehend the information in my notes or textbook. You will have to know the information for your exams well beyond the definitional level and critically evaluate what you read to do well in your classes at Eastern.

Rewrite your notes, really read your textbook, make note cards, study with friends, and take advantage of your professor’s office hours.

Write everyday! Simply put... To write well you must practice. Writing is a process whether you are a student entering Eastern this semester, or a college professor of 15 years.

You must write and rewrite and rewrite. And then what do you do next class, class of 2013, what’s next? Pause....Exactly!....You rewrite your paper for a fourth time, put the final touches on it, and turn in a product you are proud of, and I enjoy reading.

Have a friend look at your work, read your paper out loud. Take advantage of the writing center. Get started early.

I IMPLORE YOU..... THINK SMART.....DO SO AS IF YOUR LIFE DEPENDS ON IT.... BECAUSE IT DOES!

Oh did I mention?.....Ten years later and \$75,000 in debt, I went on to excel through my Ph.D. program.....My point is this....If a kid from a one-horse town in western Kansas, with no money, no study skills, no direction and no clue can do it, then anyone in this auditorium can as well. (Expound on post-graduate studies.)

With all the hard work on your studies, don't forget to live, and enjoy your time at Eastern.

You have just severed the umbilical cord from your parents for a second time and are about to embark on one of the most exciting adventures of your life.

You will soon begin lifelong friendships and expand your horizon in ways you cannot even imagine.

You will meet people with diverse backgrounds, opinions, and beliefs. Embrace these opportunities and share your own culture in return.

Introduce yourself to other students and get involved early. These two are not mutually exclusive.

When you get involved early you will have the opportunity to meet students with similar interests. Developing these friendships early will enrich your experience here at Eastern.

There are currently more than 160 Recognized Student Organizations representing the academic, cultural, social service, athletic, and religious interests of Eastern students. Get involved! And if you cannot find an RSO that is suited to you, then find twelve likeminded friends and start your own organization....but get involved.

Seek internships and service that are directly related to your course of study!

With my Criminology students, I steer them toward internships and service that directly relates to their studies. What they learn in the classroom is applied to their internships and service, and their outside experience is then applied back to the classroom. They now have a more complete skill set

which will likely make their candidacy more attractive to potential employers.

While learning in the classroom is imperative, learning outside the classroom is also invaluable.

Study abroad! I just got back from teaching my fourth class in the Netherlands. It was life-changing the first time I taught in Maastricht and every time I go back I continue to learn and grow as a professor and a person.

To observe my students personally experience other cultures, to mature, learn, and become more insightful citizens is precisely what is most rewarding to me as I continue to teach these classes in my favorite city on the planet.

Several recent students reminded me, as they tried to explain their experience to family and friends.... you simply can't explain it.....you must experience it!

So Beg, Borrow, or Steal, (well maybe not the later), but do whatever it takes, short of stealing, to ensure you participate in a study abroad experience!

Finally.....Take time to give of yourself.

Eastern has a rich history of providing service to our community, surrounding communities, and assisting those in need across the nation and abroad.

I have worked with many student organizations over the years and have absolutely enjoyed working side-by-side with my students, knowing at the end of the day, in some small way, we have collectively made a difference.

Continue this tradition! Get involved! Join one of the many student organizations and make a difference!

Tomorrow you will experience giving first-hand when we all participate in the "JUMP START TO GIVE" activities.

We will leave here and attend our Eastern Reads Discussion Circles. I read our book, "This I Believe," while in the Netherlands this summer and was captivated by the short essays.

Some of these writings inspired me, others challenged long-held beliefs, and all of them made me think introspectively. I look forward to participating in the discussions with you this morning and throughout the semester.

In sum:

Learn – passionately

Live – gregariously

Give – generously

Enjoy your time at Eastern Illinois University.