

**State of the University Address  
Eastern Illinois University  
October 3, 2019**

Good afternoon. I realize we have been in session for over a month, but I'd like to formally welcome everyone to the new academic year. Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedules to hear important updates about our outstanding university.

Frankly, after last year's 75-minute State of the University Address, I'm thrilled to see you've come back at all. I thought maybe for this year, I'd just chat without a script or notes, but as you may know -- If I freestyle this thing, we'll need to have dinner catered. In fact, I've become famous for taking 20 minutes to finish a strict 10-minute flash talk at a Final Friday event. My thanks to Dr. Wharram for not cutting me off.

So, without further digression, it is my absolute pleasure to welcome you to Eastern Illinois University's Fall 2019 State of the University Address. To all of our faculty and staff who were off and away for the summer, welcome back to another great academic year.

To faculty and staff who worked over the summer -- although you may not have had the summer off, I hope you all were able to enjoy at least some time away from campus to rest, relax, and take a breather from the work routine.

And finally, to every new faculty and staff member, welcome to Eastern. Welcome to our EIU family. I'm excited to applaud your commitment to join one of the best regional universities in the entire Midwest.

Please allow me to introduce and recognize our newest EIU members, beginning with the latest additions to our administrative leadership team. Please stand when called:

- Dr. Ken Wetstein – Vice President of University Advancement, who oversees the efforts of our Alumni, Development, and Foundation areas;
- Dr. Ozlem Ersin – Dean of the College of Health and Human Services;
- Dr. Austin Cheney – Dean of the Lumpkin College of Business and Technology; and,
- Mr. Jason Hood – Assistant Vice President of Academic Affairs.

Next, I would like to welcome EIU's newest faculty members. Will all new faculty please rise and be recognized. At Faculty Orientation, we welcomed about 30 new full- and part-time faculty and academic support staff. We are so glad that you have chosen to join us. Thank you, you may be seated.

No university can claim excellence without a dedicated, committed, and superbly trained staff to ensure its efficient, effective, and enduring operations. Will all new staff members joining us here today -- please rise and be recognized. Welcome everyone, please be seated.

And finally, to our students. If we have any new or returning students with us today, please stand and be recognized. Please know that everyone in this room believes that each and every one of you has made one of the best decisions of your life to attend EIU. You have the opportunity to learn from a world-class faculty that can help you discover and explore diverse ideas, to think critically about the world around you, and to prepare you for a lifetime of personal achievement, ethical citizenship, and community leadership. And while it may not seem like it today, understand that your college years will go by very quickly. Enjoy them! Thank you for coming today, you may be seated.

To our entire university community -- I hope this new academic year will be one of tremendous success, productivity, and satisfaction.

In keeping with the themes of success and productivity, I am absolutely delighted to announce that our enrollment numbers this year continued to grow. As has been reported, Eastern's Fall 2019 enrollment has reached 7806 students -- an increase of 3.7% over last year.

Our first-time, full-time freshman enrollment increased 12.5% -- and this follows the 24.5% increase we experienced in Fall 2018. Contributing to this year's numbers was a remarkable 48% increase in first-time, full-time freshmen living within a 60-mile radius of the university. This outstanding outcome was the result of our enrollment management team's deliberate focus on nearby student populations, demonstrating our commitment to keeping East-Central Illinois students right here in our region. Following graduation, they will be much more likely to continue living and working in East-Central Illinois, contributing positively to our local communities and our local economies -- a premise underlying the mission of regional public universities like Eastern.

Not only is our new freshman class larger than last year, it is also a stronger class academically. The average GPA of our incoming freshmen is 3.2, a slight increase over last year's class, who in turn exhibited a slight increase over the class before them.

Our overall number of new transfer students fell this fall by 32 students and is something we are actively remedying by creating new transfer enrollment strategies for the upcoming year. Nevertheless, we did notice an interesting occurrence in the number of undergraduate students who chose to transfer to EIU from other four-year universities in Illinois and out-of-state. This group increased by 50% -- an outcome that suggests our brand is strengthening in the marketplace and that a number of students came to realize EIU should have been their first-choice option.

