

State of the University Address  
Eastern Illinois University  
David M. Glassman, President  
October 15, 2020

Hello, and thank you for joining me for Eastern Illinois University's Fall 2020 State of the University Address. I am pleased to share with you a look back at last year's accomplishments, detail on how we are responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, our current enrollment and financial position, and our strategic direction for this academic year.

The unique obstacles that were presented to us over the past year were nothing short of extraordinary. And as we all know, we are still navigating through many of these challenges in this new academic cycle. We entered Fall 2019 with an exuberant spirit and positive energy as our campus enjoyed on-going momentum in growth. The campus grounds had returned to their beautiful and well-maintained form, and our university brand enjoyed expanded success across Illinois and beyond by promising an incredible investment in each of our students. Then came the Spring semester, when we were met with a public health pandemic at a magnitude our nation had not witnessed in over a century.

At the same time, we became collectively enraged with hate groups using our campus as a platform to spew their prejudice and vitriol against our Black, Brown and Jewish communities. Soon after, we stood tall in speaking out, joining the national voices rejecting the kinds of disparities of social injustice that exist in our nation following the unnecessary death of George Floyd. Racial prejudice, hatred and ignorance have no place at Eastern Illinois University.

And finally, we were unable to join our graduates and their friends and families in celebrating their accomplishments at our traditional Spring Commencement ceremonies. More than 900 students were awarded their degrees last Spring, yet not a single student had the opportunity to walk across the stage in fulfillment of their dream as a freshman, transfer or graduate student.

Through it all, we enthusiastically persist. And here we are, back again for another academic year, albeit in a strategically reimagined atmosphere. We have and continue to approach Fall 2020 cautiously, but optimistically, which entails a bit of a different look on campus, a broader array of learning modalities, and of course, the sometimes-- uncomfortable inability to see anyone's full facial expressions. But, indeed, we are here and we continue to live up to our mission of being an outstanding and accessible institution of higher education.

It doesn't escape me that this Fall is the 125<sup>th</sup> Fall semester at Eastern and over those many years our university has faced and successfully navigated numerous national and local

challenges – two World Wars, the flu epidemic of 1918, the Great Depression, the Vietnam War, national and international terrorism, the Great Recession, a two-year State budget impasse and now the COVID-19 pandemic. EIU's enduring resiliency against so many formidable challenges is a testament to its strength and the highest level of dedication and commitment to the belief in the importance of higher education and the immense value of a regional comprehensive university in Charleston, Illinois.

I am very humbled and proud to continue in my sixth year as president of Eastern Illinois University. I'm equally proud to welcome our returning incredible faculty and staff to the 2020-2021 academic year and to applaud our newest faculty and staff who have most recently joined our EIU family.

I'd like to introduce a few new members of EIU's administrative leadership team. Mr. Sean Reeder joins us as our new Vice President of Business Affairs, Dr. Anne Flaherty joins us as Vice President for Student Affairs, Mr. Ryan Gibson, a familiar face on campus, joins us as Executive Director of Information Technology Services and we also welcome two new academic deans -- Dr. Laretta Henderson who joins us in leading the College of Education and Dr. Barbara Bonnekessen who is our new dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. Of course, if we were all together in person, I'd have each of them stand and be recognized to a very welcoming applause.

That welcoming applause would also be reserved for our new faculty and staff members. Thank you for joining our EIU community. We are an institution whose faculty are keenly focused on student success and whose staff are truly service oriented in meeting the various and dynamic needs of our students while creating and maintaining a positive, nurturing environment. Our collegiality and the ability to work through difficult challenges collaboratively have been a hallmark of our institution and a central mechanism to our enduring success.

Last fall we celebrated an increase in enrollment over the previous year. Our most impressive metrics included a 12.5 percent increase in first-time full-time freshman, a 48 percent increase in freshman who live within 60 miles of Charleston, and the largest graduate enrollment we've seen since Fall of 2010. Our overall head count continued to grow as well, seeing an increase of 3.7 percent, driven in part by our strategic entry into the dual credit market. Clearly we were off to a good start.

But amidst these successes, our strategic Vitalization Plan doesn't afford us much time to relax in such a changing and competitive higher education market. To continue the momentum of enrollment growth, efforts must continue to focus on our recruitment activities. EIU's Enrollment Management and Admissions teams worked tirelessly last Fall to create special relationships with prospective students and their families as they began making their college choice for Fall 2020.

