



*Opening Session “State of the University” Address*

*President Bob Davies*

*September 17, 2012*

Thank you Tim, Beth and DeAnna for your comments and introductions. And thank you, Jim, for coming today to offer your remarks. The EOU Foundation, I must add, in terms of growth of assets and in additional support for student scholarships, is the fastest growing university foundation in the state of Oregon. Thank you for your support of our students. I look forward to working with each of you in the upcoming year in your respective leadership positions.

Good morning and special greetings to the new members of our family who were just introduced. I am sure that you will find EOU and our region to be a dynamic and open place to work, live, share and learn. Welcome to our returning faculty members – it is good to see you back on campus with your renewed sense of energy. And welcome to all of our administrative faculty and staff members whose dedication, service and commitment to our University is unheralded and an asset that we cannot undervalue.

It is with a great deal of enthusiasm and excitement that today, September 17, 2012 we gather here, as one university, as one community, to open yet another academic year at Eastern Oregon University. This, our 83<sup>rd</sup> academic year, will be one that I am certain will be marked with many successes and triumphs.

For the last two years in this Address I have built upon a theme of the three rivers of change and their combined impact on higher education and our University. These rivers include and symbolize the tremendous advances of technology, the significant decreases in funding and the immense calls for public accountability. Their convergence has created a considerable set of forces that are altering the direction of higher education. I am proud to say that we, as a community, are navigating this newly formed river and its rapids very well. I am confident that we will be able to use our successes over the last several years in charting our course, as we continue to traverse the river before us. By purposely choosing our direction and having the determination to maintain our vision, ultimately we will discover new territories and explore new opportunities.

At the same time we face these challenges, we are seizing amazing opportunities brought on by the advances of the professoriate in the creation, application and dissemination of knowledge. We have the ability to engage our students in ways that were not even imaginable a short time ago. We are able to apply these new fountains of understanding and levels of comprehension to assist our communities, to serve our region and to make a difference in the lives of our students.

Today, knowledge is doubling in less than every three years and because of this, it is projected that the jobs many of our incoming freshmen will compete for after graduation have not even been created or thought of at this time. As we know more and more, we create more and more. This exponential growth of information, combined with the forces of change and the opportunities they bring, are crucial for our state and region. Oregon has declared the importance of education to the state's future through the 40-40-20 attainment statute. This means that by 2025, 40% of Oregonians will hold a bachelor's or advanced degree, 40% will have an associate's degree or a meaningful post-secondary certificate, and every Oregonian will hold a high school diploma or the equivalent. The ambitions represented here are laudable, but are coupled with the fact that the state's investment in higher education is declining at a pace faster than Dr. Monahan's exit from Ackerman Hall last spring! (Hey, for four years I have inserted a comment regarding the venerable Dr. Monahan in my opening speech – I can't break that streak just because he retired to Portlandia!) This is also a time when the value of a college degree is being referenced more than ever before in terms of private and economic benefits. Report after report demonstrates that a college degree means

you will earn more money – over a million dollars in a lifetime; that you are less likely to be unemployed – nearly 20 percent of those with only a high school diploma are unemployed, compared to the less than five percent of those with a bachelor’s degree.

I do not argue with the private benefits of a college degree; but I do not contend that is the only benefit, the only outcome, the only purpose of a public university.

At the heart of the question is what is the true value of a college degree? What makes up a college degree and what does it stand for? Is it the degree itself; or is it what is learned and gained in the journey? I contend that the true value of education is the instilling of essential elements of critical thought, in creating the foundation and the ability to grapple with complex questions and come to new conclusions based on sound principles of logic, and having the ability to communicate these new theories to multiple audiences in clear and concise manners.

And, as such, I contend that access to public higher education should be available to those who have the desire, the ability, the dedication and the fortitude to pursue and enhance these skills and abilities. Public higher education is an instrument that transforms and inspires lives and communities.

We are not here to “teach to the job” but rather to instill in men and women the confidence and talents to do great things for themselves, their families, their communities and society.