For our graduate student enrollment, I'm pleased to report enrollments exceeded last year's number by 4.2%. We now have 1,554 graduate students, which is the largest number EIU has seen since Fall 2010. This number would have been appreciably higher had it not been for the difficulties several of our accepted international students encountered in navigating the current federal policies and practices guiding immigration.

However, despite the challenges for many international students, we were still able to increase international numbers by 3% over last year. This fall, EIU is home to 332 international students -- 135 undergraduate and 197 graduate. They represent 61 countries from around the world -- the largest number of countries we have ever had represented on campus at one time. Congratulations to our Office of International Students and Scholars, under the excellent direction of Mutombo "Andy" Kabasele, who is succeeding in the intentional expansion of the geographical regions of our prospective international students.

Finally, our highly successful dual-credit partnerships with a select group of high schools are also supporting our growth in enrollments. These partnerships, which use a unique educational model, have been so successful that other school districts have been approaching us, requesting they be added to our partner list. Rather than overextending our current resources, we have been cautious and deliberate in any expansion of our dual-credit offerings as we monitor both the students' educational outcomes and our own institutional return on investment. This year, we added a partnership with Lake Zurich to teach a Spanish class and with Maine Township to teach math classes. At this time, we do not anticipate adding any additional partnerships for next year.

As you may know, college-bound high school students taking dual-credit classes has become a national norm. The potential rewards of reduced college costs and accelerated completion rates are highly appealing to students and families alike. Representatives from high schools that do not offer dual-credit opportunities believe they are disadvantaging their students and are moving aggressively to have their own faculty seek credentials to teach dual-credit courses or create partnerships with institutions like EIU, which have the expertise and qualifications to do so.

EIU's dual-credit initiative is both valuable and strategic. We are not alone in this space. More and more universities, like us, are leveraging the emerging opportunity to expand into dual-credit partnerships as a way to diversify traditional revenue streams. And more importantly, dual-credit connections offer an efficient onramp for high school students to continue their higher educational journeys as on-campus undergraduates at their affiliate institutions -- universities where they have already created supportive relationships, originated transcripts, and built positive familiarity with professors. How far EIU should or will venture into the dual-credit arena will depend on the positive outcomes it presents to EIU as a partner provider.

Without a doubt, EIU's Enrollment Management team -- under the leadership of Josh Norman -- celebrated another banner year of continued momentum while completing 66 action items in last year's annual strategic enrollment plan. With the assistance of Enrollment Worx and the Communication Planning group, they continue to achieve success and are already hard at work to enroll next year's incoming class.

Equally impactful on this year's enrollment success has been the incredible work of Kelly Miller and the entire Admissions Office staff. They processed over 10,000 applications and worked

diligently to create relationships with prospective students, high school counselors, and community college advisors.

Vital support for our recruitment efforts also comes from a plethora of offices and individuals deserving high praise. They include the Office of Digital Communications, Marketing and Brand Management, the Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships, the Office of the Registrar, and of course, the All-In recruitment efforts of our amazing faculty, staff, students, alumni, and advocates who exemplify the very best of our extraordinary University.

Clearly we have created momentum in our enrollment growth. And while it is fantastic to celebrate our enrollment successes -- and we should -- we cannot rely on our existing momentum to run on its own. Sustained growth will be increasingly more difficult to maintain as competition increases and as other schools mirror our productive recruitment strategies. Our enrollment successes both now and in the future will be largely achieved by collectively embracing our brand promise, and by effectively and relentlessly communicating it to our critical external audiences. United, we have pushed our proverbial boulder partially up the mountain. The simple recipe for our continued success is: Never stop pushing!

Helping us this year to push that boulder up the mountainside were our supporters in the Illinois General Assembly and our statewide elected officials -- including, most notably, Governor J.B. Pritzker. The past year's legislative session felt entirely different from any of the previous four legislative sessions through which I have served as President. I am excited by the atmosphere of optimism and accomplishment emanating from Springfield.

I can share with you my meetings with Governor Pritzker have been extremely positive. He has indicated a desire to be a champion of education in the state, citing higher education as a key component to his vision. I am highly encouraged by his perspective, which seems to genuinely see public higher education as an investment and opportunity rather than an expense or obligation. He has spoken publicly about the importance of reversing the state's divestment in institutions of higher education, and increasing accessibility for everyone in Illinois.