However, well before the May 1 national college declaration date, college recruiting nationwide suffered a monumental setback resulting from the COVID pandemic. Campus visits screeched

to a halt; high school visits were cancelled; and even our Admitted Student Days had to transition to virtual modalities. Prospective and returning students and their families were understandably concerned by the largely unknown science surrounding the Sars-CoV-2 virus. Discussions swirled regarding the ability of universities to open in the Fall; or whether students should take a gap year or stay closer to home by taking general education courses at their local community colleges.

So how did we fare in this extraordinarily difficult recruitment cycle? I'm happy to report -- pretty darn good! Our overall headcount grew from 7,806 students to 8,626 for an overall increase of 10.5 percent. Yet the most telling metric for maintaining multi-year growth is our number of first-time full-time freshman. This is the group most affected by the pandemic -- those who had to decide between making a choice to enroll, elect to take a gap year, or enter a local community college. In this regard, I am very pleased to see our freshman class increase by 1.4 percent over last year. This increase is understandably smaller than the targets we originally set a year ago, but this modest growth is an extremely positive outcome given the unique circumstances that surround us.

A significant boost to this year's enrollment came from our graduate programs. This fall we have enrolled 1,657 graduate students compared to 1,577 last year -- accounting for a 4.5 percent increase.

Other significant enrollment metrics for this year include a five percent increase in our continuing student enrollment, our honors qualifying students for this fall were up an extremely impressive 68 percent over last year, and we expanded our dual credit enrollments through the addition of offering modern language classes. The academic profile of our freshman class continues to progress towards higher achieving students. The average GPA rose from last year's 3.16 to 3.29 this year and average ACT scores increased from 20.8 to 21.2. There is no doubt we recruited an excellent Freshman class for Fall 2020.

We continue to be disappointed with the difficulties our prospective international students are encountering in gaining visas that would permit them access to attend EIU. The pandemic created an additional layer of challenge and our number of our international students has decreased. Our current international student enrollment stands at 263 students representing 54 countries. We look forward to the day that pressures against approving student visas by our American embassies loosen and international students regain the ability to enroll in American universities of their choice.

Immeasurable thanks go out to all involved in this year's recruitment process, including the Office of Enrollment Management; the Admissions Office; the Enrollment Workx Committee; the Communication Planning Group; the Graduate School; the Office of International Students and Scholars; the Honors College; the deans, department chairs and faculty of all our academic colleges and the Booth library; our coaches and the Department of Intercollegiate Athletics; our University Police Department; groundskeepers; tradespersons; building service workers; and our entire University staff. I think you get the picture. Everyone in the EIU campus community

has a part to play, and no EIU employee should ever undervalue their critical role in the recruitment of students to EIU. This is what it takes for a regional public comprehensive university like EIU to persist in growing its enrollments and to enjoy enduring success in today's competitive market. And I sincerely hope and encourage each of us to continue to do our part in that regard.

As you all can appreciate, getting ready for the reopening of campus for Fall 2020 was no small feat. Hundreds of hours over the summer were spent strategizing our return, and multiple contingency plans were developed to respond to a variety of scenarios that could occur. New policies and guidelines were created and communicated, and resources were needed to be acquired such as disinfectants, masks, cleaning products, sanitizer, hand wipes, product mixers, sprayers, sneeze guards, Plexiglas, air purifiers, and more.

Daily, and often urgent decisions were made squarely focused on making our campus as safe as possible by implementing measures that would greatly reduce the transmission of the Sars-CoV-2 Virus. These decisions were informed by science and guided by the CDC, the Governor's Office, the Restore Illinois Plan, the Illinois Board of Higher Education, the Illinois Department of Public Health and the Coles County Health Department.

There is a tremendous number of individuals who assisted with our Return to Campus Plan and I am so very proud and grateful to everyone who made our Fall reopening possible. EIU's Emergency Management Team provided important and thoughtful recommendations to the administration for campus safety and health measures; the Associate Deans of each of our academic colleges assessed classroom spaces and created socially distanced class seating; and, our entire facilities team were instrumental in our efforts to disinfect campus spaces, move excess chairs out of classrooms, weld stands for sanitizing stations, change out air filters, reorganize dining areas, prepare housing units to be used for isolation and quarantine spaces, assess traffic patterns in buildings, and create signage to reduce traffic flow in hallways, staircases, restrooms and elevators.

