

East Tennessee State University

Digital Commons @ East Tennessee State University

Office of the President Speeches and Videos

8-19-2016

2016 August 19 - Faculty Convocation

Office of the President, East Tennessee State University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dc.etsu.edu/president-speeches>



Part of the [Higher Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Office of the President, East Tennessee State University, "2016 August 19 - Faculty Convocation" (2016).
Office of the President Speeches and Videos. 24.
<https://dc.etsu.edu/president-speeches/24>

This Slides is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ East Tennessee State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Office of the President Speeches and Videos by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ East Tennessee State University. For more information, please contact digilib@etsu.edu.

Fall 2016 Faculty Convocation
August 19, 2016

Thank you, and good morning. I am excited to welcome you to the start of the 2016-17 academic year at East Tennessee State University. Other than Commencement, this is my favorite time of the year. August brings a sense of academic renewal as we prepare to return the classroom, as well as energy and excitement as our new students prepare to begin their academic journeys.

I want to extend special greetings to the more than 80 new faculty members who are joining the ETSU family this fall. My wife Donna and I had the privilege of meeting many of you this past weekend at Shelbridge. Let me again say what an honor it is that you chose East Tennessee State University as your new academic home.

In the time that we have together this morning, I would like to provide an update on a few of the major initiatives that will evolve throughout the 2016-17 academic year. A historic event in the history of Tennessee higher education was witnessed this summer as Governor Bill Haslam ceremonially signed the FOCUS Act into law here on our campus, which authorized the creation of an institutional governing board for our university. Over the next few months the Governor will

appoint those individuals who will comprise our board of trustees. In addition, our faculty will select the faculty representative to the Board of Trustees through a process defined by the Faculty Senate.

Throughout the fall, we will continue our review of institutional policies and procedures in order to ensure a smooth transition to the new governing structure. We expect to have the first meeting of the Board of Trustees in late April. This is a period of significant change across the state, and I look forward to working with you in the spirit of shared governance as we move through the transition from the Board of Regents to our Board of Trustees.

Speaking of updates, I want to take this opportunity to invite you to my State of the University Address on October 3rd at 10 a.m. here in the Martha Street Culp Auditorium. At that time, I will provide a detailed overview of our enrollment, budgets, strategic planning efforts, and other important initiatives taking place across the campus. However, I do want to touch on a few of those key topics today, particularly compensation and enrollments.

As you know, we have taken steps during the past few years to address long-standing concerns regarding faculty and staff compensation at ETSU. For three out of the past four academic years,

we have provided salary enhancements as part of a long-term strategy to enhance salaries across the campus. I am pleased to announce that for the coming academic year, we will provide a two percent across-the-board salary increase for our faculty and staff. This increase will be reflected in your October paychecks and will be retroactive to July 1st. Additionally, we have submitted our salary equity plans to TBR, and our ability to support that plan is predicated upon the university's fall enrollment. At this time, our enrollment is within three percent of last year and remains fluid. I will provide a complete update on the status of our enrollment during my State of the University address on October 3rd.

I want to provide a quick update on our long-standing arts initiative. As most of you know, two weeks ago the City of Johnson City voted to partner with ETSU on the construction of the performing arts center that will provide new classroom and performance space for our university. To date, we have secured over \$16 million from external sources, which will be combined with state resources to build this \$53 million facility. I thank you for your patience during this process, which has not followed the original timeline that we projected. Yes, the conversations with the City have taken time, but conversations

yielded the opportunity to create something that will have a historic impact on both our campus and the region. Our arts programs have found their homes in some of the oldest buildings on campus and now, after much anticipation and delay, we will finally break ground during this academic year.

We will also soon break ground on another new academic facility that will serve as the hub for inter-professional education at ETSU. Building 60, which sits next to Stanton-Gerber Hall on the VA campus, is set to be transformed to house state-of-the-art simulation labs, research space, classrooms, and study space. This center will open in the Fall of 2018, providing critical classroom and teaching infrastructure for our Academic Health Sciences Center, thereby allowing us to raise the profile of ETSU as the university of choice for students interested in pursuing careers in the health sciences.

These two projects are part of a broad effort to transform the physical infrastructure of our university. From classrooms, to research laboratories, to student support facilities, we are making strategic investments to ensure that you and your students have modern facilities that meet the demands of the 21st century higher education marketplace.

You can read more about these and other initiatives in our 2015-16 annual report, which you received this morning. Those of you who are new to our faculty will discover that I am a data person, and I like to use numbers to tell the stories of our great university. These data points share our stories of student success, the accomplishments of our faculty and staff, the quality of our academic programs, and the many ways in which we engage our community.

