

State of the University Address

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Eastern Illinois University

September 7, 2016

Good afternoon.

Before I begin my remarks, I would like to welcome and recognize the Chairman of our Board of Trustees, Mr. Joe Dively, and Trustee Mr. Dan Caulkins. Thank you for attending today's Address and for the support and guidance we receive from our Trustees.

Welcome back to an exciting new year at Eastern Illinois University. Our students have found their classes, our faculty have begun sharing knowledge, our staff are working diligently to support the educational mission and positive experience of our students, and our admission counselors are out recruiting our Fall 2017 class – just where we want them to be!!

There is no doubt that we all get excited about the new school year. But it can also be a time for a little nervousness. I can recall as a faculty member that year after year, I used to wonder right before teaching that first class whether I could still pull off the effortless, effective lecture, mixing rigor with humor, and having the students be engaged. Or, would this time be the doomsday where no words of intellect would be forthcoming, the mind would shut down, and I'd fall flat on my face. But as soon as I walked into the classroom and saw the eager faces of the students, an immediate transformation took place from a shaky and nervous Don Knotts persona to a calm and experienced teacher. I wonder if any of you have experienced something similar. (And if you are younger than 40, you may need to Google Don Knotts).

There are very good reasons why faculty and staff are excited, and perhaps a bit nervous, when the students return to campus each Fall. After all, we are responsible for the education and positive experience of our students. Our students have come to EIU to become lifelong learners and gain the knowledge, skills and abilities to navigate through difficult challenges encountered during their lives and to be adaptable to multiple career paths.

Our success in this mission is predicated solely on the success of our students. And I am more than pleased to say, we have an excellent track record!

We realize that our students did not have to come to EIU; they could have gone to many other institutions. But they chose to enter or to return to EIU because they believe in us. They believe we will provide for them the keys to a fulfilled life. That's a heavy responsibility — one that we take most seriously.

Last year we were rated the top public regional university in Illinois and number five in the entire 12-state Midwest region, within our classification. This meritorious accomplishment of excellence did not occur by chance nor by folly. It is the result of the dedication and commitment of an incredibly talented faculty and university-wide staff. In data collection by the Illinois Board of Higher Education, it was noted that EIU has the same rate of degree completion as some of the flagship institutions in other states, such as the University of Kentucky and the University of Arkansas. Now that's something we can be proud of — and I can only imagine what we could do with the resources of the University of Kentucky.

When I'm asked what makes EIU different from the other universities I've served or have spent time with, I tell them it's our people. And when they reply, "Everyone says that," I tell them, yes, most universities do have outstanding people, but with EIU, all of our people share a common value: we love EIU, and no matter what capacity we serve our university, we are laser-focused on the success of our students and providing them an exceptional living-learning experience. That's our mindset and we believe in it!

If I were to ask you to stop and reflect for a moment on last year, I imagine many of you would conjure up notions of challenge and crisis, of cutbacks, furloughs and layoffs, and of the unprecedented inability to compromise among our state's lawmakers. And there are good reasons for why these thoughts are predominate in our minds. There is surely no question that Fiscal Year 2016 will go down as a low point in Illinois budget development and in Illinois higher education history. The events of the past year have shaken the level of trust between the state, their public colleges and universities, and the citizens of Illinois. This systemic uncertainty continues en masse today.

However, despite any despondent thoughts one may have about last year, they should be overshadowed by the extraordinary accomplishments that took place on EIU's campus during this same tumultuous period. We did not sit back and remain static during our lowest funded year by the state. Instead, we effectively managed the financial challenge, and we did so through the cooperation and pulling together of all members of the EIU community. This was no easy task given the anemic amount of resources the university was provided during the first 10 months of the fiscal year, and singularly reflects the excellence and commitment of the faculty and the entire university staff who selflessly stepped up to additional workloads and effort.

We were also effective in greatly insulating our students' academic education and university experience from the fallout of the budgetary impasse. Our students received the same high level of attention, academic excellence and student services expected from the top-ranked public regional university in Illinois. Classroom and laboratory supplies were never diminished and extracurricular student activities and services were supported. My heartfelt thanks goes out to everyone in the university community that helped maintain the positive learning and living environment for our students.