Our Information Technology Services team worked impressively in adding cameras and microphones to over 100 classrooms to accommodate virtual learning; our HR department was called upon to navigate through and respond to numerous policy, operational and administrative matters related to the pandemic; and I must also acknowledge Danielle Green and her terrific staff in the Procurement Office. At a time when the supply chain for absolutely anything related to protect against the transmission of the virus was completely throttled, Danielle and her team worked magic to get us what we needed to reopen this Fall. Our Procurement Office deserves further recognition for their outstanding progress in increasing the amount of funds we spend with diversity-owned vendors, which resulted in the doubling of our diversity spend in FY-20.

Thank you to our outstanding staff in EIU's Student Medical Clinic who created protocols for monitoring and reporting COVID cases among our student population and overseeing August's onboarding surveillance testing, which we partnered with the incredible assistance of Sarah

Bush Lincoln Health System. I'd also like to thank the entire Student Affairs team for developing a safe way to move students into their residence halls, provide orientation sessions, and even develop remote activities to engage our new students in a unique Prowl Week experience.

A very important collaborative effort was forged between our Housing Office, EIU's Student Medical Center and EIU facilities, to develop a safe, effective and empathetic plan for moving individuals who test positive or are contact traced to transition to university isolation and quarantine spaces. While in isolation or quarantined, our students are contacted daily, their meals are brought to them from Panther Catering and their class instructors are notified of their absences.

A special acknowledgement goes out to Dr. Julie Dietz and Dr. Sheila Simons of EIU's Department of Public Health. When approached with a request by the administration to assist the campus in developing a model for contact tracing, they dove right in with remarkable energy and professionalism. Under a Memorandum of Agreement between EIU and the Coles County Health Department, Sheila is leading a team of 14 trained contact tracers that are working daily with EIU community members who have tested positive for the virus. Several of our 14 contact tracers are EIU Public Health graduate students. Talk about a real-time high-impact student experience for future public health professionals, this is surely it. Thank you Sheila, and to your team of contact tracers.

There are so many other actions that have been developed and implemented for reopening campus this fall that they are just too plentiful to mention. But, I must absolutely recognize the entire faculty who diligently worked to provide multiple learning modalities to support our student's academic needs as well as reduce the congestion of large groups of students in campus buildings and classrooms. Thank you to you all.

If ever the phrase, "it takes a village" was true, it was demonstrated by the entire EIU community in preparing for a safe reopening of our campus for the Fall semester. Together, you all provided our students with a gift. One that they wanted very much. A gift that allowed them to be on-campus together along with the university-provided supports that so many of our students rely on for their success.

Of course, there has been a very significant financial cost to the university related to responding to the pandemic and implementing measures to keep the campus safe. Since the pandemic's initial disruption of our normal operations last March, we estimate our unintended expenses and refunds will reach more than \$7 million by the end of this school year. Funds from the Federal CARES Act will help to offset some, but not nearly all of this amount. Fortunately, the strength of our university will allow us to cover the additional expenses and hopefully, the Stimulus Act that is currently being negotiated in Congress will provide additional assistance to EIU, if passed and signed by the President.

We are extremely pleased and grateful that the Illinois General Assembly and Governor Pritzker were able to appropriate a similar level of funds to higher education as they did the previous year. However, we are equally cautious that if the State does not meet their revenue projections due to the COVID pandemic, a rescission of some level of our appropriation could occur. For that reason, we are holding back approximately 5% of our appropriation – about \$2 million -- from being entered into our divisional budgets at this time.

We are also pleased that MAP and AIM HIGH programs were similarly appropriated at the same amount as the previous year. These funding sources are incredibly valuable for addressing equity gaps in making universities more accessible to low-income students and in reversing the trends of out-migration of university-bound high school graduates.

Our increase in revenue from this Fall's enrollment growth will help to meet, but not completely offset, our contractual agreements and inflationary costs for the current year. This has required a modest reduction to each of the Vice President's divisional budgets over last year. In addition, with the unpredictability of the pandemic and the high probability for future unplanned expenses, we must once again be extremely cautious in our spending. Financial managers will be restricted to purchasing only the most essential equipment and supplies to be used during this fiscal year. We will also not be able to announce any salary increases for our non-negotiated employees at this time, but hope we will be able to do so later this year. Any increase would be retroactive to July 1, 2020.

Although we've seen it occur on the campuses of numerous universities across the country, EIU has not had to lay off, furlough, or take on any other personnel reduction measures to our full-time continuing employees as a response to the high costs associated with the COVID pandemic. We don't anticipate this changing unless it becomes necessary for our students to be required to be sent home due to circumstances of the pandemic on our campus or in our region. If such action were to occur, it may necessitate some downsizing of our staffing in the housing and dining areas depending on when such direction might occur during the year.

