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### 2014 August 22 - Faculty Convocation

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EAST TENNESSEE STATE  
UNIVERSITY

Office of the President

## **2014 Faculty Convocation Friday, August 22, 2014**

Thank you, and good morning. It is my pleasure to welcome you to the beginning of the 2014-15 academic year. I think that everyone in the room would agree that this time of year on campus is simply magical. Other than Commencement, there is no other occasion at ETSU that can match the energy and excitement of the start of the fall semester.

Let me begin by extending a special welcome to our seventy-four new faculty members. I had the opportunity to meet many of you earlier this week, and we are honored that you have chosen to make ETSU the place that you call home. In a few moments, we will honor three professors with distinguished faculty awards. From day one, this institution has made great teaching its hallmark. With an original mission to educate teachers, East Tennessee State Normal School attracted some of the nation's best, beginning with the first faculty, shown in an early photograph seated on the steps of Gilbreath Hall, surrounding the man who hired them, lifelong educator Sidney G. Gilbreath.

On their very first day of classes, our original 29 students met faculty members who had studied and taught at places like Johns Hopkins, Columbia, and Harvard. President Gilbreath and the faculty offered to those students courses in civil government, literature, chemistry, the history of education, composition, French, German, and physical geography. The curriculum was a unique blend of the theoretical and the practical, the idealistic and the everyday. Our early leaders created a foundation for excellence in teaching and learning that continues to guide the complex, vibrant, and ever-changing institution that we call home.

Colleges transform individuals, but great universities transform communities. You would be hard pressed to find another university in the south with a more significant impact on their community than we have here at ETSU. We educate the regions teachers, nurses, small business owners, bankers, and physicians. We are not a city on a hill, for we are the people who built the hill. We are the heartbeat of this region, but the heart of our university is the faculty, and today we celebrate our faculty and your legacy of service to ETSU.

As I look back on ETSU's rich history of teaching, I am amazed and inspired by stories of people like the late Dr. Herman Stribling, who taught in our College of Business. Dr. Stribling knew that having a trademark helps students connect with their professors and remember them long after grades have been assigned. He always wore a bow tie, and he always wore red, a tribute to the educational opportunities that had been given to him at the University of Alabama.

Dr. Stribling took a subject approached by many students with great dread and turned it into an adventure. Majors and non-majors alike were turned on to the study of economics because of his enthusiasm for the subject, his ever-present smile, his grand style as a teacher, his humor, and his kindness. Even students who only took him for a large lower-division economics class say that he remembered them years later. In the pantheon of campus personalities over the years, Dr. Herman Stribling was unforgettable.

One of ETSU's most dynamic professors taught lessons about bravery, heroism, and love of country, along with Spanish grammar and literature. A native of Cuba and an attorney there, Dr.

Eduardo Zayas-Bazán took part in the Bay of Pigs invasion, was wounded, captured, and spent a year in prison before embracing his own part of the American dream, to be a college professor. Before study-abroad programs became commonplace at American universities, Dr. Zayas-Bazán, as Chair of the Department of Foreign Languages, organized study abroad experiences for our students in Spain, France, and Germany. In his retirement, he continues his active scholarship, and his Spanish textbooks are highly successful.

From our founding in 1911, ETSU's commitment to hiring and nurturing women faculty and staff members has been outstanding. Dr. Willene Paxton, Flora Marie Meredith, Ella V. Ross, Dr. Louise McBee, and many other women educators fill the pages of our university's history.

One of those illustrious educators was Ada Hornsby Earnest. She actually began her career here as a student, at the age of 28, when she came to ETSU in 1912 to study Domestic Science. Her association with the university continued for 43 years, from the day she stepped off the train in Johnson City during the first year of the Normal School's existence to her retirement in 1955. Dean P.W. Alexander described her as "the master teacher, yet always the student." I think that would still be a high compliment for any of us today.