I hope our Governor, as well as our friends in the General Assembly, continue to appreciate the societal and economic value that stable -- or better yet, progressively increased educational funding -- provides to all areas of the state, including the many rural and downstate communities that public regional universities like EIU so essentially serve.

The details of this year's state budget were finalized in July. The balanced budget included a 5% increase for operating expenses at each of the 12 public universities. Eastern's FY20 operating appropriation totaled \$41.4 million. In addition, the budget included the reappropriation of approximately \$10 million of EIU capital projects that had been previously authorized by law, yet have remained unfunded. Although we are extremely grateful for this year's increase, we also recognize our operational funding level is still lower than our pre-impasse appropriation in FY15.

There were other significant appropriations in the budget favoring Illinois students seeking a higher education. MAP funding was increased by \$50 million over last year's level -- which is an essential program supporting low-income Illinois students. In addition, the budget continues to fund the state's AIM HIGH grant, and increases that program's overall budget by \$10 million. As you may know, the Illinois' AIM HIGH program was a critical bipartisan effort aimed at recruiting more of Illinois' best and brightest students to attend our 12 Illinois public universities.

Complementing EIU's year-over-year increase in appropriations is a newly approved Illinois Capital Program Bill, intended to provide critical support for construction and renovation projects across the state. The bill is structured to provide \$45 billion to state entities over the next 6 years. For Eastern, that translates to \$119 million for a new science building -- yes, THAT science building, the one we have been requesting for the past two decades -- and approximately \$19.5 million additional dollars for other emergency and deferred maintenance needs.

While this news is thrilling, we must remember that patience is a virtue. Projects will only begin as funds from specified revenue sources are actually collected and made available by the State. And as you know, external bids, contract procurements, and architectural design take time as well. But let me assure you, our projects are on the list, and the Governor's Office as well as the Illinois Board of Higher Education know without any doubt that the Science Building is EIU's TOP priority. We are poised to move forward as soon as those funds materialize.

At this time, I would like to take a quick side bar to formally and publicly thank the Governor and the members of the Illinois General Assembly. The Governor's leadership and the legislature's bipartisanship as was witnessed this past year surrounding higher education support was tremendous. Thank you to the Governor for demanding that our State begin significantly reinvesting in our Illinois public universities and our resident students. And thank you to all legislators who authored and/or supported bills making Illinois public universities resourcefully stronger and more affordable for Illinois citizens.

It is easy to talk about being supportive of education -- specifically public higher education -- but it can be much more difficult to fight for it and for student financial aid to be made budgetary priorities when there are so many worthy and often urgent demands being made on the State's limited funds. To the Governor and those in the General Assembly who did just that, please know you have our most sincere thanks and gratitude.

Finally, I wish to thank Senator Dale Righter. In his over 22 years of serving in the General Assembly, he has been an immense supporter of Eastern Illinois University and our greater campus community. He also happens to be an alum, as well as the parent of an alum, and we could not be more proud of him. We will never forget his courageous vote in 2017 that helped to end the 793-day-long state budget impasse which had effectively starved higher education and human service networks throughout the State. Senator Righter has chosen not to seek another term in office and we thank him and celebrate his many years of public service, support and friendship. He will be missed and we wish him well in all his future endeavors.

The most notable budgetary news that I can give you today for FY20 -- such that I have waited five years to be in a position to announce -- is that in reference to our income fund, EIU will NOT be required to reduce spending from the previous fiscal year in order for revenues to match last year's spending rate. This is the first year since even BEFORE the State budget impasse that we are able to say this. In simpler terms -- EIU has achieved a truly balanced financial position in our income and associated operational expenses.

Of course there's another side to this story -- our budget this year does not allow us to spend any additional dollars over last year's budget level either, except to meet our commitments to salary increases for our faculty, negotiated staff, and our non-negotiated employees.

As such, we must once again firmly and dedicatedly commit to regulating our expenses. All divisions across the university will see familiar limitations on spending and travel, and the procurement of only essential equipment and supplies necessary for the current year. It is paramount that we continue to be responsible stewards of our still-limited resources to remain on the pathway to institutional strength and sustainability.