No one wishes for our students' on-campus experience to end abruptly, especially our students, who tell us time and time again how much they want to be here, how they want access to our student supports, how they want as much student-faculty engagement as possible, how they want access to our library, and how many need access to our technology, laboratories and other resources. They want to continue experiencing EIU and the promises our brand provides them. But in order to reduce the possibility of students being required to vacate our campus, we all need to make active and serious efforts to reduce the spread of the virus. This includes all students, all faculty and staff members, and the entire Coles County community.

So far, we are doing a very admirable job in keeping the rate of viral transmission low on our campus grounds, classrooms and residence halls. Where we need to do a better job is making sure that our entire EIU community practices the same level of commitment and dedication to following our safety measures off campus as they have been demonstrating while on campus.

We are all well aware of these safety measures of wearing masks and maintaining six-feet between ourselves and others in public, completely avoiding any large social gathering and even small gatherings if others are not wearing masks and social distancing, and washing our hands often for 20-30 seconds. The sooner everyone complies by following these simple and scientifically proven public health measures, the sooner the positivity rate in our county will go down. I want nothing more than to alleviate the fear being expressed by students wondering if they will be sent home. That decision would certainly be contrary to our tremendous efforts throughout the entire summer, and completely undermine the assistance and sacrifices made by scores of EIU employees to make our campus safe for living and learning.

Over the past year, Eastern achieved a considerable array of accomplishments with arguably the greatest being able to successfully transition our entire operations and model of education to a remote format in two weeks' time. From our faculty moving classes to online modality to our student support services continuing to assist students with advising, mental health issues, exercise programs and tech support we were able to finish the semester. I am unbelievably proud of that accomplishment and so grateful to our entire EIU community.

It is often said that the greatest accomplishments emerge from the greatest challenges, and last spring was no exception.

Other accomplishments last year are abundant and reflect excellence throughout our university. Here are but a few of them. Once again, *U.S. News and World Report* positioned EIU as the top-ranked independent public regional university in Illinois. We also were highly ranked by other organizations for our outstanding value, our graduate programs, our STEP program for students with autism, and for our college town's safety and affordability. In *Money Magazine's* Best College List of the top 739 U.S. Colleges, EIU ranked 121. Given that there are over 2,600 4-year accredited colleges and universities in the U.S. it's an impressive accomplishment. The only Illinois universities to rank higher than EIU were the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, Northwestern University, University of Chicago and the University of Illinois – Chicago. I'd say we stand with very good company.

Our outstanding School of Business received reaffirmation of their accreditation from the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business; and reaccreditation was also conferred on our excellent programs in Clinical Mental Health and School Counseling by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Education Programs. This important milestone for any department or program is among the highest levels of external validation ensuring high quality training, faculty excellence, the use of best-practice assessment measures, and successful student outcomes.

We are thrilled to inaugurate the Gail & Richard Lumpkin School of Nursing. While it often takes years to progress through the various approvals and accreditations to begin a traditional nursing program, EIU accomplished this momentous feat in just over one year! That doesn't just happen. It takes a team of faculty, administrators and others to develop all the paperwork in meticulous fashion, create and have an entire curriculum approved, demonstrate need and

justification, design the learning and laboratory spaces, and equip them with state-of-the-art simulation technology. Any misstep would have caused delay, but our team was flawless and that was awesome! EIU is most grateful to the late Dick Lumpkin, his children Bess and Ben, and the Lumpkin Family Foundation for helping us make the dream of an EIU School of Nursing possible.

We are also equally thrilled with the progress being made towards the construction of our new science building appropriated in FY20 and thank, once again, the Illinois General Assembly and Governor Pritzker for including this strategic initiative among the Rebuild Illinois Capital Plan. The \$118 million building, which is slated to house the Department of Biological Sciences and the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry, will be located just south of the Tarble Arts Center. \$11.8 million has already been released for the architectural design phase of the structure. Numerous architectural firms from across the country expressed interest in the project, which was ultimately awarded to RATIO Architects. The first meeting of the design phase was held a week ago Tuesday and it will likely take 12 – 18 months to complete this phase. We are all very excited for the day when we can break ground.