EIU continues to be a strong university and is demonstrating exciting growth in its enrollment of graduate students that is up by more than 10 ½ percent over last year. We are also experiencing impressive growth in recruiting international students, with an increase of 48 percent. Today, there are 437 international students studying at Eastern. Last year, I set a goal for our international recruitment initiative to reach 500 students by Fall 2017. It appears we are well on our way to meeting and even surpassing that goal. The successes of growth in our graduate programs and international students are not coincidental; they are the result of developing effective recruitment strategies and our ability and willingness to innovate our graduate programs to meet the market interests.

And although we are experiencing lower enrollments in our new freshmen and transfer students this year, it is largely attributed, directly or indirectly, to the state budget calamity and not to any deficiency in our university's excellence or student recruitment plan. Do not lose

sight of the fact that just last Fall 2015 we had an increase of new freshmen of two percent over the previous year. We do have a proven strategy to grow our enrollments!

More than 7,400 students are enrolled at EIU this fall, and the freshmen students we recruited are strong by all measures. We deliberately held to our admissions standards. EIU continuously ranks high compared to our peer institutions in retention and graduation rates, metrics we do not want to, nor will we, jeopardize.

This year's downward spike in enrollment will be remedied quickly and effectively. To do so, however, we need the efforts of our entire EIU community to combat the doomsayers' erroneous and deleterious messages that plagued our university last year over social and traditional media.

I ask everyone to encourage those prospective students and their families that you know to consider Eastern and share with them how EIU is a wonderful university at which to live and learn. And, reconnect with high school counselors, community college advisors and other EIU alum who are teachers in Illinois and encourage them also to have their students explore EIU for their higher education goals.

EIU can no longer afford to be the best-kept secret in Illinois higher education. It's time to get the word out that academic excellence, blended with a supportive, safe and nurturing environment, exists in Charleston, Illinois. We all know how good EIU is — let's shout it out to others. And we will do so as individuals, admissions counselors, and by the university's commitment to enhance university marketing and branding as a targeted investment this year.

If one is to believe the State of the University is not strong, they are not looking at the myriad extraordinary accomplishments that were achieved by our outstanding faculty, staff and students this past year. Nor have they been looking at the development of the comprehensive and integrated communication and recruitment plan that has been developed by our admissions team, nor the new program development that is taking place by several of our departments to meet student demand in the marketplace. EIU is positioning itself toward enrollment growth and success through 2020 and beyond.

Bottom line is this, the strength of EIU is not measured by its financial position of the moment; it is measured by the strength of its educational product, the student university experience it provides, and the quality and dedication of its faculty and staff. We believe in our educational model, which we deliver at a competitively affordable price. If we focus on strategically vitalizing our university and are willing to modernize our programs and student services, EIU's financial position will follow right along in positive momentum.

A bright and successful future for our university is in our control, and we will use this time to maximize our efforts to do so.

Recently, I asked our university's division leaders to provide a list of the most notable accomplishments that occurred within their division this past year. And while I'm sure you are familiar with the great things that are taking place in your own department or unit, it is incredibly impressive when you hear what has taken place across our great campus. The list is extensive and beyond the number I can publicly recognize in the shortness of this address, yet all are absolutely meritorious. Allow me to take the liberty of sharing a few examples to capture a picture of our successes.

We all recognize that students come to Eastern to pursue a higher education, but without providing excellent support services to assist them in enjoying a nurturing, safe and developmentally enriching environment, they would be much less likely to succeed and acquire the many life skills promoted through campus life that are highly sought after by employers. I'm referring to leadership development, confidence, interrelationship skills, team building skills, and effective organizational communication.

EIU is a residential campus and students are in the classroom on average 12 – 18 hours per week. This leaves a large majority of time to be managed on their own. Our student affairs division excels in developing a robust EIU university experience that supports each student's academic success and his/her personal well-being. The division's work is every day, all day, and I commend our student affairs staff for their commitment and achievement of positive outcomes.

