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Great Expectations are What Make EIU Great

Sep-01-2009

Eastern Illinois University President Bill Perry believes in great expectations.

"Great expectations raise the bar and raise our sights. Great expectations of ourselves rubs off on our colleagues and our students. Great expectations motivate us to support our colleagues to move our university forward," he said, speaking at Eastern's 2009 Faculty Senate-sponsored back-to-school luncheon on Tuesday.

And, he added, great expectations are what turned EIU into the successful institution that it is.

"Our academic programs are strong. Students are choosing us because of our academic reputation," Perry said. "Enrollment is stable, and athletics is student-athlete focused and has received academic recognition.

"We are making progress where it counts," he added.

The president presented figures to support his assertion, noting that the statistics "are only proxies of the qualities we bring to the table." For example, he said, during the past couple of years the number of students involved in faculty-mentored graduate research has risen from 1,228 to 1,341, while the number of undergraduates involved in faculty-mentored research has risen from 2,802 to 2,839.

The number of students participating in study abroad has jumped from less than 50 a few years ago to more than 300. The student-to-faculty ratio is 15:1, and Eastern offers small class sizes with excellent faculty instruction. Student and parental opinion is very strong and very positive.

"But numbers don't tell the whole story," Perry said. "It is the faculty's and staff's dedication to excellence and personal relationships that makes the Eastern experience a defining one.

"My first year here, I met with faculty, staff, alumni and community. I found the passion for excellence, personal relationships, service and accessibility. EIU is extremely good at developing each student -- alumni consistently tell us that. And as I said about a year-and-a-half ago, I believe we can be the best at it," he added.

The president reiterated the message he's been focusing on during the past 18 months.

"Our overarching goal for EIU is to be the best in the nation at integrating the personal and academic development of our students," he said. "The linchpin for achieving this goal is the 'Integrative Learning Experience,' which focuses on the activities we have long held as fundamental cornerstones of our university culture -- the development of strong relationships with our students and providing them with learning opportunities like study abroad programs, student research projects, capstone courses, community-based learning and many more.

"I believe the future success and long-term viability of the traditional residential college experience at Eastern depends on how well we provide the 'Integrative Learning Experience,'" Perry continued. "Our students and their families want the 'Eastern Experience' precisely because it provides an integrated experience of excellence."

In closing, Perry urged faculty members to think about how they incorporate the characteristics of integrative learning into their coursework, and then ask themselves how Eastern's programs and learning activities, both in and outside of the classroom, and co-curricular programming can focus more directly on helping students integrate their academic endeavors with their personal development.

He also promised that resources would be available to support the faculty in these efforts, and that details would follow during the semester ahead.

"You surely know that I have great expectations for EIU," Perry said. "I have great expectations for our 'Integrative Learning Initiative.' Thank you for the great expectations you have held, and continue to hold, for yourselves, for me, and for Eastern. Together, we will advance EIU further than any one of us can imagine."