One of the greatest stories ever told about this institution is that of our storytelling program, and woven through every page of that story is the name Dr. Flora Joy. She graduated with honors from ETSU and began teaching at the age of 18. Although she taught at every level from elementary school through college and was named "Teacher of the Year," most of her career was devoted to ETSU, where she taught for 41 years.

In the storytelling arena around the world, she is nothing short of a legend. She founded ETSU's master's degree program in storytelling and reading and received the Lifetime Achievement Award from the National Storytelling Network in 2000. She was also the recipient of the Distinguished Faculty Award in Service and the Distinguished Faculty Award in Teaching, one of the few people in our history to earn both awards.

This year we celebrate the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the creation of the Quillen College of Medicine. Our first class of students arrived in 1978, and they were joined by Dr. Tom Kwasigroch who came to ETSU as an instructor of gross anatomy. He continues to serve in that role today and has taught every student who has graduated from the College of Medicine. Throughout his tenure, Dr. Kwasigroch has received more "Professor of the Year" and teaching awards than anyone could count, and he is frequently chosen by the graduating classes to hood the new M.D.s during Commencement. Desiring that the students have a place to call their own where they could study and relax, Dr. Kwasigroch led the effort to build and expand a student study center at the College of Medicine, which opened two years ago. In addition to his many teaching awards, Dr. Kwasigroch holds a Purple Heart, a Bronze Star, and an Army Commendation Medal for his meritorious service in the military. He is also the best dressed man on campus, and I am wearing these shoes today in his honor.

Three years ago, Dr. Stanton and Dr. Bach presented the 2011 Distinguished Faculty Award to Dr. Chris Dula, who teaches in our Department of Psychology. He is widely recognized for his passion for teaching, for mentoring student researchers, and for helping students succeed, and throughout the year he offers seminars to students across campus on learning good study skills

and test-taking strategies. Freshmen arrive for orientation during the summer having heard about Dr. Dula and are eager to get a seat in his "Intro to Psych" lecture course during the fall. Even though it is taught in a large lecture hall with 320 seats, this course is known to reach capacity before the end of the summer.

Earlier this week, we used our social media channels to ask our students and alumni who were their favorite professors. The vast response that we received on Facebook and Twitter encompass nearly every academic college and major. I would like to share the following with you  
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Ashlynn Campbell thanked Dr. Edward Dywer in our Clemmer College of Education noting *"He is passionate about his teaching and makes learning enjoyable and things you may use in your classroom."* She also thanked Dr. Lori Meier noting *"I was privileged enough to have Dr. Meier not only as a professor, but as an advisor as well. She did an excellent job preparing me for my teaching career and is an awesome advisor! She was there to answer all my questions about what to do in the classroom, but made sure I had everything to graduate and pointed me into the right direction. If it had not been for these professors I would not be where I am today. Thanks Dr. Dywer and Dr. Meier!!!"*

Jonathan Severt, a member of the class of 2014 wrote – *"one of my favorite instructors was Karen Brewster.... there are many great teachers at ETSU, but Karen was my personal mentor while I was in the Theatre department; and as a tag-team with Melissa Shafer, watch out. You can't beat the amount of knowledge and help you will receive from these two great and friendly ladies. I also have to give a shout out to Bobby Funk.... very interesting man and an awesome teacher (his stage combat class is very difficult to get into, so register early if you want to take it). And if you are into history you should probably check out Dr. Burgess; he is laid back and an easy-going instructor, but be prepared to write!!!"*

Our social media response overwhelmingly told stories of people who are more than faculty; they spoke of individuals who are kind, caring, considerate, and devoted to the success of their students. Although the references in our social media response span generations, they share something in common: Each faculty member mentioned had a transformative influence on his or her students, and that characteristic speaks to who we are collectively as an institution. We transform lives. We make dreams happen.

Each day we walk onto this campus we help our students move one step closer to the realization of their dreams. Every time we enter the classroom, advise students, mentor students in our research labs, or simply answer an email to calm a student as they prepare for their first college exam, we pass along those gifts that were given to us by our mentors.

Thank you for all that you will do during the 2014-15 academic year to transform the lives of our students whose path toward graduation begins today.