I was amazed to learn of some very big numbers. The University's Martin Luther King Jr. Student Union hosted 10,066 events this past academic year with a total attendance of over 336,000 people. The student Recreation Center recorded over 190,000 student visits representing 6,463 distinct individuals. And our Health Services Center managed over 17,000 medical visits last year alone. Well, on second thought, perhaps we shouldn't be excited about 17,000 medical visits, but kudos to our staff for handling this large number of cases.

Two signature programs of student affairs deserve special recognition. First, the Office of Civic Engagement and Volunteerism worked with more than 70 community partners and Eastern students completed approximately 130,000 hours of community service activity. As a university, we embrace the value and civic importance of servant leadership, and EIU is on the forefront of inculcating this value onto our students. Rachel Fisher, who led the office earlier in the year, and Beth Gillespie, who took over as interim director in the Spring, both demonstrate high levels of energy and enthusiasm that has effectively engaged our students.

Second, our Career Services Center provides valuable assistance to EIU students in securing employment through identifying job openings, hosting job fairs, providing workshops on preparing resumes and mentoring students with their interview skills.

Whether you agree with this expectation or not, today's students expect that their college experience will immediately lead to a professional job in the competitive economic workforce. Students and their parents have become very concerned about the return on investment for a college education, as the cost of higher education continues to rise.

The placement rate has become an important metric used by the external community in assessing a university's ability to prepare students for the job market or successful entry into graduate and professional programs such as medical school, law school, etc.

I am pleased to share that the Career Services Center that tracks our placement data reports that 90% of EIU's graduates from the 2014-15 academic year secured employment in professional positions or were admitted into graduate or professional programs by December 31, 2015. This was an increase of three percent from the placement rate of the previous year and more than 18 percent higher than the national placement rate. That is a most impressive

and resonating statistic that EIU must showcase in our recruitment materials and our discussions with prospective students.

Congratulations to the staff of the Career Services Center for their help in getting our students placed.

I would like to highlight a couple of individual honors among our student affairs staff. First, Jody Stone, Associate Director of Housing and Dining, was elected president-elect of the Association of College and University Housing Officers, International Foundation; and second, Kimberlie Moock, Director of New Student and Family Programs, was honored when she received the National Orientation Directors Association's Area V Outstanding Processional Award. The region includes seven states and the Canadian province of Manitoba.

Congratulations to Jody and Kimberlie.

EIU's intercollegiate athletic program has a long history of success, and this past year was no exception, as our almost 500 student-athletes competed exceedingly well both in the classroom and in their respective sports. We were extremely close -- missing by only 1 ½ points -- to winning the Ohio Valley Conference's Commissioner's Cup, which goes annually to the university that demonstrates the greatest overall athletic excellence in Conference-sponsored championships. And although we didn't win the cup, our second-place finish is a testament to our competitiveness in Division I athletics, especially during a year when athletic department resources had been dramatically cut back.

Off the field our student-athletes set several university records for their academic success during the Spring semester. The cumulative GPA for all athletic sports was an impressive 3.25. Sixty-nine percent of all student athletes earned a GPA of 3.0 or higher and 77 student-athletes last Spring had a perfect 4.0 GPA. Finally, it was our women's tennis team that amassed the highest team GPA, with an exceptional 3.79 average.

Congratulations to all our coaches and intercollegiate athletic program staff for providing an enriching and competitive experience for our student athletes.

Once again, our Office of Research and Sponsored Programs reported a strong year for the university in securing external funding for research, educational and social outreach, student support services and creative performance. Proposals were submitted from multiple campus divisions, and we were successful in receiving 30 grant awards totaling over \$4 million. Several of these grants came from federal and state organizations whose award process is extremely competitive, such as the National Science Foundation, Illinois Department of Natural Resources and the Illinois Department of Agriculture.