In meeting this goal of 40-40-20, we need to continue to serve our students with the same skill, attention and dedication to higher education that are reflected in our core values. We must continue to actively commit to these values and ideals – the attributes espoused by our faculties and staff – that generate pride in our graduates and are why students choose Eastern. Our unyielding commitment to providing an exceptional educational experience that purposely balances professional studies and liberal arts, our focus on providing access to all students who have the ability and dedication regardless of their economic status or geographic location, our energies to serve and enhance our region culturally, civically and economically, and our unabashed commitment to our

students to ensure that they have the opportunity to succeed and achieve their goals academically, professionally and personally. The opportunity now before us is to reaffirm our commitment to our institutional identity and values that are articulated in our core themes.

In committing to these themes we are reaffirming standards that were established in 1929 by President Inlow and the first faculty members to serve the needs of the region through education, and as reinforced by President Maaske some 30 years later in his expansion to create a mixture and balance of professional and liberal arts curriculum to serve an even greater audience, and our commitment being refined by President Gilbert to include the webbing that integrates the efforts of our students and professors with the citizens in our towns and counties. We acknowledge the new dimensions of opportunities brought on by the changing landscape, and that we will change by applying new theories, adopting new methods and creating new practices. We do this to reaffirm our commitment to the standards we hold dear. This is not new, as Eastern has a long tradition of holding true to our values while responding to seismic change. The quality of our people, all of you and those who came before us, stands in testimony to this basic fact.

Our four themes are focused on high-quality programs, access for all, our role as the educational, cultural, and economic engine of eastern Oregon, and our essential student-centered approach.

***Theme 1:*** EOU has high-quality liberal arts and professional programs that prepare students for the world beyond college.

***Theme 2:*** EOU is a regional University with a deep sense of commitment to students where they are.

***Theme 3:*** EOU is the educational, cultural and economic engine of eastern Oregon.

***Theme 4:*** EOU provides personal, student-centered experience in both the curricular and co-curricular programs.

In our first theme of having high-quality academic programs that balance the quality of the liberal arts with the important characteristics of our professional programs, is our ethic of making educational excellence inclusive. We can point to many shining examples of how we actualize this. Dr. Richard Hermens, professor emeritus, was recently named a fellow of the American Chemical Society. He is one of three Oregonians to have this distinction and the only one from a university whose primary function is teaching. Our faculty members have authored over 250 journal articles, books and presentations at national conferences, and nearly 75 additional articles and presentations of that caliber are attributed to our students. I know of nine students who earned their degree last June and are now entering doctoral programs at leading research universities because of our faculty in science, mathematics and technology. One of our online students has informed me that he was accepted to a world-class graduate program where he will pursue a doctorate in the social sciences. The International Assembly for Collegiate Business Education presented EOU's own Ted Takamura with the Excellence in Teaching Award as the outstanding business professor in the country. In front of us here today are 19 newly hired professors and 30 administrative faculty and staff members. In all of our searches, I am very pleased to state that each one of them were among our top choices. Success breeds success and this leads to excellence, and we have the foundation to continue this momentum. To do this, we need to continue to refine our offerings of courses and curriculum to keep abreast of advances in knowledge. We need to continue to invest in faculty development programs like the Summer Institute in Innovative Instruction and the creation of the Center for Teaching, Learning and Assessment. We need to continue and even redouble our efforts in providing our administrative faculty and staff similar opportunities like the Mountaineer Management series that was initiated this summer and our commitment to annual evaluations for continual improvement.

Our second theme is about providing access to higher education. We have a tradition of offering the most affordable opportunity for students in the state and in the region. This last year, our total per credit tuition increase to students and their families was less than \$7, or less than the cost of a venti mocha at Starbucks. At the same time, the investment by the state, on a per student basis, has dropped from an important contribution to a nominal subsidy. This now shifts the burden of the price of higher education to our students and their families. And, as 85 percent of our students are

Pell-Eligible, we clearly serve more families from the lowest economic status in the system. This is why we must commit to raising private support for additional scholarships. This also means that we must redouble our efforts in attracting students, retaining students and having them persist through to graduation as efficiently as possible.

We also know that students are less likely to attend college from our region. This is a concern that we must work on and collaboratively present solutions. We will work even closer with our community colleges and our elementary, middle and high schools to develop attainable pathways for our sons and daughters. We are being proactive, through the Eastern Promise, to do this important work. The Eastern Promise is our initiative to improve the college going culture of our region by providing early college experiences—both in terms of academic opportunities as well as cultural. We must show our 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders that they can achieve a college degree by beginning to plan now. We need to demonstrate to the high school freshman that to obtain the goals for their future will require a college degree. Our work with juniors and seniors will show that they can be successful in college if they apply themselves and we need to demonstrate to families that the investment in a degree will provide immense benefits.