Even during a most disruptive academic year, our faculty were able to maintain an exceptionally high level of scholarly and creative productivity, resulting in 101 peer-reviewed journal articles, 23 book chapters, 2 books, 19 creative exhibitions and art shows, and 14 professional performances. Many of these professional activities by our faculty included students in their research, -- a hallmark, high-impact opportunity for both faculty and students at EIU.

We had an equally strong performance in obtaining competitive external research and organizational grants. Of the 45 proposals submitted last year, 32 awards were funded for a total amount of \$3.88 million.

The most awards for research grants were received by faculty in our Department of Biological Sciences and the most awards for a non-academic unit went to WEIU-TV and FM. Congratulations to all principal investigators that submitted proposals last year. I encourage all our faculty and professional staff to consider the benefits of submitting an external grant or contract. They support the enhancement of your research and creative projects, assist students with unique and rewarding opportunities and always help to increase the awareness and prestige of EIU as a vibrant and high-quality institution.

I'd like to offer an additional recognition to our Department of Biological Sciences as well as our Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry. During the initial buildup of the pandemic this past Spring there became a local shortage of the viral testing medium needed for process screening COVID-19 infections. Sarah Bush Lincoln Health System contacted EIU asking if we had the expertise and ability to produce this material. Several faculty members from the two departments, as well as Roger Osthoff, clinical laboratory director in EIU's Medical Clinic, quickly responded, and were able to produce over 6,000 vials of the viral testing medium. I am



very proud of this tremendous response effort and how we were able to assist our community in the fight against COVID-19. Thank you to all faculty and others involved in this endeavor

In the College of Education, EIU's Accelerated Post-Baccalaureate Teacher Licensure Program was launched during Summer 2020, and the first cohort of 15 candidates are now engaged in their full-time, one-year residencies in high schools around the State. These candidates are earning full teacher licensure in biology, chemistry, physics, English, mathematics, and business education--all of which are teacher shortage areas, particularly in rural schools. The Golden Apple Foundation is providing significant funding for six of these candidates as part of their new "Accelerators" program, which supports talented recent college graduates and career changers committed to becoming teachers in rural schools of need.

Our ever innovative Graduate School, in conjunction with our academic departments and graduate coordinators, continues to develop new programs and pathways to increase enrollments and reinforce student success. The accelerated graduate program option introduced last year has begun to ignite student interest with 21 students currently taking advantage of this option. For this year, the Council on Graduate Studies approved a second master's degree pathway, which creates additional incentives for students to continue their graduate studies at EIU. As the demographics clearly demonstrate a decreasing number of Illinois high school graduates over the next several years, our graduate programming will become an increasingly integral component in our enrollment strategy plans for university growth.

The Booth Library completed an ambitious two-year project to digitize oral history interviews recorded on cassette tapes in the 1970s and 1980s. The East Central Illinois Local History Oral Interviews Project is a collection of 98 recorded interviews with residents of East Central Illinois, particularly Coles County, as well as with important political figures and Eastern Illinois University faculty and staff. These oral histories are now easily accessible online in the Illinois Digital Archives. The Library was also recognized with two awards in the 2020 PR Xchange Awards Competition sponsored by the American Library Association in the categories of Special Events and Exhibits and for Advocacy, Fundraising, Annual Reports and Strategic Plans.

Career Services recently introduced its new online system and mobile app for students and employers called Handshake. Students can use Handshake to request appointments for assistance with academic major and career exploration, register for Career Services workshops and career fairs, find internships and full-time jobs targeted to college students, and receive messages by potential employers. Efforts like these help EIU in continuing to achieve exemplary career and professional program placement rates. In fact, EIU's Class of May 2019 reported a 91 percent success rate in their post-graduation plans of either obtaining a job,

applying to graduate school, or committing to the military or volunteer service within six months of their graduation.

Our excellent student affairs division has been able to creatively shift to virtual student engagement activities since last March. Virtual programming includes online orientations, fitness classes, health promotion programs, social activities, student volunteerism activities, multicultural programming, and more. Student Affairs also partnered with Enrollment Management and our Digital Media Technology program to develop EIU's Esports arena that celebrated its grand opening last Fall.

Although the pandemic greatly disrupted a normal year of intercollegiate athletics, our student-athletes were still able to achieve a number of team and individual successes. Our men's track team won the OVC indoor championship and both our men's and women's basketball teams earned positions in the Ohio Valley Conference Championships. Women's basketball finished the season with 19 wins, ranking second in the entire NCAA for highest win total improvement over the last two seasons. Dustin Hatfield was named OVC Men's Indoor Track Athlete of the Year, Sara Teteak was named OVC Women's Soccer Defense Player of the Year and Lariah Washington was named OVC Freshman of the Year for women's basketball. Two of our outstanding coaches also received recognition last year. Brenton Emanuel was named OVC Indoor Track Coach of the Year, and Erin Howarth was named OVC Cross Country Coach of the Year.