Our top grants persons, with awards of over \$500,000 in support-services funding, were Misty Baker of our Child Care Resource and Referral Center and Jack Neal of WEIU. Top faculty grants persons with research funding of \$200,000 or more were Dr. Rob Colombo from the Department of Biological Sciences and Drs. Hongshan He, Mary Konkle, and Kraig Wheeler, all from the Department of Chemistry and each receiving individual awards of more than \$200,000.

I wish to acknowledge and congratulate all of our successful grants persons and thank all others who took the time to submit proposals. Every external grant and contract award – regardless of its size -- promotes our university in prestige and benefits the research, programs or service projects of our faculty and professional staff. Furthermore, many EIU students are supported by funding from external awards and others are provided experiential learning opportunities that would otherwise not be available. The importance of experiential learning in the student university experience cannot be underestimated. And that is why faculty/student research collaboration is a recognized special emphasis for Eastern Illinois University.

Of all the areas of strength on our campus, the faculty and our academic programs and services are at its core. EIU is proud to have extremely talented and dedicated faculty that provide expertise in a broad spectrum of academic disciplines and specializations.

When the deans of our colleges, graduate school, continuing education and the Booth Library submitted their suggested lists of a few bulleted accomplishments, you probably aren't surprised to learn that there are many definitions of the word "few." In fact, I was inundated with a litany of items from all of the deans.

What was more surprising, however, was the differing types of items they chose to include, ranging from individual successes of faculty and students to new program development, and the use of integrating new innovative pedagogy to maximize the learning environment of their students. This broad array of accomplishments aptly and effectively demonstrates the holistic strength of EIU's academic affairs division.

The following is an abbreviated list of examples representing a few of the excellent activities and outcomes that have taken place in academic affairs over the past year. My apologies to all of the many faculty deserving recognition – and there are many – that I have omitted from the deans' lists due to time.

An important measure of the quality of our academic programs is demonstrated by meeting the criteria of standards set forth by accrediting bodies. This past year, two of our programs successfully received their reaccreditation. Congratulations to the Accounting Program of the School of Business for their reaccreditation through the year 2020 by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business and to the Recreation Administration program for reaccreditation through 2022 by the National Recreation and Parks Association and American Association for Leisure and Recreation.

Anyone familiar with the accreditation process understands just how much work and time goes into preparing the self-study document. Thank you to all the faculty and administrators who were involved in maintaining these two academic accreditations.

Several departments over the past few years have become very innovative in program development and are demonstrating that these programs can be successful and grow. Whether they are new academic programs or modifications to existing programs, they are being strategically developed to meet the needs or interests of greater numbers of prospective students. The ability for departments to adapt to the new higher education environment is key to EIU's success, vitality and sustainability.

A few exciting examples comparing this semester's graduate enrollments with last Fall's well illustrate this trend. Master's programs recently modified in music, nutrition and dietetics, political science and in biological sciences grew by a most impressive 112 percent, 50

percent, 44 percent and 38 percent, respectively, just in the past year. These are excellent results for our university.

And by making a targeted investment in our technology Master's program, we yielded an increase of 111 additional students this semester for a remarkable 74 percent increase over last year. This is concrete evidence that EIU is absolutely able to grow its enrollments, and these departments and others like them are becoming the pioneers of modernizing our University.

Strategically developed new programs or modified existing programs launched this past year included a Master's in Health Promotion and Leadership, an online Master's of Business Administration, Masters' in Bio-chemistry Bio-technology, and a B.A. degree in Public Relations. In addition, new options or concentrations within existing degree programs were introduced in several master's programs across the campus. We look forward to their success.

Finally, we are eager to initiate programs already being developed for new enrollments in 2017 with the offering of a B.S in Computer and Information Technology, Master's in Cybersecurity, Master's in Talent Development and an online option for K-12 educators interested in a Master's degree in History. And I understand there are several more yet to come. As said multiple times, it's this ability and willingness to build, change and innovate our academic programs that demonstrate our University's strength to endure.