I know there are many needs and expectations that each of our divisions have been waiting patiently to rectify. However, I can assure you that our endurance in managing our expectations WILL pay dividends in the future. But for now, as we attempt to rebuild the university's fund balances following the State's budgetary impasse, we are slowly integrating more funding focused on student success initiatives, enhanced academic excellence, and addressing critical staffing needs across our university operations. If we can continue our two-year trend of enrollment increases and maintain stable or improved annual state appropriations, we will soon be able to make measurable strides toward accomplishing our goals and achieving positive net revenues to address a broader array of essential needs.

Guided by our strategic Vitalization Plan, we have been positioning ourselves to enter a very positive period in our University's storied history. Not only is this exciting, there is a definite increase in optimism and energy on campus. Much of this growing optimism comes from the amazing accomplishments that took place this past year, highlighted by the major transformation of our academic colleges and the creation of two new schools. To list all of the past year's accomplishments would be an exercise in impracticality. However, I am happy to share a sample of them—with apologies to the innumerable other achievements that must be omitted solely due to the interests of time.

From the division of Business Affairs, our Procurement Office has been working diligently to increase the university's spending with registered minority-owned businesses in compliance with State statutes. Over the past year, we raised our Business Enterprise Program, or BEP spending and we are committed to increasing it even further in FY20. Many thanks go to Danielle Green and her incredible staff for supporting our efforts in that area.

Although we were plagued with a very cold, long winter, which was followed by an extremely wet Spring, our groundskeepers were focused on keeping our 320-acre campus looking as beautiful as possible for our faculty, staff, students, and campus visitors. I'd like to thank Teamster's Public Service Division Local #26 for allowing volunteers to work side-by-side with our groundskeepers for an EIU day of beautification in July. To ensure our grounds continue to be maintained at a level representative of EIU's excellence, the administration allocated funds to hire four additional full-time groundskeepers.

Our outstanding facilities and trades staff completed several projects including substituting new exterior panels on the bridge of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Student Union, remodeling the Roberson Auditorium in Lumpkin Hall, renovating the Multicultural Center, remodeling the Lawson Hall lobby, preparing the new eSports arena, and installing the Panther statue in the memorial courtyard, among others.

In addition to these projects, the Illinois Capital Development Board approved the renewal of work on elevator projects at McAfee Gym and the Student Services buildings, as well as work to connect the chill water loop to Blair Hall and upgrade Old Main's outdated HVAC system.

Our campus' dependency on technology cannot be underestimated, and our ITS staff works diligently to handle the university's technological demands. In a digital age, ITS professionals are truly unsung heroes. Seldom do they receive recognition, but they are the first to hear about problems when they occur. Our ITS colleagues accomplished much over the past year, including the successful conversion to the updated Banner system, modernizing our core infrastructure of servers and other technology enhancements, and initiating the transition to thin clients, which support remote hosting and desktop virtualization.

Finally, our Human Resources Office stayed especially busy throughout the year, managing the hiring of more than 140 new or returning employees. Our HR personnel, along with our staff in the university's business and budget offices, are another great group of staff members whose hard work we all depend on, but who are seldom recognized publicly for their day-to-day achievements. Today, we thank them -- and in doing so we trust that our paychecks will continue to be distributed.

Within the division of University Advancement, the University Foundation and Development Office went through a reorganization of staff responsibilities leading to a greater level of efficiency and effectiveness in our fundraising operations. In FY19, the development office raised over \$2.5 million, and as of June 30, the University's Foundation assets stand at about \$90 million. Approximately 98% of the Foundation's endowed holdings are restricted to donor-directed activities, mostly involving student scholarships. The availability of these scholarships has been instrumental in attracting and allowing many of our current students to attend EIU. We salute our generous donors and acknowledge that their investments immensely benefit our students and institution.

Beyond the Foundation and Development Office, the third arm of University Advancement is our Alumni Office. Throughout the year, the staff engaged our alumni with newsletters and numerous local, regional, and out-of-state alumni events. The Alumni Office also coordinates the university's Annual Fund initiatives, which received more than \$270,000 in non-endowment gifts in FY19. These funds are directed to various divisions and academic departments, and are a welcome source of additional support to the university's various gift accounts.