Similar to past years, our student-athletes were also champions in the classroom, albeit the remote classroom after March. We have approximately 525 student athletes and their average GPA for Spring 2020 was an extraordinary 3.44. Collectively, this is the highest semester average GPA for our student-athletes on record. For the entire academic year, 32 EIU student-athletes received the OVC Medal of Honor for GPAs of 4.0 while 171 student-athletes earned the Commissioner's Honor Recognition for earning GPA's of 3.25 or higher. 19 student-athletes also earned positions on the Summit League Commissioner's Honor Roll. I'd like to congratulate our student-athletes for their excellence in their sport as well as in the classroom.

Growing the enrollment during a pandemic is no easy job. Yet our Division of Enrollment Management with their inter-collaborating units of Admissions, University Marketing and Communication, Financial Aid and the Office of the Registrar didn't let us down. Last year, they completed or worked on 72 action plans. They also partnered with Drs. Heidi Larson, Mona Davenport, Karla Sanders and Mr. Jody Stone to develop a ground-breaking mentorship program for student success that is being piloted this semester. The program, called Freshman Connection, has 150 of our Fall 2020 freshman as participants and we hope that the value of our efforts will demonstrate a new EIU support measure that we can use to drive our engagement and retention efforts with all freshman in the future.

It was also an outstanding year for our University Advancement division. Our Alumni Association memberships were up six percent from last year and our EIU-Foundation receipted more than \$6.6 million from our extremely generous donors, friends and advocates. This

amount is an increase of 194 percent (nearly triple) over last year's amount and the third highest total over the last 21 years. Several very significant gifts were made to assist both our academic mission and our intercollegiate athletic activities and we are so grateful for the support from our many donors who continue to invest in our outstanding university. Currently, the EIU-Foundation assets are valued at just over \$100 million -- that amount includes farm land which generate revenues to fund various academic grants that our students and faculty rely on.

Several individuals across our divisions also received external awards and recognitions for their superior achievements. Omar Solomon, one of our highly talented admissions counselors, received the Inclusion, Access and Success Service Award from the Illinois Association for College Admission Counseling; Jody Stone, Senior Associate Director for Residential Life and Conference Services, was selected to receive the Great Lakes Association of College and University Residence Hall's Hallenbeck Service Award; and EIU student Ethan Osbourne was named Student of the Year by the same organization. And while on the topic of residence halls, the Illinois Residence Hall Association named EIU Institution of the Year.

Dr. Shawn Schultz, academic advisor and coordinator of undergraduate programs for the School of Technology, received a 2020 Global Research Award from the National Academic Advising Association for his dissertation, titled *Academic Advising in the Twitterfirst Century: A phenomenological Study*. Sienna Mark, a management major and Caitlyn Atwood, a marketing major, both representing our School of Business, joined a team with six other students from across the world and achieved first place in the Case Competition at the national business honor society -- Beta Gamma Sigma--Global Leadership Summit. The Summit is a gathering of the "best of the best" business majors around the world. Like so many other EIU students, Sienna and Caitlyn continue to demonstrate the dynamic education and opportunities EIU provides, and that our students are prepared to compete against the very best students from the most prestigious universities across the country and beyond.

There are so many more recognitions and accomplishments that could be added to those I've mentioned. They occur in every division and in every office across our campus. It is, and will ever be, the people that make EIU so very special and a leader in Illinois higher education. Thank you all for your achievements that occur day in and day out at EIU.

In my first State of the University address in 2015 I introduced a vision of a Pathway to Success to reverse an eight-year consecutive trend of decreasing enrollments and unbalanced budgets that were draining our cash reserves. In my follow-up State of the University Address in 2016, I introduced the Vitalization Project and together -- under an urgent and ambitious timeline -- we created the substance of the Vitalization Plan. In essence, a productive, university-wide strategic plan to guide the university during the unprecedented State budget impasse and position the university for immediate success when the impasse was over.

By last year's State of the University Address, I was pleased to indicate the Vitalization Plan was working and we could see tangible proof that EIU was marching forward in enrollment growth,

financial stability, and the continuation of academic excellence. Who knew that just five months later we would be faced with another immense challenge of a global public health crisis. As before, we are meeting this challenge head on, using our resources effectively and relying on scientific best practices in making our health-based decisions. I am confident we can and will continue to navigate our university through these circumstances together.