Although the budgetary impasse in Springfield greatly limited EIU's capacity to fund conference travel and internal research grants, our colleges were still able to report impressively high levels of research productivity. During the past year, our faculty published no less than 19 scholarly books or manuscripts and 223 peer-reviewed articles in academic journals and chapters in books. In addition, over 168 scholarly papers were presented at regional, national and international professional conferences, and our faculty from the fine arts disciplines demonstrated their excellence in scholarship through more than 70 performances and exhibitions in venues throughout the country.

Among the many other accomplishments of our academic affairs division, I'd like to recognize our WEIU production team for its excellent TV series, Our Story. Five episodes were developed and aired showcasing Effingham, Maunton, Charleston, Paris and Marshall. The

productions, under the leadership of Jana Johnson and Ke'an Armstrong, were a huge success in spreading community outreach and yielded total revenue from the projects of over \$140,000.

The physics department facilitated our student recruitment efforts last March by hosting the regional competition of the Worldwide Youth in Science and Engineering Sectional that brought about 600 highly talented students to EIU to compete in seven subjects ranging from English to Physics. Several other departments, including the Departments of Journalism, Biological Sciences and Foreign Languages, also held educational events to bring high school students to campus. This form of outreach will significantly help EIU in growing our enrollments.

The Booth Library, arguably the most attractive library and housing the best library faculty and staff in the state, continues to exceed everyone's expectations in its hosting of national exhibits. Rather than simply showcasing a traveling exhibit, our library creates a full-blown celebration of learning that incorporates lectures and discussions led by the talents and intellect of our faculty, staff, students and community. Last year's major events on Abraham Lincoln in the Fall and the Dust Bowl in the Spring brought a record number of attendees to the series.

I'd finally like to provide recognition to a few faculty and students for their individual accomplishments: First, Dr. Tom Grissom, Director of the Instructional Technology Center of the College of Education and Professional Studies was selected as a Microsoft Innovative Educator expert. Microsoft identified Dr. Grissom for his innovative use of technology to improve student outcomes.

Dr. Allen Lanham, Dean of the Booth Library, was named a Library Luminary last May by the Illinois Library Association in recognition of his career serving the profession. This is certainly a well-deserved honor, and anyone who knows Dean Lanham can attest to his overwhelming dedication and energy to creating a library environment to serve all.

History student Michael Bradley was honored by the David Library of the American Revolution in Washington, Pennsylvania, by being named the second-place winner of the

national competition for the Omar Vasquez Prize for Excellence in Undergraduate Research. Michael's honors thesis, which he used for the competition, was supervised by Dr. Charles Foy of our Department of History.

A somewhat unique honor was bestowed upon Dr. Gordon Tucker of our Department of Biological Sciences. A group of his collaborators in India, who recently identified a new species of sedge plants, chose to name the new species after Dr. Tucker. I don't believe many of the rest of us can claim to hold a nomenclature position in the classification of nature. It will be fun asking our groundskeepers to start planting some *Fimbristylis tuckeri* around campus.

And finally, two academic departments, the Sandra and Jack Pine Honors College and the intercollegiate athletics department all share in the accomplishments of this recent graduate. Honors student Christian Ilunga-Matthiesen, a double major in Economics and Political Science and a star member of our track team, completed an internship working for the German diplomatic service in South Africa in the summer of 2015. Since then he was admitted to several of the most prestigious schools – including Oxford and the Paris School for International Affairs – but has chosen to pursue his master's in international development at the top-ranked London School of Economics and Political Science.

Now that's a success story to showcase the excellence in education that students can receive at Eastern Illinois University.

What a privilege it is to boast of our world-class faculty that commit their knowledge, experience and energies to assist our students in reaching their goals, aspirations and dreams.

By measure of the abundant accomplishments of our university's divisions and our faculty, staff and students, we are a very strong University -- yet we also have definite challenges that must be overcome going forward. Although we received stop-gap funding, the state has yet to pass a budget for FY17 with a full appropriation for higher education. This will force us to continue our operations in the most fiscally prudent manner as we did last year, especially in Ledger 1 expenses (those that utilize appropriated and tuition dollars).