The division of Intercollegiate Athletics accomplished a number of team and individual successes. Leading the pack was our men's outdoor track and field team who were victorious in winning the OVC championship under the leadership of first-year coach, Brenton Emanuel. Some of you may remember Brenton as a student here at EIU, where he received his bachelor's and master's degrees in 2008 and 2009, respectively.

Individual awards for athletic excellence included 14 student-athletes named 1<sup>st</sup>-Team All-Conference selections; one student, Rachel Papavasiliopoulos, was named OVC Conference Player of the Year for women's tennis; five of our athletes garnished the recognition of All-American; and two members of our baseball team were draft picks in the Major League.

It is a special pleasure to note that EIU's student-athletes are as excellent in the classroom as they are in their team sports. This past year 32 EIU student-athletes received the OVC Medal of Honor award for GPAs of 4.0 during the 2018-19 academic year and 148 student-athletes earned the Commissioner's Honor Recognition for earning GPAs of 3.25 or higher. Overall, the average GPA of our entire group of student-athletes was a highly commendable 3.04 in Fall 2018 and 3.14 in Spring 2019. Congratulations to our athletic department who focus their attention holistically so that our student-athletes grow in their sport, in the classroom, and as community service leaders.

We all realize our students average about 15 hours each week in the classroom. But if you are not involved in the student affairs division, you might not give much thought to the other 153 hours each week students have on their own to study, work, attend organizational meetings, eat, sleep, exercise, socialize, and participate in other non-classroom activities. It is the responsibility of our division of Student Affairs to assist students during these times as well as address student conduct issues and protect the safety and security of all members in our campus community. It is a big responsibility and they do a tremendous job.

About 60% of Eastern's student body accounted for over 115,000 visits to the Rec Center last year. The Center is also heavily involved in our student recruitment efforts and this year will add to their responsibilities oversight of our new eSports arena.

Our Career Services office actively engages with students throughout their entire educational experience and are responsible for coordinating the job fairs to assist students in gaining internships and career employment after graduation. We are very proud that last year's

placement rate was an outstanding 94%, much of it due to the hard work of our Career Services staff.

Each year I am always excited to report on the amount of community service our students performed in the Charleston and our regional communities. This past year, our students contributed about 125,000 hours -- valued at over \$3 million worth of volunteer time. The majority of community service activities are coordinated through our Office of Civic Engagement and Volunteerism whose mission is to develop civic-minded Eastern graduates who will continue to be engaged in life-long service to their communities.

Maintaining the physical and emotional health of our students is paramount for student success and persistence. In FY19, EIU's Medical Clinic had over 21,000 visits helping students manage their illnesses and accidents. And we are all aware of the stressors associated with being a college student in today's highly connected, social media era. Across the country, universities, including EIU, have reported increases in the number of students seeking counseling, and the amount of counselor time devoted to meeting students' mental health needs. The challenges and importance of mental health counseling on university campuses today cannot be overstated. For that reason, I have chosen, in consultation with the Faculty Senate, to focus this year's Presidential Lecture on this critical topic. EIU is extremely fortunate to have a dedicated and committed staff of mental health counselors.

With 11 residence halls, two apartment complexes, 19 Greek Chapter Houses, three dining halls, a food court, a catering operation, and a few other food and beverage venues, you better have outstanding leadership and an amazing staff to manage and deliver excellent service. And that is exactly what we have in our Department of Housing and Dining. I'm pleased to also mention that with our growing enrollments, our housing contracts for this year rose 179 over last year. Congratulations to our Housing and Dining staff.

There are so many more accomplishments I could mention within the other divisions of Student Affairs, including the offices of New Student and Family Programs, Student Accountability and Support, Student Legal Service, Fraternity and Sorority Programs, University Union, Textbook Rental Service, University Police Department, Center for Gender and Sexual Diversity, and the Military Assistance Center. It's one huge division. All of these areas are worthy of recognition and I truly thank all of our student affairs employees for their hard work and dedication.

At its heart, EIU's fundamental mission is educational, and the responsibility for achieving our mission at a superior level lies within the division of Academic Affairs. There is no debating the extraordinary excellence of our faculty and academic support staff. Our rankings for academic excellence are in the top levels of our class. Our faculty's "All-In" dedication to student success has existed for decades and remains our brand's distinguishing feature within EIU's student-centeredness model.