This leads me to the major question for this year -- where are we on EIU's Pathway to Success and what measures are necessary to continue our forward momentum?

The Pathway's over-arching goal has been to solidify our on-going future as an outstanding, relevant, institution of higher education that focuses on academic excellence, high student outcomes and preparing students to be lifelong learners, and ethical and global citizens. In order to do so, it is necessary that we have a financial strategy plan that will support this sustainability, which includes growing our enrollment to between 8,500 – 9,000 full-time students by or around 2025.

Through the Vitalization Project we produced a series of initiatives we believed could advance our university's ability to grow enrollments and reverse spending habits that had led to ongoing year-over-year budget deficits. We recognized the solution to falling tuition revenue cannot be sustained by simply making more budgetary cuts year after year. Reversing that trend would also require strategic and targeted investments. The Vitalization initiatives were created to do just that and involved several divisions and units across campus making changes or adjustments that align with the Pathway goal.

Primary to these objectives was to:

1. Create an Enrollment Management division with top talent to focus on developing and executing strategies toward enrollment growth;
2. Find ways to diversify the university's revenue streams by expanding the focus of our learner base beyond solely traditional, residential-seeking students from Illinois;
3. Develop new market-driven academic programs to add to our curriculum array;
4. Make targeted investments in branding and marketing our University;
5. Centralize the organizational structure of our technology services and update our technology infrastructure; and,
6. Place priority on facilities' work that serves to improve the positive presentation of our campus.

As we leap forward to today, we have accomplished a truly remarkable come-back from our position during the State budget impasse by having moved forward toward completing our vitalization objectives. Here is where we stand.

We could not have brought together a better Enrollment Management division in both its leadership and its entire staff. The days of sending a nice view-book to prospective students and laying back to see just how many enroll is definitely over. In fact, it's been over for well

more than a decade. It's now analytics, marketing, financial aid leveraging, relationship building, strategy, innovation, ambition, etc. etc.

We diversified our revenue streams through focusing on enrolling greater numbers of international students, partnering with Academic Partnerships for our RN to BSN program, adding, and in some cases transitioning existing graduate programs, to online modality to attract working adults and individuals outside the state, and moving into the dual-credit space to provide high school learners with an EIU guided experience. All of these ventures assist in supporting the sustainability of our finances.

At last count, I believe we added 19 new undergraduate and graduate market-driven programs and revised several others to be more marketable to prospective students. Programs in criminology and criminal justice, cybersecurity, engineering technology, health administration, electrical engineering, curriculum and instruction, digital media, construction management, television and video production, and neuroscience all come to mind, and now we can add our new traditional nursing program to the list. Some of these new programs have become leaders in enrollment and all have contributed to our enrollment growth.

We're all familiar with the targeted investments we've made in branding and marketing our University over the past several years. This return on investment is tangibly reflected in our enrollment growth and an improved positive perception of our university. Our marketing collaboration in partnership originally with The Thorburn Group and now with Central States Media has been focused on assisting prospective students on a trail from awareness of EIU to relationship building to visiting campus and finally to enrolling.

Although our initial thoughts leaned towards bringing all information technology under a single centralized organizational structure, further discussions among constituency groups led us to retain a modified decentralized model. Our web designers have joined with University Marketing to become the new Office of Marketing and Communications, which is heavily focused on enrollment management activities; the classroom technology staff have moved to Information Technology Services; and the instructional designers are affiliated with the Faculty Development and Innovation Center housed in Booth Library. Recently, the University invested more than \$700,000 to upgrade our core technology infrastructure of new servers and related hardware and software technology.

Excellent progress has also been made toward beautifying our campus so that it presents well to our guests and creates a positive aesthetic for our faculty, staff and students to enjoy. We've added additional groundskeepers and our facilities projects have been prioritized to enhance the look of campus including side-walk repairs, paneling on the MLK, Jr. Union bridge, the Robison Auditorium in Lumpkin Hall, our residence halls, and the new Physics Tutoring Room in the Physical Sciences Building, to name a few. We hope that we'll soon be able to tackle the north stairs of Booth library and the façade of the wall that showcases the clock on the historic McAfee building.