We also lost a number of outstanding faculty and staff this past year who chose to take positions in other states because of the insecurity posed by the budgetary impasse. This is a very unfortunate situation, and we must do all we can to keep our excellent faculty and staff members at EIU for the benefits to our students, our internal operations, and our university's prestige.

We learned an important civics lesson this past year. And if nothing else, we now know for sure that a fragile dependency on the state for EIU's viability is a shaky proposition. We must tighten our efficiencies and increase our enrollments to gain greater control of our future. There is no waiting for some good old days to return; we will move forward together and create the good new days for Eastern Illinois University.

We will accomplish this by modernizing our academic programs and student life services in a manner desired by prospective students today. And we will vitalize our operations and our image in the marketplace for recruiting a broader segment of learners: residential and online, traditional and non-traditional, domestic and international, undergraduate and graduate.

It has been said that the solution to falling tuition revenue is not more and more cuts, but targeted investments. I fully subscribe to the essence of that statement, and it will inform our decision-making process for moving forward.

But what will those targeted investments be for Eastern? What can we invest in that will bring us higher enrollments? What academic programs and non-academic experiences can we provide that are market driven and will distinguish us among our peers? What reorganizations within our divisions can create excitement and interest to prospective students? Will it be a school or center of applied health professions? A college of technology, engineering and computer sciences? A STEM college? Is it time for EIU to offer micro-degrees or skill-mastery certificates? We have the ability and opportunity to fully re-imagine ourselves and vitalize our campus to thrive.

Posing and answering these questions are consistent with the Pathway to Success model outlined last Fall in my State of the University remarks. And if it weren't for having to

divert our attentions toward Springfield this past year, we would be much farther down that path.

The negative effect on our university's reserve funds caused by the state's inability to pass a full and comprehensive budget in FY16, combined with our lower Fall 2016 enrollments, largely attributable to the fallout from the budgetary impasse that included negative and erroneous messaging about Eastern, dictates that the time for us to craft a plan of strategic solutions to vitalize our campus is right now, beginning this semester, and we must follow up by implementing these solutions in a prudent, yet timely, manner.

I have heard the phrase many times on campus, from many different sources – and I imagine you have heard it, too -- that EIU has great students, but just not enough of them. The inherent fact of the statement is we don't have enough students to sustain our current level of resourcing all of our academic and non-academic programs and student services at their current rate, let alone find additional funds to allocate for targeted investments.

Something must change that will allow us to increase funding of our high-demand signature programs and those student services that are known to attract more students and allow them to grow, as well as to have available funds to invest in new market-driven initiatives. One thing is certain, however; the additional revenue we seek will not come from tuition increases. EIU reaffirms its unwavering commitment to providing an affordable education for our students.

Thus, the primary variables that would effect this change (excluding a sudden reverse in direction by our state lawmakers to begin increasing annual appropriation levels – which I wouldn't bet on) include increased funding through enrollment growth and/or reducing costs in other programs or services that we currently offer that are either over-resourced, not sustainable or could be effectively outsourced.

The process of such action is complicated by the fact that the majority of our expenses are tied to faculty and staff salaries. With recent layoffs and non-replacement of employees retiring or leaving the university, we have increased the ratio of students to non-instructional employees from 7.0 : 1 to 9.3 : 1, yet it still remains well below the ratio of our peer set of

universities at 14.2 : 1. Our current student to faculty ratio for this semester is 14.0 : 1, exactly the same as it was last year, despite the reduction of faculty from retirements, those who left for new employment and others whose contracts were not renewed. This ratio is also much lower than the median of our peer set of universities at 18 : 1.

For fiscal alignment, it is necessary that EIU attain ratios closer to the median statistics, and thus, I am setting the goal that EIU will achieve a student to non-instructional employee ratio of 11.0 : 1 and a student/faculty ratio of 16.0 : 1 by Fall 2018. Like all of you here, I want to see this accomplished by increased enrollments rather than any further reductions in the size of our faculty and staff. And we do have the ability to accomplish this if we all become recruiters for EIU.