Many of you have already been working on this critical issue by engaging with high school teachers through the Oregon Writing Project or the Eastern Promise Professional Learning Communities in math, science, speech and other disciplines. Or you assisted by welcoming the more than 600 fifth and sixth-graders that visited our campus last year. The work of Donna Rainboth and her colleagues in securing not one, but two, significant and very competitive grants will provide STEM opportunities for the Wallowa and Enterprise school districts and is essential and critical to this task. The ongoing commitments of the many EOU faculty and staff with the Girls in Science and Lego-Robotics programs also provide this foundation of success.

Our goal is to provide access to quality higher education and remove barriers. Our online programs continue to grow and expand and we must continue this path. At the same time, we need to continue and develop our on campus programs. Last year, we had 2,012 students on campus (surpassing the 2,000 mark for the first time in our history) and 2,116 students studying at a

distance. To reach and fulfill our commitment to the 40-40-20 goal, we need to grow to an estimated 6,000 students – an additional 2,000 students. Therefore, we need to plan now, and execute over the next five years, for this growth. Based on our campus master planning efforts, I believe a target of 2,500 to 2,750 students is realistic and appropriate for our on campus programs. This preserves our commitment to individualized education and it provides for a campus vibrancy that will not strain our existing facilities or our positive relationship with the community. While growth is good, I do not believe that our “at-a-distance” population should expand unlimited and without boundaries. Rather, our commitment to an individualized and personal approach must guide us in these efforts and while we will continue to increase these enrollments, it must be done with an eye towards quality and within our scope of expertise. We will grow strategically by targeting specific geographic areas, then further developing partnerships with community colleges in Oregon and neighboring states, and extending our relationships with regional high schools. We must also extend the work we have initiated by clearly identifying and supporting initiatives that will broaden our community of faculty, staff and students to be inclusive and supportive of individuals from underrepresented populations and who represent the diversity of the global community in all forms and ideas.

To maintain our commitment to access we also must ensure that Eastern remains financially sustainable and viable. Last year we began the implementation of our Sustainability Plan, which is in fact linked directly to our four core themes and commits us to reducing costs in certain areas and investing in others. While we did not meet every objective, we have met the overall financial goals for the first year of the plan. This was due to the hard work of each of you in many ways, but does not mean we have completed the plan or that we are suddenly and magically “financially sound.” There is much work to be done in the forthcoming year and well into the future. As we enter this next year, I plan on working with the Budget and Planning Committee in completing the budget resetting process that was initiated last year. In doing so, I will seek their recommendations and advice on strategically planning our expenditures relative to our revenues.

Our third core theme is our commitment to serving the region. The late President-Emeritus Dave Gilbert had the foresight and knowledge to understand that Eastern Oregon University was the most

powerful influencer of civic engagement, cultural experiences and economic development for the region. He also knew that the most vocal supporters of our University would in fact be the citizens of the region. He, like President Maaske before him, connected the efforts of the University with the larger and surrounding community in a positive and productive manner. This effort allows for a powerful leveraging point by utilizing the talents and skills of our students, professors and staff members. This can be seen and evidenced in our recent success of co-locating the Governor's Regional Solution Center on campus. Since its inception a mere year ago, we have created over 20 internships throughout our region. One of these programs is leading to the revitalization of the Liberty Theatre in downtown La Grande; another enabled the full investigation of a water contamination issue in Arlington; another is enabling the town of Halfway, and many others, to revamp and rewrite their economic master plans so that they will be eligible for state and federal funding to implement necessary infrastructure needs. These are just a few examples, but our impact goes well beyond those efforts. Thousands of volunteer hours are provided in our area schools and non-profit organizations. Our faculty, student and staff members are an essential component of the Elgin Opera House by performing on the stage, working behind the scenes, and in the directing and promoting of performances. Eastern clearly is a significant contributor to the success of this organization, which is an important cultural and civic symbol for the region. These pursuits and efforts are clearly linked to our civic engagement efforts and we need to continually expound on them. Additionally, through our own personal interests, EOU makes an impact as each of you supports and actively engages in the day-to-day activities that make our region the pride and joy we love. Last summer, as I watched my daughter play soccer in the U-11 league, she was coached by an EOU alumnus, she competed against two other teams that were coached by current EOU students, and five other teams she competed against were coached by EOU staff or alumni. Two weekends ago, as I checked in at the United Way golf fundraiser, I was greeted by eight smiling faculty and staff members giving of their time and energy to this worthy activity – and they were very happy to take my money! As we navigate the rivers of change before us, we must remember that it is not just EOU at the center of the discussion; it includes our greater community due to the immense and positive impact we have throughout eastern Oregon.