Our Office of Research and Sponsored Projects reports EIU generated approximately \$4 million in external funding last year, up from \$3.5 million a year ago. Thirty-five proposals received

awards ranging from \$350 to \$788,400. The department that submitted the greatest number of successful research proposals was Biology, with six awards; and the college that received the most research award funding was the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences.

For public service grants, the department that submitted the most successful proposals was WEIU, with seven awards; and the college that received the most public services funding was the College of Health and Human Services.

Congratulations to the principal investigators, team members, and all who assisted in the proposal process on your successes. As in the past, I encourage all our faculty and staff to consider submitting external research or public service proposals that can benefit your research, professional development, community outreach, and/or provide opportunities for your students.

This past year saw our faculty flourishing with scholarly and creative productivity. Collectively, they published 4 books, 110 referred journal articles, and 17 book chapters along with 49 major creative activities that included art exhibitions, musical and theatrical performances, creative writings, and video productions, among others. Congratulations to our faculty for their many contributions to their professional disciplines and external audiences.

Over the past few years, our academic departments have aggressively embraced the challenge posed by the Vitalization Plan to develop new market-driven major and graduate programs that meet the interests of prospective students. By my count, we have added 14 new undergraduate majors and five new graduate programs since 2015. And we are not done yet. Our new Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering is scheduled to begin Fall 2020, and we are currently seeking State and accreditation approvals for a traditional Bachelor of Science in Nursing.

As you can imagine, these new programs have absolutely contributed to our recent enrollment growth. I am incredibly proud of all our academic departments who have been working to vitalize our program array. It is no easy task and there are numerous internal and external hurdles to overcome from a program's first concept to its final creation.

Across the country there is a growing demand for graduate education leading to master's degrees and other high-end certifications. I would like to give a shout out to the leadership and staff of our Graduate School and all our Graduate Coordinators. Thank you for your vision and willingness to create and innovative graduate opportunities for our students such as the accelerated master's programs that were implemented last year.

Reaccreditation represents an ongoing milestone of excellence for many of our programs. This past year two programs received their national reaccreditation. Firstly, our music programs received reaccreditation by the National Association of Schools of Music, and secondly, our teacher education programs received reaccreditation through the Council for the Accreditation

of Educator Preparation. Congratulations to all faculty and staff who assisted in the often arduous and time-consuming reaccreditation process.

Last year the School of Extended Learning joined forces with Doug Brandt, Professor of Physics, allowing EIU to become the institutional home of the Academic Challenge in Engineering and Science Competition. EIU hosted the state finals with 1,620 high achieving high school students who not only had the opportunity to compete, but also the opportunity to experience our campus and hospitality as potential future students.

The Geology/Geography Department unveiled a new museum-quality mineral and meteorite display that features Lunar and Martian meteorites and other specimens donated by department alumni. And that's not all, Jake Crandall, Instructor in Geology, is researching ore deposits on Mars, and he and his research team's field site was selected for the next Mars Rover landing project.

Soon we will be celebrating a beautiful new physics tutoring room, which will provide an excellent, comfortable studying and learning space for our students on the first floor of the Science Building. Funding for the project was primarily supported by two physics department alums -- Randy Wright and Jack Pine -- along with other friends of the department. We are most grateful to our alums who help to improve facilities for our students.

When the newest wave of the General Social Survey came out, Ryan Burge, Assistant Professor of political science, calculated how religious groups have changed in 2018, and tweeted his findings. CNN picked it up and covered his research, he was interviewed by CSPAN, his research appeared in the Washington Post, the New York Times, and in the Daily Mail – the third largest daily newspaper in the U.K. Seldom has EIU had such an impact at this level of media attention. Congratulations Ryan – and please keep tweeting!

I'm pleased to share that our faculty are winning awards, serving at executive leadership levels in their professional organizations, and are being sought after for their expertise to assist professional colleagues and institutions. Here are but a few examples: Librarian Stacey Knight-Davis was selected to receive the 2019 Illinois Library Association Reference Service Award; David J. Boggs, Professor and Assistant Chair of management, served as president of the Academy of International Business Midwest; and Angelo Glaros, Associate Professor of anthropology served as president of the Central State Anthropological Society. Congratulations to all for their individual efforts and for representing EIU in the very best light.

