

East Tennessee State University

Digital Commons @ East Tennessee State University

Office of the President Speeches and Videos

8-24-2018

2018 August 24 - Faculty Convocation Ceremony

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, "2018 August 24 - Faculty Convocation Ceremony" (2018). *Office of the President Speeches and Videos*. 25.

<https://dc.etsu.edu/president-speeches/25>

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.

2018 Faculty Convocation Ceremony
August 24, 2018

Thank you, and good morning. It is my honor to welcome you to the 2018-19 Faculty Convocation, which formally marks the start of the academic year at East Tennessee State University.

Today's convocation represents the start of a new chapter in the story of our university and I have the great honor to represent this institution and to tell the stories of our faculty, staff and students who call this home. Today is slightly different in setting. As we were gathering out in the plaza I was reflecting on what it must have been like to be at this institution during the '50s and '60s, because in the '50s and '60s we would have been in room about this size, or we probably would have gathered outside. It is wonderful to see everyone in a room together as family. In the past we would have had this in the Culp Center. And it would have had a different feel. As I stand here in this room, I think of what it was like to be at this institution the last time we moved through a period of growth, construction and development. The things that ties this institution together are the threads of support we all have for this region, the connections across disciplines, the love we have for the university and the respect we have for our colleagues. It is wonderful to see everyone together in this room as we begin another academic year. I trust that you share my enthusiasm as we cycle into the fall season – a season that brings a sense of renewal and a season in which we welcome back our students to begin the next chapter in their academic journeys. Today the rituals and life cycle of higher education begin anew.

A critical component of that life cycle is the arrival of new faculty to our campus. Donna and I had the privilege of welcoming new faculty to Shelbridge earlier this week. We are

honored that you have chosen ETSU as your new home and the place in which you will pursue your academic and professional dreams.

Let me take this opportunity to reassure our new faculty that this is a college campus and not a massive construction site. Most fall semesters at ETSU do not begin with the sounds of jackhammering in the background, or with closed-off roads and yards of temporary fencing surrounding our buildings. However, we as a campus are going through a cycle of growth, a cycle that will yield new facilities for you to conduct your teaching, research, and service.

This summer, our facilities staff coordinated more than 80 different construction and renovation projects, ranging from classroom enhancements and sidewalk improvements to major building projects. While it is exciting to see the cycle of physical development, I recognize the temporary inconveniences that emerge. The closing of the Culp Center meant that offices were relocated across campus. Some parking lots that you have used for years are now temporarily closed. This fall, getting from point A to point B may require some extra steps.

But remember: Two years ago, there was a big hole on the west side of campus and now we have Greene Stadium. Building 60 on the VA campus was once a dilapidated storage facility but over the past two years it has been transformed into our new Center for Interprofessional Health Education and the home of medical simulation at ETSU. And in the blink of an eye it will be the year 2020. The renovation of the Culp Center will be complete and we will open the Martin Center for the Arts. It has been more than twenty years since we opened our last academic building on the main campus (that was the library) and the academic building prior to that was the Culp Center. That is how long we have waited for this moment – that is how long we have waited for new academic buildings to comprise the profile of the institution, and in a few short years we will break ground for the renovations of Lamb Hall which is now in the

planning phase. These renovations will greatly enhance and expand the academic and research infrastructure for students and faculty in the colleges of Public Health and Clinical and Rehabilitative Health Sciences.

So today I am asking for your continued patience. Today I remind you that this cycle is temporary and trust that you will not lose sight of the promise these projects hold for enhancing the experience of our students, faculty and staff.

This summer has not been just about construction. The new faculty we are welcoming today are joining other new staff who became part of the ETSU family over the summer – staff such as new Chief of Police, Ms. Nicole Collins; Dr. Sharon McGee our new Dean of the School of Graduate Studies; and Dr. Bill Block who is serving as the interim dean of the Quillen College of Medicine.

This summer we also took dedicated steps in our ongoing efforts to improve faculty and staff salaries by providing a 2.5 percent salary increase to all employees. I am very proud of the fact that we have been able to offer salary enhancements during six out of the past seven years, and improving salaries remains as one of our top priorities. During the coming year we will spend considerable time discussing and reviewing proposals that may further enhance compensation levels across the campus.

Personally, I spent much of the summer in conversations about the future of higher education with colleagues from across the state, nation and the globe. A consistent theme emerged from those conversations, a theme that bears meaning for all of us at ETSU. It is a theme that has the potential to undercut the very democracy we are trying to advance through the collective mission of higher education. It is a theme of anti-intellectualism and the rise of

populism - a theme that questions the value of higher education and whether a post-secondary education is worth the investment of both time and money. Many demographic groups are beginning to openly question if higher education is good for the nation, for they view the academy as a collection of intellectual gadflies.