Our fourth theme is at the heart of our work: we hold the value and importance of working with our students at the center of our focus. I have said many times that if you Google "student centered university," 4,000 universities will claim that moniker, but only a select few will actually live up to the standard of putting students among their highest priorities. At Eastern, we do that every day. Each one of us has a multitude of examples. Last year when I was student for a day (starting at 7:30 a.m. and ending at 11 p.m.!), I saw this first hand from the passion of our professors ensuring each student grasped the essence and nuances of the discussion at hand, our dedicated administrative faculty working with students in the tutoring center, and a very passionate adviser ensuring the pathway to graduation was being followed. I also saw one of our custodians stop his duties to assist a student carrying materials down a hallway. Even though I know Dr. Dearinger took great joy in giving me a C- on a pop quiz, it was a day that I will remember as I was able to see Eastern through the eyes of our students and it was truly impressive. It was all of the seemingly small things that add up to the incredible experience we have at Eastern.

And speaking of student success, our student-athletes provide an excellent example. We cheered on our women's basketball team to the Elite 8 of their national tournament, the fifth straight tournament appearance for the men's basketball team, the victory over Carroll College in football, and our cross-country and track teams as they continued their national prominence. However, I must say it is more impressive that we had eight out of 12 teams that earned All Scholar status from the NAIA, 101 out of 298 student-athletes were named Academic All-Americans and 115 qualified for our dean's list honors.

On this very stage, our students have delivered amazing performances through their voices in the choir and through their acting and musical talents. We also have extremely gifted students in the visual arts who are recognized annually through the selection of statewide, regional and national exhibits.

We truly empower our students to excel in all that they do – in the classroom, throughout the campus and in our communities.

But let me read to you what a student handed to me at graduation, as it truly says it all:

“Dear Dr. Davies, (or Bobby D. as we students like to call you!) As you hand me my diploma, it sadly means my time at EOU is at an end. I will leave with many good memories of my time at Eastern. This includes the publication of one of my research projects and being selected to present my senior thesis at an international conference. I will remember talking with my professors about long-term goals and life in general. I also met my fiancée here at EOU as she lived just three doors down from me our freshman year. EOU has allowed me to excel academically as well as socially and emotionally. I think back on my time at EOU and while I received many awards and prizes, these aren't my proudest moments. My proudest moment is realizing and learning who I am as a person. I have solidified my core values and ideologies. I have developed a passion for learning and helping others. I was an introvert as a freshman, now I am not as I have gained the confidence to lead, to debate and to engage others. While my time at EOU is at an end, the experiences I have gained here will always be with me and guide me. So, today I will leave EOU, but Eastern will never leave me.”

Last June, we sent 738 new graduates into the world. We made a difference in their lives and now they are making a difference in their communities. We have – you have – truly transpired and transformed these men and women. Today, we start anew as we prepare to greet 438 new freshman, 636 transfer students and welcome back more than 3,000 returning students. Let us commit to maintaining our standards of academic excellence, our mission of removing barriers to higher education, to engaging the communities we serve and our core belief in providing the foundation for student success. Let us make a difference in their lives.

There is no question in my mind that by working together and committing to these values – the core values of Eastern – we will be able to meet and successfully overcome any challenge that is put in our way as we transpire and transform people's lives.

I want to thank you, each of you, for what you have done for our University and our students. I want to thank you for allowing me, Cindy and Katie, to be a part of this community that we dearly and proudly call home. There is no other place that I would rather be than right here, right now,

with each of you at Eastern Oregon University. There is nothing I would rather be doing than serving this great and proud University and serving all of you who make a difference in the lives of our students.

Thank you and let's open this, our 83<sup>rd</sup> academic year at Eastern Oregon University, and make it our most successful!

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