Recently the Government of Ethiopia, through the Board of Governors of the Addis Ababa University, requested Teshome Abebe, Professor of Economics, to assist in restructuring the country's flag ship institution. Like all institutions of higher education, Addis Ababa University faces the cross-sectional challenges of access, diversity, educational quality -- along with the attendant public scrutiny. To be solicited for such a service is an extraordinary honor and a global recognition of Dr. Abebe's professionalism and global reputation. Congratulations.

Just as our faculty deserve the highest praise for their accomplishments, so too, do our many students who have excelled. Honors student Kofi Basel-Smith won the Freeman-Asia Scholarship and the U.S. Japan Bridging Scholarship -- both national awards that will fund his study in Japan this semester. Three graduate students in Counseling and Higher Education received Diversifying Faculty in Illinois Fellowships, which are highly competitive awards offered through the Illinois Board of Higher Education. And lastly, our student robotics team placed 1<sup>st</sup> in the technical paper category and 2<sup>nd</sup> overall in the national Robotics Challenge at the Association for Technology, Management and Applied Engineering annual convention. Just wait until our new electrical engineering program is *fully charged*.

EIU's faculty, staff and student accomplishments continue to rack up local, regional, and national accolades, which contribute to our overall positive reputation as a university and that reputation is excellent. Again this past year, EIU remained the top-ranked independent public regional university in Illinois by *US News and World Report* and we also received accolades for our value, online programming, and affordability from other college ranking organizations.

After having accomplished so much, what can we expect for this year? First, we will remain firmly guided by our strategic Vitalization Plan with the primary goals of advancing ourselves in academic excellence, creating meaningful opportunities for student success, continuing our enrollment growth, and reinforcing the financial strength of our institution.

As I mentioned earlier, it will be essential that we maintain our expenses at the same level as last year to ensure the institution remains in a balanced-budget position. Prior to the start of the Fall term, all divisional and departmental operating budgets were loaded at 80%. Now, with the 10<sup>th</sup>-day enrollment numbers driving an updated budget, we will soon distribute the remaining budget allocations.

This year we plan to continue the targeted investment in marketing our university. Distribution of marketing funds are being strategically allocated for billboards, social media, TV commercials, geo-fencing, and mobile platform advertisements. This year we have joined forces with Central States Media, a marketing firm known for its strategic advertisement placements and ongoing analysis of marketing messaging.

In regards to our focus on enrollment growth, our talented enrollment management team has crafted this year's strategic enrollment plan. The plan consists of 84 action items that will help us meet our enrollment targets for Spring, Summer and Fall 2020. If there is any takeaway from today's address, it's that everyone affiliated with EIU plays a critical role in recruiting students. The last two years have demonstrated clearly that we are most effective when we work toward our enrollment goals together.

Josh Norman will be the first to tell you that success in student recruitment requires adaptability to a fast-changing environment. More than ever, we are up against tremendous competition from institutions inside and outside the state. On top of that, we are all competing for a smaller pool of high school graduates. To recruit effectively, we will need to continually

monitor the changing needs and expectations of our prospective students and modify our recruitment strategies accordingly.

At an even loftier scale, we must begin asking ourselves, “What do we need to do to ensure EIU remains relevant in a world of increasing choices in higher education?” What will be the educational desires and expectations of prospective students next year or 10 years from now, or 20 years from now? What challenges, barriers, and opportunities will we encounter -- and what responses will we have prepared to address them?

It’s critical that our current thinking and strategic planning become more multidimensional. We need to be planning for what EIU needs to do today, in the near future and in the far-away future to remain successful. We cannot afford to be formatively or fiscally complacent, nor can we be caught off guard by new innovations or trends that would force us to sacrifice thoughtful progression for the sake of rapid change.

This factor was astutely recognized by a group of individuals participating in the Vitalization Project, who suggested that EIU create a presidential Think Tank to monitor emerging trends in higher education. The recommendation was further supported by the Faculty Senate in a formal resolution. This Fall, we are populating that Think Tank with individuals who will serve as specialists and advisors to the president and to our broader campus. Our attention to understanding and imagining the future directions in higher education will certainly provide great benefit for our strategic planning.