I don't share that opinion, and I don't think anyone in this room does. We all know the transformative power of a liberal education. We all know the transformative power of the things that occur in your classrooms. We know that our opinions are powerful opinions but I fear they may become the minority opinions. My conversations with colleagues this summer reminded me of a story that, if you will bear with me, I would like to share with you today. I promise, I have a point.

Please journey back with me to the year 1888. An elderly gentleman is sitting on a park bench in France reading the newspaper and much to his surprise, discovered his own obituary. It turned out that the newspaper had mistaken him for his brother, Ludvig, who had recently passed away. Nonetheless, it was a rare opportunity for this gentleman to read what people had to say about him. The obituary referred to him as the "merchant of death" because he invented the common explosive we know today as dynamite. It described him as someone who "became rich by finding ways to kill more people faster than ever before." And yes, it is also his invention that held up our Culp Center renovation for more than a week this summer.

The man was distraught to discover his public image was so negative, and he was determined to be remembered differently. He spent the remainder of his life improving his public image. When he died in 1895, much to his family's surprise, he bequeathed nearly his entire fortune to the creation of a series of prizes that would be awarded to individuals who contributed the "greatest benefit on mankind." Thus, the creation of five Nobel Prizes, named for the great

inventor Alfred Nobel, who I would say, successfully transformed his public image from the “merchant of death” to a man of peace and innovation.

Now, I promised you I had a point to that story, and here it is. Like Mr. Nobel, higher education is the victim of fake news. And like Mr. Nobel, higher education has been given a rare opportunity to read its obituary, and if you will, change our public image before it is too late. Each of us has the opportunity to rewrite the narrative that underscores the value of higher education not only for our graduates, but for the region that we call home.

Imagine this region without ETSU. Families who lack insurance would not have doctors and health care providers. We would have systemic shortages of teachers, counselors, and business experts. The sounds of music that fill our mountains would be silent, and the free press that is central to a healthy democracy would be devoid of journalists.

This institution was founded in 1911 for a singular purpose - to improve the quality of life for the people of our region. We had the strongest, most pure mission then, and we have the strongest, most pure mission today. This is our story – a story of transforming lives, creating opportunities, and making a difference. Our story is our mission and it is a story that must be told.

Today, as you came into Brown Hall, you received a copy of our 2017-2018 Annual Report, which emphasizes the importance of Our Story, and Your Story. The report shares data points and informational pieces that demonstrate our collective impact over the past academic year. This report intentionally focuses on your stories because you comprise the heart of this institution.

Our story is told through the work of Dr. Greg Ordway in the Quillen College of Medicine, who is on the cusp of discovering a new way to treat individuals suffering from depression, or Dr. Brian Cross and Dr. Lee Bidgood, both named Fulbright Scholars this year. It is exemplified by the efforts of our faculty and staff in the Center for Prescription Drug Abuse Prevention and Treatment, who are determined to put a stop to the opioid epidemic ravaging our region.

Our story is highlighted by the numerous service initiatives led by the Clemmer College's Dr. Cindy Chambers, who is promoting inclusiveness for individuals with disabilities, and is furthered by Matt Desjardins in the College of Business and Technology, who every summer hosts young children in coding camps to build their interest in technology. It is told through the faculty, staff and graduate students of the ETSU Olympic Training Site, who prepare Olympic athletes on our campus, and through faculty members like Dr. Chrissy Mullins in the College of Nursing, who was selected to take part in a digital innovation bootcamp to develop digital content for teaching students.

As you are going to see shortly in the video, we are an institution where people come first, are treated with dignity and respect, and are encouraged to achieve their full potential.

These examples are woven together as chapters in the ETSU story. But it cannot be just me telling our story. It cannot be just our admissions staff or program recruiters. No one person or group alone can do it. I encourage each of you to help me tell our collective story whenever and wherever the opportunity arises. Let this be the year in which we promote, market and share the great work that occurs at this institution.

The only way to change the minds of those who doubt the value of higher education is to share these stories. The next time someone asks what you do, don't be afraid to tell them more than your title. Tell them how, as a part of ETSU, you are changing lives each day. Tell them about the article you just had published or the intellectual growth you are witnessing among students in your classrooms. Make sure they understand that what we do at ETSU leaves a lasting impact on our students, our region and the world.

We are all part of something beautiful, something pure, and something true. This fall there will be noise in the market of ideas, noise that complains about the things that we teach, the job skills-related relevance of the humanities and arts, and our commitment to difference. I encourage you to ignore the noise and focus on our mission. The cycle of negativism that defines our present will pass from the public's consciousness. Tell our story, tell your story, and in time those stories will become transcendent.

I want to thank each of you for being a part of our story. As we begin a new academic year, I look forward to working with you to write the next chapter of this great institution, a place dedicated to service and making a difference in the lives of the people of central Appalachia.

Thank you all for all that do for our great University.

Godspeed and Go Bucs!