I am fond of saying that you value what you assess, and assess what you value. To that end, I would like to share a few numbers that convey the power of this institution and its commitment to its mission of stewardship of place. Did you know over 900 ETSU undergraduates participated in honors enrichment activities last year, or that our ROTC cadets brought home 19 awards during the 2015-16 year? Did you know our faculty garnered over \$36 million in research last year, and taught 169,802 credit hours during the fall semester? Or did you know the faculty, staff and students from our academic health sciences center reported over 329,000 patient encounters last year at our ETSU clinics, or that our student organizations contributed over 47,000 community service hours and raised \$326,000 to support charities? These are just

a few of success stories you will read about in your copy of “Stewardship of Place.”

“Stewardship of Place” is not just a catch phrase, it is an ethos that has undergirded the mission of ETSU since we opened our doors in 1911. Over 100 years ago, we were founded with a singular purpose, to improve the lives of the people of our region. Today, there is not a school system in East Tennessee without one of our graduates in the classroom; our graduates are the backbone of the region’s health care system; and, our faculty are actively engaged in research to improve population health outcomes in central Appalachia. At every turn, we live and breathe our mission and I am honored to be a part of a university that is truly making a difference in our community.

At the heart of this work is our faculty, who have created a culture of excellence in the classroom since 1911. During the past year, we lost several legendary members of the ETSU family, individuals such as Dr. Anne Lecroy, Dr. Jack Higgs, Dr. Bill Fisher, and Dr. Willene Paxton. In their own unique ways, they came to define East Tennessee State University. For many of their students, they **are** the university.

Dr. Anne LeCroy came to Johnson City in 1959 to teach sixth-grade English at our Training School, the precursor to the University

School of today. She made Johnson City her home for the next 57 years. When she joined the faculty of the ETSU Department of English, she tackled some of the university's most challenging courses, teaching Mythology, Latin, and Grammar and Usage. She was one of the few people qualified to teach third- and fourth-year Latin and could translate writings in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. Dr. LeCroy was one of the foremothers of the Women's Studies Program at ETSU. As colleague Kathleen Grover said, Anne LeCroy was "a tower of inspiration."

Dr. Jack Higgs was, without question, one of the most popular and well respected professors in the history of ETSU. He and colleague Ambrose Manning were among the first people in America to recognize the literature of Appalachia. Their book *Voices from the Hills* is a classic and remains in use today. Jack Higgs was the ultimate Renaissance man, equally comfortable teaching courses on William Faulkner, Emily Dickinson, Sport Literature, The Literature of Southern Appalachia, or grading thousands of Freshman Composition papers. Upon his death last year, students recalled beautiful spring days when he would move his class outside, to the lawn of Gilbreath Hall,

where he talked about Thoreau under the shade of the stately trees that adorn the campus.

Dr. Bill Fisher was always a man on a mission. Colleagues and students recall his unique gait, almost a head-first charge, as he moved from office to office on campus, often as an advocate for the rights and needs of others. He and his wife Joan, who died this spring just one week before Bill, had made their home in Johnson City since 1966. Generations of students owe their balanced checkbooks, monthly budgeting, and wise investment strategies to Bill Fisher's consumer education and personal finance courses, in what is now the College of Business and Technology. In later years, Dr. Fisher was best-known for his advocacy on behalf of retirees.

Dr. Willene Paxton was not actually a member of the faculty. She was an administrator--the last person at ETSU to hold the title of Dean of Women. But she taught every day. She taught in sorority suites, in residence halls, and in her office. Willene eased the transition from home to college for thousands of women. She made disciplinary hearings bearable. Dr. Paxton was representative of a new generation of women administrators whose careers blossomed at ETSU. As ETSU was considering creating a Counseling Center in the late 1970s,

Willene was asked to take on the responsibility of making it happen. She would remain there as director until her retirement. Yes, their backgrounds and interests were different, but that common bond, a love for teaching and for ETSU, kept them here in the mountains of East Tennessee. In each of their lives, we find stewardship of place.

All of us will enter the classroom next week to face the next generation of ETSU students. All that they know about our university is what we define for them. Given the uncertainty, tension, and divisiveness that has enveloped our society during this election season, I hope that we can create an environment for our students that is inclusive, appreciative of different opinions and backgrounds, challenging academically, and is culturally transformative.

As Robert Maynard Hutchins noted, education may not save us, but it is the only hope we have. For 105 years we have been the beacon of hope for our region, and I look forward to working with you as we build upon the legacy of excellence established by Drs. Lecroy, Higgs, Fisher, and Paxton. As the stories of these four legends demonstrate, each of you has a profound influence on the lives of your students and others in ways you may never know. Thank you for all you will do for

your students and colleagues this year. Thank you for being part of the East Tennessee State University family.

Godspeed, and go Bucs!