In last year’s State of the University Address, I stressed the importance of student success and set two goals -- to raise our freshman-to-sophomore retention rate to between 77 and 80 percent, and to raise the standard six-year graduation rate to above 60%. This year’s retention rate rose from 70% to 73% and that’s a very good start. However, to realistically meet these goals, it will be necessary to enhance our understanding of why some students don’t persist, and identify and implement the necessary supports to empower them to continue through to graduation.

We are also growing in diversity within our university -- where student life experiences and cultural backgrounds vary much more extensively than before. Forty-nine percent of our entering freshman class are from minority populations and 39% of our entering freshman class are first-generation students. We, as educators, must understand, appreciate, and adapt to the broadened differences that may exist in learning styles and other needs of an increasingly diverse student body.

Based on a variety of academic and non-academic measures, our admissions criteria suggests that every member of EIU’s freshman class has the ability and aptitude to succeed and graduate from EIU. However, university data indicate our retention and graduation rates are lower among some groups, including minority and first-generation students.

Following the excellent work initiated by the Student Success Taskforce in Fall 2017, Karla Sanders, Mona Davenport, Jay Gatrell, and many others at EIU continue to work diligently in addressing the achievement gaps that exist. They have done an outstanding job, and EIU has been recognized for our success in reducing the minority achievement gap relative to our peer institutions. Nevertheless, we should not be complacent with our current level of success and proceed aggressively to reducing any achievement gaps until they are completely eliminated.

One critical key to improving the success of our students is to foster a more inclusive campus culture. One that is attractive and supportive to students of all backgrounds. The importance of creating a sense of belonging is critical to every student's social, emotional, and mental health, which goes far toward helping students do better in the classroom and subsequently increasing their likelihood to persist and walk across the stage to receive their diploma. Creating a truly inclusive campus will not only improve student success and wellbeing, it will also help to ensure that EIU remains a thriving, relevant institution into the future. And beyond that, it is consistent with the very foundation of what this university stands for.

Earlier this week, Dr. Jerlando Jackson, the Vilas Distinguished Professor of Higher Education and Director and Chief Research Scientist of the Wisconsin Equity and Inclusion Laboratory at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, visited our campus and facilitated several dialogues on inclusion in higher education to various EIU groups of administrators, faculty, staff and students. It was my hope that the visit would both spark additional conversations concerning the issue of race and racism on college campuses and provide us with some ideas to help guide our diversity and inclusion planning.

Next week we will have another opportunity to further explore topics of diversity and inclusion at the University's Together We RISE Conference, hosted by EIU's Making Excellence Inclusive initiative. The event will take place on Friday, October 11 and I encourage everyone to attend and become part of the discussion.

It's not every day you'll catch a university president using colorful language in their State of the University Address, but I'm going to tell you straight up -- every single one of us should be damn proud of what we have accomplished together. To some degree, every one of us suffered from the devastation of the state budgetary impasse that began on June 1, 2015 and lasted 793 days. Fast forward to today, and we are all part of a vibrant, growing, and well-positioned university prepared and poised for a spirited and prosperous future.

I thank each and every one of you for all you contribute to this phenomenal place of higher education, and to the legacy we will continue to create here together. Of course, we still have much work to do. Only by continuing to grow our enrollments can we achieve the necessary positive revenue gains to reinvest in our university's infrastructure, resources, and our ability to create more vibrant opportunities for our faculty, staff and students. I have no doubt we can accomplish this goal and continue the positive momentum that has been trending on campus for the last two years.

Please be reminded, our brand of All-In was not presented to us as some ethereal campaign by a marketing firm. All-In symbolizes an authentic intention of our university, and the formidable integrity of its people. It remains as a simple but durable expression of who we are and the core value we share as a community.

I am so very proud of everything we have been able to accomplish over the past four years. Had there been no impasse, there is no telling how far along our Pathway to Success we could have already traversed.

As I fulfill my 5<sup>th</sup> year as president of Eastern Illinois University, I could not be more humbled by the incredible support I have received from the Board of Trustees, faculty, staff, and so many students of this university. Thank you for trusting in my judgment and vision. Thank you for allowing me to lead our beloved university. Together, we will continue to boldly meet the many challenges the higher education landscape sets before us, and we will celebrate our future accomplishments with equal intensity as we continue along our pathway to success.

Thank you.