At EIU's Board of Trustees meeting in June 2016, the University was charged by the Board to assess our academic and non-academic programs and services in terms of their viability, efficiency and sustainability, and report back to the Board at its January 2017 meeting with conclusions and recommendations.

The Board's charge provided an opportunity to proactively expand the initiative in a positive direction for involving the campus community in innovative thought, discussion, and action toward the vitalization of our university, which we are calling the Vitalization Project.

The Project's design and process was crafted over the summer, with consultation of the CUPB Executive Committee, and is intended to be both consultative and transparent. Its anticipated outcomes will serve to advance EIU on its Pathway to Success and guide our budget and planning decisions for future allocation of resources and targeted investments.

The Vitalization Project will be led by a Task Force, President's Liaison Subcommittee and nine Workgroups. The charge of the Task Force and Workgroups is framed by identifying efficiencies, the viability and sustainability of existing services and/or programs, and enhancements or changes likely to increase the marketability and success for increasing student enrollments.

Two of the Workgroups will solely focus on generating ideas for vitalizing our academic affairs division – its divisional organization, academic program development, learning and

delivery formats, and other components to attract higher enrollments and distinguish EIU in the competitive marketplace.

Finally, the President's Liaison Subcommittee will help track the progress of the Workgroups and update the president on the Project's activities.

The Vitalization Project's framing document provides additional detailed information and can be found on EIU's website using the A-Z link. Posted with the framing document are links to the timeline, Frequently Asked Questions page – which will be updated as additional questions are posed, and data sets that may be helpful to the Workgroups. All but the data sets are available today, and they will be added shortly.

Transparency in the process design allows access by all members of the university community to documents and data sets posted to the Vitalization Project's website.

The timeline for the Project is very ambitious for several of the Workgroups to comply with the charge of the Board of Trustees. The two academic visioning Workgroups will have additional time to develop their recommendations.

Populating the Task Force Workgroups will be done over the next two weeks and I encourage our major shared governance organizations – CUPB, Faculty Senate, Staff Senate, Student Senate, Civil Service Council, Council of Chairs, Dean's Council and Vice Presidents -- to nominate members to serve. Self-nominations from throughout the university are also encouraged.

Nominations should be sent to the president's office by email to president@eiu.edu and will be accepted through Wednesday, September 21st. Notifications of being selected for a Workgroup will take place shortly thereafter.

I hope to see a large number of our EIU community excited and interested in participating in the Vitalization Project. However, I need to stress it is a heavy responsibility and will involve a major commitment of time and energy this Fall. Workgroups will likely need to meet multiple times each week, and members will need to be flexible in their abilities to meet at less than traditional times so that all may attend. However, participation in the Project should be very rewarding and will allow you to have a direct and driving voice in the vitalization and Pathway to Success for our University.

I enthusiastically encourage those of you who are willing to think realistically, visionarily, critically, innovatively and entrepreneurially to join in the Vitalization Project. As a university that prides itself on its success in teaching critical-thinking and problem-solving abilities, we definitely have the intellectual resources to solve our own.

At last year's State of the University Address, I spoke to a critical need for EIU to be willing to change and adapt to the modern conditions and environment that exists for recruiting students today. This year, together, we will demonstrate that willingness.

From a broad and comprehensive assessment, there is absolutely no doubt that EIU is a strong and vibrant university poised to move forward in its Pathway to Success. I ask the entire campus community to embrace this time of great opportunity with positivity and excitement.

There is one last favor in which I hope all of you will agree to participate, which will be helpful to EIU's immediate success. I ask that you redirect your energy and passion with the same level of intensity and fervency that you displayed last year in campus rallies, letters and marches focused on funding EIU, toward messaging efforts and campaigns focused on enhancing EIU's positive image across the state as a wonderful, dynamic university at which to live and learn.

I wish you all a wonderful and productive new school year, and I offer my most heartfelt thank you for your many efforts and contributions to Eastern Illinois University. Last year we pulled together as a community during adversity and kept our university great. It is my truest pleasure and honor to serve as your President.

Thank you.