In 2018 and 2019, two additional objectives were announced during my State of the University Addresses. Both support our university's mission and our goals toward the Pathway to Success. The first was to enhance our focus on student success in terms of persistence and degree completion. Goals were set at between 77 and 80 percent for freshman to sophomore retention and a six-year graduation rate above 60 percent. Within this objective our Academic and Student Affairs divisions were charged to continue their work in identifying new and effective student support initiatives – financial, academic, mentoring and social – to respond to equity gaps and assist our underrepresented, low income and first generation students to greater success in persisting and completing their degrees.

In 2019, I challenged our campus to become a champion of inclusion, diversity and equity as a hallmark of our brand. A University where all students flourish and feel safe, supported, respected, and welcomed. Over the past six months, this objective has taken on even greater meaning and importance. EIU needs to be a University that stands up against social injustices, prejudice and discrimination. It is imperative we do so conscientiously and with firm commitment and action. A University that can champion inclusion, diversity and equity, is a University that will be true to its mission statement and solidify its relevancy and positive enrollment management into future decades.

As the University has work so aggressively on these vitalization initiatives over the last four years, it's exciting to look at our outcomes.

First, we have now experienced three years of increases in total enrollment from 7,030 students in 2017 to 8,626 students in 2020.

Second, our first-time, full-time freshman class has increased for three consecutive years from 634 students in 2017 to 900 in 2020 – and I would dare say it would have been significantly higher this year had it not been for the pandemic.

Third, our graduate enrollment has increased every year for the past six years from 1,273 graduate students in 2014 to 1,657 this Fall.

Fourth, this is the first year we have an increase in student credit hours over the previous year since 2008. And before you jump to any false conclusions, this does not count any high school dual-credit hours in this metric.

Fifth, during the last three consecutive years we have finished each year within budget for our income fund. More simply stated, we operated within our generated income revenues.

And finally sixth, throughout the many challenges, changes and new initiatives we have experienced over the last few years we have continued to provide an outstanding living and learning environment for our students at the highest levels of academic excellence and positive student outcomes to remain Illinois' top-ranked independent public regional university.

We are decisively advancing on the goals set forth by our Pathway to Success. Yet, some of you may still be asking the question, “but when will it *feel* like success?” Truthfully, the answer is “it depends.” Anyone looking to define success through EIU’s experience during the early 2000s – by having the same number of staff and faculty members in our various divisions and units as we had back then, or through annual salary adjustments that exceed inflationary rates, or by overly abundant resources in each departmental budget – I suggest we have a long time to wait and truth be told it may never happen again.

Changes in demographics, technology, competition from for-profit and not-for-profit online universities, and decreasing state funding levels have all dramatically changed the higher education environment in a way that doesn’t support the successes our institution experienced during the early 2000s. This is true for public regional universities and small private colleges and universities across the nation. But if we define success, as a University that can fulfill its educational mission at a high level of academic excellence, demonstrate positive student outcomes, be adaptable to the changing higher education environment, balance its budget year after year while not making endless cuts to operations, has the ability to grow enrollments to a level that will provide sustainable revenue for ongoing operations, and that can provide stable, yet very modest annual increases in salary, we are on the doorstep to meeting that definition of success.

What will advance us through that allegorical door is to continue following the methods and strategies that the Vitalization Plan has provided us over these past four years. The Plan remains relevant today and our University’s focus on enrollment growth and conservative spending must continue to drive our decisions and actions this year as well. We are clearly moving forward on EIU’s Pathway to Success – all the indicators are there using quantifiable assessment measures-- and we have done so in the midst of challenges that no one could have predicted. EIU’s positive strides over the past four years are a direct result of your everyday accomplishments and I hope all of you will take great pride in our collective achievements.

Before I close, I would like to thank all our faculty, staff, students, Board of Trustees, alumni, Mayor Combs and officials of the City of Charleston, and all the friends of the university. Together, you are EIU and your commitment and support of our beloved university is what continues our legacy of transforming and educating thousands of students each year so they may themselves go on to make this world a better place. Thank you also to the Sarah Bush Lincoln Health System and the Coles County Health Department in partnering with EIU this year in our community fight and response to the COVID pandemic. Your assistance has been phenomenal.

Please know I remain extremely proud and humbled to have the opportunity to lead our University and I promise to continue to work as hard as I possibly can to keep us marching forward on the Pathway to Success, fostering an environment that is committed to civility, equity and inclusion, embracing shared governance as a foundation of our decision-making, and retaining the best qualities of academic excellence, individualized attention and affordability for our students that are the hallmark of the EIU experience.

Thank you for listening, and thank you for all you do for this amazing University.